

CRITICAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CENTERING THE SOCIAL JUSTICE NEEDS OF TEACHERS

RITA KOHLI
BREE PICOWER
ANTONIO MARTINEZ
NATALIA ORTIZ

Abstract

As a response to increasingly technocratic, top-down teacher professional development that we refer to as *antidialogical professional development* (APD), this article theorizes a model of *critical professional development* (CPD) where teachers are engaged as politically-aware individuals who have a stake in teaching and transforming society. Illuminating three US based case studies of CPD that emerged in response to the unmet needs of justice-oriented teachers—The People’s Education Movement, New York Collective of Radical Educators’ Inquiry to Action groups, and the Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice—this article uses Freire’s (1970) framework of dialogical action to analyze shared critical practices. In each independent case, teachers were engaged in a cooperative dialectical process, there was a strong emphasis on unity amongst participants around their social justice goals, the structure was organized through shared power between teachers and organizers, and teacher and student needs were centered using a practice of cultural synthesis. Reframing the possibilities of teacher professional development through this model of critical, dialogical practice, this article offers a critique of the banking methods and technical content traditionally used within APD, and provides insights into how teachers can successfully be positioned as experts in their own social justice-oriented professional growth.

Keywords: teacher professional development, social justice education, critical pedagogy, Freire

In early 2014, Chicago public school elementary teachers who agreed to teach a standardized test-taking Saturday class attended a district-run professional development (PD). Led by a private consultant hired by the Chicago Public Schools' Office of Strategic School Support Services, teachers were taken through a simulation of how to engage their students (Strauss, 2014). The trainer began the PD by introducing the topic of the day: "The vocabulary matrix," she said. "What's the strategy we are using today?" The teachers responded in unison, "The vocabulary matrix." "And we are also going to use appositions," she said. "What else are we going to use?" The teachers responded again, "Appositions." The trainer then asked the room of teachers to repeat after her...

Trainer (T): We will...

Teachers in unison (TU): We will...

T: use...

TU: use...

T: accurately, ...

TU: accurately, ...

T: grade appropriate, ...

TU: grade appropriate, ...

T: general academic...

TU: general academic...

T: and domain specific words...

TU: and domain specific words...

T: ...We are using two strategies today. How many strategies are we using?

TU: Two.

T: The two strategies are apposition and vocabulary matrix. What I want you to do, is turn to your AV partner, and I want you to tell them what are the two strategies we are using in vocabulary. Ready?... (Transcript from youtube, 2014)

A passive and dehumanizing process to the attendees, the above PD was an example of what critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970) called antidiological action. In contrast to dialogical action, a process for social transformation, antidiological action is used for social control. Banking in its methods and technical in its content, this PD frames the teacher as the bestower of knowledge to the student, "whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire, 1970, p. 72).

Unfortunately, with the rise of scripted PD and prescribed curriculum, teachers are increasingly the passive recipients of technical training (Cohen-Vogel & Herrington, 2005; LaGuardia, Grisham, Peck, Brink & Wheeler, 2002). Wilson and Berne (1999) found that much school and district PD consists of "outside experts with little knowledge of local conditions who present irrelevant, sometimes amusing, often boring prepackaged information..." and "...that these experienc-

es are irrelevant and teach teachers little” (p. 174). Typically focused more on compliance (Thomas, 2007), these market-reforms have been described as “intellectually shallow, gimmicky or simply wrong” (Little, 1989, p. 178). Thus, much of current PD does not involve teachers in the process of examining the pressing issues they or their students face in schools, nor does it elicit teachers’ professional expertise, interests or needs (Corcoran, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Building upon Freire’s (1970) theory of oppression, we refer to this type of oppressive, anti-liberatory professional development as *antidialogical professional development* (APD).

As a response to the unmet needs of justice-minded teachers within APD, there has been an emergence of what we are naming *critical professional development* (CPD). CPD frames teachers as politically-aware individuals who have a stake in teaching and transforming society. In both pedagogy and content, CPD develops teachers’ critical consciousness by focusing their efforts towards liberatory teaching. Offering insight into how teachers can be engaged in alternative pedagogical methods that are equity and justice focused, this article develops a framework for CPD by illuminating three case studies from across the United States—The People’s Education Movement (People’s Ed), New York Collective of Radical Educators’ (NYCoRE) Inquiry to Action groups, and the Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice (ITOC). Using Freire’s (1970) framework of dialogical action to analyze commonalities, this article demonstrates how teachers can successfully be positioned as experts in their own social justice-oriented professional growth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Antidialogical Professional Development

Freire (1970) delineated four manifestations of oppressive, or antidialogic, actions to explain how power and oppression are maintained: conquest, manipulation, cultural invasion, and divide and rule. During conquest, Freire (1970) claimed it is in the best interest of those in power to keep the oppressed as passive subjects. To accomplish this, “...the oppressors develop a series of methods precluding any presentation of the world as a problem... showing it rather as a fixed entity, as something given—something to which people, as mere spectators, must adapt” (p. 139). This serves to “anesthetize the people so they will not think” (p. 149), which is best accomplished through a banking model of education that treats students, and in this case, teachers, as empty “receptacles.”

While Freire (1970) was speaking about education of disenfranchised communities, in the current K-12 education US context, teachers too are increasingly positioned as passive subjects in both their development and teaching. LaGuar-

dia et al. (2002) describes this shift within PD, "... the essence of this change is from that of an active and creative participant in the change process, to one of passive recipient of externally designed and mandated training in how to improve test scores: from *agents* of change, to *objects* of change" (p.14). With teachers positioned as objects, rather than agents, their professional duties become about compliance rather than change. Giroux (1988), echoes LaGuardia et al. referring to this shift as the proletarianization of teacher work. He explains it as:

... the tendency to reduce teachers to the status of specialized technicians within the school bureaucracy, whose function then becomes one of the managing and implementing curricular programs rather than developing or critically appropriating curricula to fit specific pedagogical concerns (Giroux, 1988, p. 122).

As illuminated in the introduction, teacher training can exist as *antidialogical professional development* (APD). Typically using banking methods and teaching technical skills, APD frames teachers as empty vessels. APD does not offer teachers agency in their work, and focuses on compliance. As Freire (1970) describes banking education, the "task is to 'fill' the students [teachers] with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance" (p. 71). While technical content can serve as useful for improving many teaching practices, it does not prepare educators to disrupt structural inequity because it often ignores broader historical or institutional injustices.

APD does not engage teachers in the true liberatory purposes of education. By providing teachers with rote memorization, lectures on discrete skills, or training on pre-packaged curriculum, APD manipulates educators to maintain "the teacher's subservient position to those removed from the classroom with regard to the core aspects of their work—curriculum and instruction" (Zeichner, 1993, p. 7). Such APD frames the PD trainer as all knowing and the participating teachers as passive, thus alienating them from the opportunity to engage in inquiry or praxis—which Freire (1970) argues is how people can engage in liberation. Because APD does not provide space to process, engage or adapt content or procedures, it ultimately serves the status quo and maintains educational inequity.

Critical Professional Development

While Freire (1970) framed antidialogic action as oppressive, in contrast, he described dialogic action as the path to liberation. For antidialogic educators, the focus is on choosing a program to deliver to students. However, for dialogic educators, the focus is not the program but rather "the organized, systematized, and developed 're-presentation' to the individuals of the things about which they want to know more" (p. 74). Freire (1970) suggests a model of dialogic, problem-

posing education, in which the teacher and student, and in this case, PD facilitator and participant, are both seen as creating knowledge. It is in coming together in a process of both reflection and action, or what Freire (1970) called, “praxis” (p. 125), that allows for liberatory transformation.

In contrast to APD, teachers interested in social justice are in need of problem-posing, social justice-oriented PD. *Critical professional development* follows the tenets of dialogical action: it is designed to provoke cooperative dialogue, build unity, provide shared leadership, and meet the critical needs of teachers. CPD engages teachers in political analysis of their role as educators in the reproduction or resistance of inequality. While in sharp contrast to the top-down banking methods and technical content of APD, CPD is rarely a formal part of schools or districts, and often emerges in direct response to oppressive practices. In this article, the authors share three models of CPD designed to support justice-oriented teachers. Analyzing the data from these case studies, we highlight how Freire’s (1970) four aspects of dialogical action— *cooperation, unity, organization* and *cultural synthesis*—are fundamental to developing critical, social justice-oriented PD for teachers.

METHODS

In 2014, each author of this article presented on a conference panel about grassroots teacher professional development. As researchers and facilitators of CPD, we gathered to share our work as a challenge to the neoliberal deprofessionalization of teachers. As the session unfolded, it became clear that, although the CPDs we worked with existed independently and varied in structure, format, and content, there were commonalities in their rationale, process, and pedagogies that should be further explored. The following methods section describes how data was collected and analyzed for each individual case as well as how we brought the data together collectively.

NYCoRE Inquiry to Action Groups

The New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) is a grassroots group of current and former public school teachers who have been organizing around issues of educational justice since 2002 by developing curriculum, leading political education, and participating in larger social movements (NYCoRE, 2014). Recognizing the need for a new model to meet the needs of social justice educators, in the winter of 2005, NYCoRE launched its first series of Inquiry to Action Groups (ItAGs), which continue to run annually. An ItAG is a study group “in which educators make connections between social justice issues and classroom practice by sharing experiences, responding to readings, exchanging ideas, and developing plans of action” (NYCoRE, 2014). ItAGs meet weekly for

at least seven weeks in which teachers and allies read social justice texts, connect theory with classroom practice, and take action around their area of study.

For the purposes of evaluating the program, NYCoRE collected surveys at the annual conclusion of the ItAGs four times (2008, 2009, 2011, 2013). Participants were invited to fill out anonymous online surveys that captured participants' reflection on the impact of the ItAG on their teaching practice and educational philosophy. The initial purpose of these surveys was to provide NYCoRE with an ongoing evaluation of the participants' experiences of the ItAGs. Seventy completed surveys from four years were collected, and analysis focused only on three of the open-ended existing survey questions that were suitable for providing insight into the social justice professional development needs of participants: 1) Name three things you feel you gained from participating in the ItAGs, 2) What impact, if any, did the tag have on your teaching practice?, and 3) What impact, if any, did participating in the ItAG have on your thoughts about the role of a teacher?

The qualitative data was analyzed using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Foss & Waters, 2007) allowing for it to inform the analysis, rather than forcing a priori categories to fit (Glaser, 2011). A constant comparison method was used to create code categories, where each piece of data was compared with every other piece of data so that similarities, differences, and consistency of meaning might be found (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The responses to the survey had repetition and frequency without many outliers, which demonstrated that the data captured the most frequent responses across a large group of people. After coding and labeling, data was arranged to share the story these labels told together (Foss & Waters, 2007). These data come from reoccurring themes that repeated across years and across participants. In other words, this process of axial coding looked for relationships across the piles of data to uncover themes such as causal relationships, strategies, consequences, conditions, etc. The axial coding took the literal answers and connected them to a larger schema. In this study, the data suggested a progression from the literal statements of emotional and intellectual benefits to a more critical stance. After an initial draft was written, the findings were shared with the leadership of NYCoRE to member check and elicit feedback on the draft.

The People's Education Movement

The People's Education Movement (People's Ed) is a grassroots organization of teachers and community members primarily from South Los Angeles. Members of People's Ed voluntarily attend biweekly general body meetings to engage in discussions on educational equity and work towards solutions. Because members expressed that their schools did not support them in developing effective teaching

practices, one initiative of People's Ed has been to support teachers in developing critical and culturally relevant pedagogies through biweekly teacher inquiry groups. During the 2012-2013 school year, the inquiry group members decided on a broad inquiry question, "How do we develop a decolonizing pedagogy?" Teachers then developed their own inquiry questions that aligned with the larger overarching question. The inquiry group meeting was divided into two parts: scholarly and applied. The scholarly segment consisted of the group discussing readings surrounding critical social theory and education, and the applied aspect consisted of participants sharing curriculum.

Data for the People's Ed teacher inquiry group was collected through ethnographic, participant observations (Carspecken, 1996; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999) and formal and informal interviews were conducted over the course of the inquiry group cycle. Observations and interview questions sought to understand the usefulness of the teacher-led inquiry group for participants. The participants were a convenience sampling (Weiss, 1994) of seven educators that voluntarily attended all of the biweekly inquiry group meetings. Participants were teachers that worked in elementary and high school settings, taught a broad range of disciplines, and ranged in experience from pre-service to thirteen years. Once all the data was collected, categories were created, such as teacher voice, school-site professional development, and support from teachers, to organize the information based on common themes and uniquenesses. From these smaller units of data, main codes were developed which were then cross-checked with participants in a process of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice

In response to the limited presence of teachers of Color in U.S. public schools (Feistritzer, 2011), their high attrition rates from the profession (Ingersoll & May, 2011), and the lack of relevancy of teacher education and professional development to their experiences (Amos, 2010), the Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice (ITOC) was created for teachers of Color to support their professional growth and retention. ITOC is a union between Education and Ethnic Studies, bringing approximately 80 teachers of Color from across the country together each summer for three days of community building and racial justice school leadership development. ITOC differs from other social justice teacher conferences because there is a selective application process used to facilitate an intimate, deep professional development space, much like a cohort-based teacher education program. The goal is to create a community of racial justice-minded teachers of Color who use critical race theory to deconstruct structural racism, challenge deficit belief systems, and build upon the rich knowledge of their communities to transform schools.

Data for ITOC was collected from 218 self-selected K-12 teachers who identified as Asian American, Black, Latina/o, indigenous and mixed race and who self-reported a commitment to racial justice. Participants ranged from novice to veteran teachers and were predominantly female. Data was collected in four main ways: short answer questionnaires given to all attendees, one to two hour in-depth interviews with a smaller self-selected pool, video recorded counterstorytelling, and ethnographic observational notes throughout the CPD. Questionnaires and interviews probed using questions such as: 1) describe the most significant barriers you are facing as a teacher of color who is committed to racial justice and 2) despite the barriers, what keeps you committed to classroom teaching and your racial justice goals? While inquiry about the racialized struggles of teachers of color is often an emotionally charged and sensitive subject, because of the nature of the CPD, ITOC participants were ready to openly discuss these issues. ITOC researchers were also facilitators and active participants in the community building space. Because of the developed relationships over the span of the CPD, participants trusted that their experiences would be documented with care. All data was transcribed, and using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), the data was sorted and coded to identify emergent themes. These themes were then relayed back to participants for member checks.

Collective Data Analysis

Across the three different research sites associated with this paper, data was collected between 2008-2013 with over 350 teachers. For this article, the authors brought together their data sets and began to identify common themes that existed across the distinct CPDs. Recognizing the relevance of a dialogical action framework and a deep analysis of Freire's (1970) notion of cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis, the authors re-examined the data, and developed a model of CPD to inform a more liberatory education for teachers.

FINDINGS

With the rise of top down, antidialogical teacher training, Freire's (1970) notion of dialogical action is increasingly relevant for social justice-oriented teachers. The following findings sections use data from the case studies to demonstrate the transformative power of PD constructed through: *cooperation* and authentic dialogue, *unity* through an intentionality of community building, *organization* of shared power, and *cultural synthesis* where the needs and perspectives of students, communities, and teachers were centered over the interests of leaders.

Cooperation

Reflecting the Freirian (1970) notion of conquest, in which people are kept as passive recipients of knowledge, much current PD provides teachers little say in their professional growth. Teachers are often left feeling that their PD is a waste of time and not connected to everyday classroom realities (Wilson & Berne, 1999). In contrast, CPD involves cooperation; teachers working together to create spaces for learning that more closely reflect the holistic needs of their students and themselves. Composed of people engaging in a dialectical process, cooperation, according to Freire (1970), can only be mediated through authentic dialogue where participants are engaged as subjects, rather than objects, struggling for liberation. Freire's (1970) notion of cooperation points to the importance of leaders and participants coming together in authentic dialogue to develop a collective revolutionary consciousness. For cooperation to come to fruition, Freire (1970) argued, this dialogue must be grounded in genuine acts of caring and love.

In the three models of CPD, facilitators consciously worked to be in dialogue with teachers. In the People's Ed, creating conditions for participants to act as "Subjects" were carefully crafted by the facilitators and then acted upon by participants. An important aspect of this process was providing the time and space for group members to be heard.

At the end of one meeting, Ms. Garcia, one of the participating teachers, articulated that the discussions around the texts seemed narrowed and wondered if there were ways to open the discussion further. She said, "I'm thinking about the readings and understand them from one angle, and the questions are coming from a different place." For Ms. Garcia, the discussion seemed directed by the facilitators rather than drawing from how other members might be thinking about the readings. However, because her thoughts and contributions were central to the CPD, she felt comfortable to dialogue with the facilitators and push the space to be more responsive to her needs.

Before the next inquiry group meeting, Ms. Nieto, a facilitator, checked-in with Ms. Garcia and addressed her concerns. Ms. Nieto suggested an activity to allow the group members more opportunities to guide the discussion, "like a chalk-talk where everyone will have a chance to give their thoughts about the readings." After the inquiry group meeting, Ms. Garcia said the following about the facilitators responsive shift:

I liked it. Having the discussion that way let us move the discussion about the readings and then [Ms. Nieto] was good at facilitating that too. It was like there were two discussions, one on the board and another where we got to ask for clarification about things on the board or we just built on each other's ideas. I hope we stick with that style.

Because the facilitators were listening to what the other teachers in the group wanted, they were better able to meet their needs. This allowed members to participate in the structure of their own CPD.

Providing inquiry group members a voice moves PD from a banking education to a dialectical relationship. However, engaging in a cooperative, dialectical relationship is not simply a means to achieve an end. Instead, as Freire (1970) argued, the connection between people must be grounded in genuine acts of love that are dialectical and reflective. Speaking to this point, Ms. Ramos said the following about the inquiry group:

There is a genuine concern for each other, for teachers and they can go and discuss something as simple as ‘how was your day,’ to abstract ‘let’s talk about this policy.’ There’s a place for the conversation and it feels authentic as opposed to a generic PD or some cliché workshops. There’s a sense of love I feel in the space which is something I don’t think we get to talk about enough.

Developing a cooperative space for learning required those involved to connect and build community. It was from this community that teachers drew on strengths of the collective to challenge and also be vulnerable to learning together. The teachers exemplified the importance of cooperation in PD that moves beyond the banking methods and technical content of APD. As seen in this example, CPD draws on the Freirian (1970) notion of cooperation and must include ways to foster dialogue and community amongst participants in both process and content. In this way, CPD creates authentic spaces in which justice-oriented teachers can develop and grow their liberatory knowledge and pedagogy.

UNITY

Freire (1970) explained that “it is in the interest of the oppressor to weaken the oppressed still farther, to isolate them, to create and deepen rifts among them” (p. 141). This trend of divide and rule often manifests in K-12 schools when parents, teachers, and students are pitted against each other to lay blame for educational failure. Even school staff are seen as competing over limited resources, belong to different unions, and often work against each other, rather than together in unity. This fractured state of school personnel can result in professional isolation, which contradicts Freire’s (1970) notion of *unity*—a key component to liberation in which people facing oppressive forces and those struggling for change work in solidarity with each other.

In all three case studies, unity was a central theme of CPD. In the case of ItAGs, the structure worked to build community among people filling diverse roles. One attendee described the community as:

a comprehensive sense of the educational community in NYC, one that included people working in a variety of different jobs (teachers, teaching artists, administrators, people working in CBOs) that partner with schools and across the diversity in jobs. The community was based on political beliefs, which is rare among educators sometimes.

Most antidialogical PD is attended exclusively by classroom teachers and typically by teachers at the same grade or subject area, which serves to maintain divisions within educational communities. In contrast, while the ItAG attendees were mainly classroom teachers, also in attendance were former teachers, pre-service teachers, administrators, teaching artists, community organizers, and high school students. Participants valued the diversity of roles, stating that they appreciated “learning about different perspectives from teachers of different grades and teaching artists” and that the group “bridged the gap between new and experienced teachers.” By overcoming rifts that serve the status quo, participants developed unity and appreciated what they learned from people who cared about the same issue but approached it from different vantage points. By developing relationships across roles, the participants were able to develop the unity that (1970) deems the starting place for liberatory action. The participants named that they developed a sense of camaraderie and expressed a sense of excitement about “lasting bonds,” “smiles and laughter,” and “new friends.” However, this bonding was not solely a social experience.

While the camaraderie was appreciated, more importantly, it developed within a group of professionals with a shared purpose. As Freire (1970) explained, “since the unity of the oppressed involves solidarity among them, regardless of their exact status, this unity unquestionably requires class consciousness” (p.174). Within the U.S. educational context, this consciousness can be translated to a political understanding of education as a site of both liberation and oppression. Much like Freire’s (1970) call for solidarity amongst people facing common barriers, the content of the ItAGs was aimed to develop the political analysis of participants and attracted those with shared political vision. This like-mindedness also developed unity toward social transformation. As one participant shared,

It gave me a feeling of community that I don’t really feel among my co-workers regarding our perspective on teaching, common hopes for education and views of our relationships with students. It helped me to feel more free in reconnecting with some of the ideals I had before becoming a teacher about education that I was starting to feel were not possible at all.

Embodying a sense of unity, ItAGs addressed the issue of isolation that many social justice educators face (Carlson, 1987). By finding a like-minded community, the participants were better positioned to hold on to their vision of education and to move toward taking collective social action. The participants were

able to receive critical feedback and to vent with others who shared their views and understood their professional settings. This sense of unity provided a safe space where participants engaged in critical discussions about critical content, their classroom practice, and their school communities.

The discussions that took place in ItAGs varied significantly from those that teachers have in APD sessions. As a participant in the anti-Islamaphobia ItAG stated, “I was able to engage in valuable discussion around the taboo talk of politics and religion.” The opportunity to have “taboo” discussions with people who shared both their profession and political stance allowed the participants to reflect on their practice in ways that APD does not make room for. Participants pointed out that they had “space to consider the role of action in our educating,” and another stated s/he had the opportunity to “reflect on my actions and strategies and work as an educator and an antiracist activist.” By creating spaces that united those concerned with educational justice, CPD allows people to engage in critical discussions and to reflect on dialogic action for social change. These opportunities, often unaddressed in the banking methods and technical content of APD are necessary components in supporting educators to move toward justice inside and outside of their classrooms.

Organization

In contrast to the manipulation present in APD, where teachers are given no active role in their professional experiences, the third tenet of dialogical action that undergirds CPD is *organizing*, where leaders must share power with the people they serve. Freire (1970) believed that “leaders do bear the responsibility for coordination and, at times, direction—but leaders who deny praxis to the oppressed thereby invalidate their own praxis.” (p. 126). He felt that leaders must work together with the people to “initiate the experience of learning how to name the world... Leaders cannot say their word alone; they must say it with the people” (p. 178). This structure of organizing was present in all three case studies of CPD where participants had a significant role in developing, facilitating, and building upon the CPD. Framed as experts within deconstructed power hierarchies, engaged to name their needs, and encouraged to co-create and add onto the space, CPD offers teachers agency in their own professional growth.

In the ItAG case study, rather than relying on NYCORE leaders, outside “experts,” or corporate representatives, the organization identified potential facilitators from within their network of teachers and activists. One of the two facilitators was typically a classroom teacher, the other was often someone with knowledge or lived experience in the topic, and co-facilitator teams were purposefully diverse in race and gender. For example, an ItAG on *Parent Organizing for Teachers* was facilitated by an elementary school teacher as well as a parent organizer, both of whom had worked at a school that was started by parents in Brooklyn.

The People's Ed inquiry group was organized through collaborative planning and implementation. While the facilitators supported the development of the work, they also left enough flexibility for participants to name their focus and goals. Additionally, participants volunteered to facilitate parts of the inquiry group alongside the main facilitators each meeting. This was important for the organization because this approach developed leadership among all members.

In the example of ITOC, while there was an agenda developed around participants' interests, the CPD was also designed with flexibility and room for participants to co-mold aspects of the space according to their emerging needs. For example, several LGBTQ ITOC participants, who felt they rarely had space to discuss the intersections of their sexual and racial identities, initiated the creation of affinity tables at lunch for subgroups of participants to build with peers. Another group of participants wanted to connect deeper with the community led a team-building workshop in the morning, an open mic at lunch, and planned a post PD dinner. The organizing structure of ITOC allowed teachers the agency to identify what was lacking, build on the space, and better meet their own professional needs.

As seen in all three examples, shared leadership and ownership over the experiences was an essential aspect of CPD. Allowing teachers agency within PD offers them agentic possibilities for naming and reading their world, a foundation needed for social transformation.

Cultural Synthesis

Freire (1970) describes cultural invasion as a key tenet of antialogical action, when "invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (p. 152). In the case of APD, districts and education corporations typically enter school contexts with little input from teachers or the community about their needs and goals (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Prescribed PDs leave teachers with few tools specific to their contexts and with little agency to apply their knowledge and skill to their own craft.

In opposition to cultural invasion, Freire (1970) names the fourth tenet of dialogical action, *cultural synthesis*. In cultural synthesis there are no imposed models or prescriptions; instead, the people critically analyze and take action on their reality. PD that involves cultural synthesis allows teachers to critically analyze and act upon issues and contradictions specific to their contexts, rather than mindlessly following imposed curriculum. This action is guided by the struggles of the people, and decided *with* the people, ensuring that change begins from collective vision of the oppressed. Unlike APD, each of the CPD cases was formed in opposition to cultural invasion, using cultural synthesis. The frameworks of

CPD were built in direct response to the needs of working class, communities of Color and the social justice-oriented teachers who work to serve them, creating a context to critically analyze and act on issues of inequity and oppression.

ITOC is structured through cultural synthesis as teachers of Color are guided to examine racial barriers of their schooling contexts and offered tools to challenge racial injustice. There are three main steps to how cultural synthesis was developed within ITOC. First, the facilitators examined the realities that teachers of Color face in schools. Second, theoretically rich dialogue was offered to (re)frame these particular issues. Lastly, teachers were given space to apply these frameworks to their specific school contexts through action-oriented working groups.

The first step of cultural synthesis was built from ITOCs application process. Each year, the facilitators solicited applications where teachers of Color answered questions about how race and racial inequality framed at their school site and their struggles as teachers of Color. Coding and sorting the applications using grounded theory, the planning committee found key themes regarding the professional experiences and needs of teachers of Color in their racial justice work including isolation, their struggles to accomplish liberatory pedagogy in the face of increased accountability, and the intersectional “isms” they and their students face as people of Color.

For example, one teacher articulated:

When I enter my classroom, a purely Latino and African American student body, being a conscious and radical woman, I believe I challenge the image of what a woman should be for many of my students, especially my male students. For some students who believe that the teacher should be a passive woman, or that they should be able to dominate the classroom, they seem to have a hard time collaborating with my innate power. My challenge right now is how do I grapple with my positionality in the classroom, my power, my identity, my race, so that none of these elements inhibit student learning.

This teacher was struggling with how to build upon her identity as a conscious woman of Color to optimize the learning of her students who may struggle with the nuances of her identity. While the issue of identity and intersectional “isms” surfaced as a prominent issue that teachers of Color wanted to critically analyze, it is a topic highly undertheorized within APD (Amos, 2010). In contrast, when framed through cultural synthesis, an issue such as this can surface, allowing CPD to respond to the authentic needs of teachers.

Freire (1970) identified that cultural synthesis must occur through problem posing, pushing the vision of the people to a more critical place for liberation. Rather than prescribed models, the second representation of cultural synthesis in ITOC occurred as participants engaged in problem-posing sessions where they

were pushed to deconstruct the dilemmas of their teaching. In a cooperative, unified community, they were exposed to case studies of how others framed and addressed issues, not as an end, but as a starting point of how to take action toward liberation. To address the issue described above, for example there was a workshop on *gender, identity and intersectionality*, where participants were able to have explicit conversations about the intersectional role of race, gender, and sexuality in working with students of Color and their communities. Talks and workshops were designed by scholars, teachers, and activists to pose critical questions, push teachers toward deeper understanding of inequality, and offer dialogue of how to navigate inequality within their professional lives.

The third representation of cultural synthesis within ITOC was moving participants from critical analysis to action. Through action-oriented working groups, participants were brought together over subthemes of their choosing. Focused on school-wide change, classroom culture and curriculum, or teacher organizing and self-care, teachers entered sessions as a community of actors, not passive recipients. In these working-group sessions, teachers thought through the critical theory and analysis they engaged in through ITOC, and considered how to apply it to their racial justice work in schools. In community, they developed action plans for the coming school year. The teacher quoted above, for example, was given space to develop critical race and gender curriculum for her classroom.

Structured as cultural synthesis, CPD must be participant driven, but facilitators must also guide the discourse towards a more critical end. Building on Freire's (1970) notions of unity, cooperation, and organization, the cultural synthesis of the CPD must be intentionally constructed within a supportive community to facilitate dialogical action. One teacher shared, "I felt over and over again, the balance of discomfort/challenge and safety/love that I feel to be what all human beings require to grow and develop. I felt troubled and humbled, while always feeling valued and appreciated at the same time." Embedded in cultural synthesis, this balance of love, support, and challenge are all pieces that must be present for CPD to exist as dialogical action.

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Teachers are increasingly faced with professional training that devalues their creativity and critical thinking skills. However, even PD that engages teachers with more professional agency rarely meets the needs of social justice teachers with transformatory goals. To fill this void, CPD is an emerging form of social justice professional development. When considering persistent school inequities, there is an increasing need for and interest in CPD, which prepares educators to develop their critical consciousness, teach with critical pedagogy, and challenge inequity across schools, districts and policy. While CPD exists in the US in vari-

ous formats to serve multiple and contextual purposes, it often emerges as a grass-roots response to the banking methods and technical content of APD. As such, research is just beginning to document consistencies in the ideologies, structures, or processes of CPD. In this article, we begin to fill this gap and offer analysis of data collected from three different examples of CPD. While it is important for future research to follow teachers who attend CPD into the classroom to see how it actually impacts teaching and learning, our study begins to provide a framework for the structure and process of CPD.

Using Freire's (1970) theory of liberation as a lens, we argue that CPD challenges antidialogical action by merging problem-posing teaching methods and critical content. It centers social justice-oriented teachers as agents of change, offering them the space and structure to develop as liberatory actors. The models of CPD in this study were very different and complex in more ways than can be articulated in this article; however, we find it significant that all three case studies reframed professional learning for teachers by engaging in the four elements of dialogical action. In each CPD model, educators were engaged in a cooperative dialectical processes, where they were communicative and responsive to each other's needs and goals. Each model focused on community building and developed unity amongst participants around their social justice goals. The CPD cases were organized through shared power, where teachers were framed as experts and felt agency to co-construct the PD. Lastly, the CPD was built on the cultural synthesis of teachers by centering and problem-posing their contextual experiences and goals.

By employing these dialogical practices, CPD engages teachers beyond learning new strategies for the classroom. Instead, their professional discourse becomes focused on using education as a vehicle for equity and justice. While curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom culture are integral components of CPD, the broader purpose is grounded in the need for social change. A challenge to this current framing of teachers as technocrats, CPD instead advocates that educators must be repositioned as transformative intellectuals who, in solidarity, have a political analysis and take action for social justice.

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