Preparing Teachers for Social Justice Advocacy

Am I Walking My Talk?

Stephanie Burrell Storms

Introduction

Due to ongoing social inequity in schools (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003) and an increase of ethnic and linguistic diversity among the public school student population (Hollins & Guzman, 2005), more and more teacher preparation programs have focused on preparing teacher candidates to become advocates for social justice (Dover, 2009). Social justice advocates know their subject matter, are responsive to the needs of their student population, hold high expectations for students, possess the ability to critically analyze the ways in which structural inequality is reproduced through schools and schooling, and implement strategies individually and collectively to create equitable classrooms for all students regardless of their social standing in society (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In other words, they are excellent teachers and change agents.

To prepare teacher candidates to become social justice advocates, teacher educators have to critically reflect on their curriculum and teaching strategies to examine whether they are "acting on their beliefs" about diversity and social justice (Gay, 2010, p.1). In this article I examine teacher candidates' perceptions of how their experiences in a graduate level action research course, using a critical approach, promoted their readiness for social justice advocacy.

I contend that infusing social justice education (SJE) into an action research (AR) curriculum and incorporating social justice pedagogy into the classroom can prepare teacher candidates to become advocates for social justice and advance

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the emancipatory goals of this form of inquiry.

I am an African-American woman and teacher educator at a predominantly White institution. One of the student learning outcomes for our teacher preparation program is that *candidates will become reflective practitioners and act as change agents for equity and social justice through education*.[1] Meeting this goal is a challenge because many of the students where I teach are from primarily dominant groups (e.g., White, upper class, Christian) who tend to lack experience with diverse social groups, have limited understanding of classism, racism, and other forms of oppression, feel uncomfortable discussing inequality in schools, and hold expectations that reflect deficit-thinking about historically marginalized groups (Sleeter, 2008).

I teach a graduate level AR course. AR is an advocacy-based approach to inquiry that is participatory and democratic and allows prospective and practicing teachers to study their own practice and implement change (Stringer, 2008). Social justice and equity are fundamental objectives of AR practice (Price, 2001).

I believe AR can help teacher candidates become reflective practitioners and learn to take actions to promote equity in schools because it provides teacher candidates with a process through which to "examine their own assumptions, develop local knowledge by posing questions and data gathering, and work for social justice by using inquiry to ensure educational opportunity, access, and equity for all students" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.40). However, some scholars argue that AR has "fallen short in advancing social justice and emancipatory change" because some teacher education programs use AR primarily "as a technical tool to facilitate the use of particular teaching techniques" (Kinsler, 2010, p. 172).

I am also a social justice educator and contend that SJE is an effective approach to promote the emancipatory goal of AR. SJE is the "conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability), foster critical perspectives, and promote social action" (Carlisle, Jackson, & Dover, 2006, p. 57).

SJE provides teacher candidates with the tools to examine and recognize inequality in schools while AR gives teacher candidates a process to confront and challenge social injustice. Through inquiry teachers can reflect on their practice and take actions to transform structures and practices in schools that can interfere with students' ability to be successful academically.

Social Justice Education

SJE examines the impact that power, privilege, and social oppression have on social groups and promotes social and political action as a means to gain equity for all citizens (Picower, 2012). Culturally relevant teaching, critical pedagogy, and critical multicultural education are examples of SJE (Dover, 2009).

The primary goal of SJE is to prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to confront social inequality in society and promote equity within their sphere of influence (Adams, 2010). In this case, the goals are preparing teacher candidates to recognize and respond to social inequality within and outside their classrooms and incorporate a critical approach into their own teaching to increase equity among social groups (Picower, 2012).

In the practice of SJE, social justice educators use culturally relevant content that examines multiple forms of oppression to increase students' sociocultural

awareness (Adams, 2010; Picower, 2012). Social change is examined at the individual, cultural, and institutional levels of society (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2007). Social justice pedagogy is "collaborative, democratic, participatory, and inclusive" (Adams, 2010, p.1036) with the intention of creating equitable classrooms that show students care and respect (Picower, 2012).

In addition, social justice educators use responsive teaching methods that affirm and respect students' different backgrounds and ways of knowing (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Students' lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and prior knowledge are used to design instruction that illustrates the value of what the students bring to the classroom (Gay, 2002). Social justice educators hold high expectations for students and engage them in a process of knowledge construction that challenges deficit thinking about marginalized groups (Picower, 2012).

I contend that AR can be a form of SJE when it includes more than just the technical and practical aspects of teaching and becomes an approach that promotes social justice and equity in schools and schooling (Noffke, 1997). Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2003) argue that AR has been "threatened externally by the increased depoliticization of action research as a tool for education problem-solving" instead of being a process for confronting and challenging oppression (p. 82).

Critical AR, on the other hand, examines sociocultural factors that affect schooling, promotes democratic classrooms, encourages critical reflection and critique of structural inequality, and advocates social change (Manfra, 2009). Therefore, I argue for SJE in AR courses as a way to instill the emancipatory goals of this form of inquiry and as an approach that prepares teacher candidates for social justice advocacy within and beyond their classrooms.

Relevant Studies

The number of studies that examine the pedagogy used in AR courses is limited (Grossman, 2005). However, several studies have examined how AR courses using a critical approach have influenced teacher candidates to become change agents and have shed some light on the pedagogical implications of such instruction. For example, using a social-reconstructionist approach in an AR class, Zeichner and Gore (1991) found that most students when conducting projects did not examine moral and political issues as they relate to

schooling. Valli & Price (2000) described their approach as constructivist, democratic, and inclusive and found that it is equally important to prepare students for both self-directed (i.e., challenging one's own bias) and other-directed change (i.e., schools) as a teaching strategy to help students develop greater understanding of the change process.

Price (2001) investigated how prospective teachers enrolled in an AR course made meaning of teaching, inquiry, and educational change in a class where democracy and social justice was a focus of the course. In this class teacher candidates showed greater commitment toward educational change and understanding how social justice can be addressed as it relates to schools and schooling.

Price and Valli (2005) explored the tensions that arise when preparing teacher candidates for social justice work in an AR course and found that the following factors could play a key role for teacher candidates as they prepare to be change agents: the focus of change (micro-level and macro-level), the importance of reflection and action in the change process, supporting and challenging students' to select a relevant course of inquiry that reflects the goals of social justice, encouraging "reasoned" passion, and regulation and emancipation.

Building further on studies of AR pedagogy, I provided a framework for SJE in this research and asked students directly how an AR course that incorporates SJE prepared them to become advocates for social justice. In particular, I explored key experiences that promoted students' readiness for social justice advocacy. The findings from this study bring to light the need for examination of issues of power, privilege, and oppression to be included in AR curriculum for teacher educators in order to guide students into inquiry that promotes social change.

Methods

Context and Content

This article draws on the experience of teacher candidates in an AR course required for students in our masters degree program. The course is for experienced teachers and community educators. The 15-week course enrolls six to eight students and is part of a six-credit integrative inquiry/advocacy sequence that teacher candidates' take prior to their capstone course.

I have taught AR since 2008 and the primary goal of the course is for teacher candidates and community educators *to

gain knowledge and competence in designing and implementing socially responsible research and advocacy projects with and for students and community members*.[2]

One textbook is required (*Action Research in Education*, Stringer, 2008) and several articles are used that illustrate AR in a variety of contexts and describe its emancipatory goals. Many of the projects described in the readings focus on social justice issues such as developing inclusive practices in schools, youth empowerment, sexual harassment, and improving communication between schools and the community.

The goal here is to increase students' sociocultural consciousness and help them understand why change is necessary. The assignments are cumulative (introduction to research paper, literature review paper, conducting research, action research report, and poster session) and relevant to their studies.[3] In addition, students are required to facilitate one class discussion as a team based on assigned reading. This builds on the students' experience as educators and allows them to demonstrate their own learning as well as take the lead in helping other students deepen their understanding of action research and social justice issues.

Early in the semester I lead an exercise[4] with students to help them make meaning of social justice and reflect on how their projects will pursue this goal. The students' research topics are self-selected. They have the choice to work alone or with a partner to conduct their inquiry.

To facilitate a significant aspect of AR, which Price (2001) describes as "talk and work with others engaged in the work of teaching all children" (p. 51), group guidelines are designed on the first day of class to create a respectful and safe learning community. Providing feedback is a key component of the course.

For example, students read their introduction to research papers aloud during class time. Afterward, each person (including myself) gives feedback. Developing group norms are necessary for this process to be effective. In addition, a weekly "check-in" is conducted at the beginning of every class to provide students with time to ask for help from the group with any issues that arose during the inquiry process.

Class discussions occur in small and whole groups and focus primarily on assigned readings and the research process. Reflective questions are given to students to guide their reading and prepare them for class discussions. The students prac-

tice data collection and analysis techniques (e.g. interviewing, coding) during class time as well. Lectures are given at the end of class sessions to reiterate key information and address issues raised during class discussions.

Participants

This study took place at a Jesuit institution in the northeast. The ten[5] teacher candidates (see Table 1) who agreed to participate in this study were enrolled in the AR course during spring 2010 or 2011. There were six females and one male who identified as White and one Asian female, one Hispanic female, and one female who identified as "other." The majority of the students were in their twenties. However, two were in their thirties and one in their fifties. Five were elementary school teachers, three were middle school teachers, and one was a high school teacher. One student was unemployed. All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted semi-structured individual interviews in fall 2011. I asked questions focused on different aspects of the course and how each aspect of the course influenced their readiness for social justice advocacy (e.g., Describe your experience completing the assignments? How did the course prepare you to become an advocate for social justice?).

To triangulate my data, I analyzed course evaluations, students final reports, the course syllabi, teacher class notes, course readings, and lesson plans to deepen my understanding of how the curriculum and teaching strategies may have influenced students overall experiences in the course. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. All were sent to students for review before excerpts were included in this article.

A grounded theory approach was used for data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Analytic memos, open coding, and a constant comparison method were employed to reduce and organize the data, develop codes, and generate themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process allowed me to be reflective about the patterns and contradictions that emerged from the students' responses. In addition, I used peer reviewers to examine and critique the themes used in this article.

Findings

The process of engaging in AR, combined with the community of the AR course, contributed most significantly to students' readiness for social justice advocacy. Their responses indicated that the AR project was meaningful and relevant to their lives, helped them to become reflective about their teaching practices, and provided them with a process for social change.

In addition, teacher candidates described the classroom community as collaborative, participatory, and providing them with support throughout the process. These findings were reflective of the pedagogy used in the course. I will first discuss how conducting AR project promoted their readiness for social justice advocacy and then share their perceptions of the classroom community.

Meaningful and Relevant Inquiry

When describing factors that prepared them for social justice advocacy, the teacher candidates highlighted the importance of conducting action research that is meaningful and relevant on a microlevel (personal or professional) or a macrolevel (institutional or societal). For example, one student wrote the following statement in the course evaluation, "We had the opportunity to pursue something for which we have passion."

Social justice educators believe encouraging students to connect their personal experiences to macro-level social issues may increase their understanding of structural inequality (Kumashiro, 2004).For example, Yolanda, who explored parents' (whose second language was English) understanding of standardized testing, described what led to her research topic:

> For me it was what I went through when I was in school. I figured that if I was personally going through the school system and didn't know what the DRA (developmental reading assessment) was then my parents probably knew less and considering I have a younger brother who is falling in this category of a Hispanic with lower grades I thought he wasn't the only one. It was more meaningful to me on a personal level, this is my community, this is my family, this is my background it was my personal experience.

Another student simply stated in the course evaluation that "It related with my job. I can walk out of this course and try something new in my class after doing the research." Both responses are examples of relevance that is on a microlevel. Rose, who examined inequitable school funding in her school district, described why she selected her topic, illustrating relevance on a macrolevel:

> I discovered something I was interested in that was on the cusp of movement. It is people looking at spending on a student basis or a school basis. It's a small area of financial education reform. It's very important and starting to take off. It was gratifying to find something that's meaningful and I can be a part of it.

Allowing teacher candidates to select research topics that are meaningful and relevant to their lived experiences and which help them connect the topics to broader social issues may help teacher candidates gain a greater understanding of systemized oppression (Kumashiro, 2004; Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

This could lead to candidates developing the ability to identify forms of oppression in schools, increase their willingness to take the actions necessary to make educational or societal change, and feel prepared to become advocates for an issue about which they have passion because it is meaningful

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

Name[6]	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Grade Taught
Yolanda	Female	Hispanic	Middle School
Rose	Female	Caucasian	
Inid	Female	Asian	High School
Cathy	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Marie	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Diane	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Holly	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Anne	Female	Caucasian	Elementary
Tony	Male	Caucasian	Middle School
Lori	Female	Caucasian	Middle School

to their lived experiences both personally and professionally (Burrell Storms, 2012). However, it is critical that teacher candidates learn to connect the personal with the institutional for this to take place (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002).

Reflective Practice

Teacher candidates' responses indicated that critically reflecting on their practice was a factor that contributed to preparing them for social justice advocacy. This is a necessary exercise if candidates are to increase their "consciousness" or gain awareness into how their teaching practice and the educational institution itself may reproduce inequity (Howard & Aleman, 2008). To advocate for social justice, candidates must first be able to determine whether their practice promotes or hinders equity in schools or schooling.

For example, one student wrote in the course evaluation that conducting action research "helped me to reflect on my teaching practices." Howard and Aleman (2008) argue that a key element of teacher capacity is a candidate's ability to "examine their own ideas and how each influences" what they do in the classroom (p. 166). Some scholars view critical reflection "as a practice for social justice" (Grant & Agosto, 2008) because it can help teachers increase their awareness about the effectiveness of their practice and make changes when necessary (Howard & Aleman, 2008).

In the first example, Cathy described how exploring English language learners' experiences in the regular education classroom increased her awareness about including students voices in the classroom:

> It just opened my eyes to how much they wanted to share with me their opinions about things. I had not realized how important it was for their voice to be heard about some of these other things that maybe I didn't think were important to them. They were just so excited to share what they thought with me. I had never really thought that nine-year-olds were overly interested in gender [differences in the classroom] but it turns out that they were very excited to share what they thought about it.

In the following example, Marie, who collaborated with Yolanda, discussed how conducting research increased her awareness about the importance of communication and the challenges bilingual families face when English is not their first language:

> I feel that a lot of the bilingual families are put on the back burner because we can't communicate with them directly. And they

are left there. These are parents that try hard and work hard with their kids. And through the interviews we did, we saw just how hard they do try. Because of the language barrier that doesn't always come across. We sit there in school and blame our low results on the families "don't do enough," well they try and it's good to see that they try and there are limitations because of language but it's not something we should judge them about.

In the next example Diane described how conducting research on gender differences related to homework completion was the vehicle that helped her reflect on and change her practice:

> Overall, the project ended up changing the way that I practice in my own classroom, so it was extremely beneficial to me. I was having a problem in class with kids not doing homework, and I had this idea that boys were not doing homework, and girls were, and why, and what was going on… It turns out it had nothing to do with that, it was me… I feel like now I'm doing something better for my students and trying to make it so that everybody has, no matter what gender or race or ability level they are, to make it more likely that they will succeed with the class… because a lot of the stuff that I read is that teachers feel so much pressure to get so much curriculum in that they end up assigning what should have been done in class for homework. And I thought, "Aha—yes, I do that" because you feel like there's a vast amount of stuff that you just have to get through.

In a final example, Holly believes that social justice advocacy should not be an explicit goal of the AR course, but believes that reflecting on social justice issues is necessary at times. She collaborated with Diane on examining gender differences related to homework completion. She stated:

> There are a lot of interesting things to look into with your students, not just [social justice issues], but I think it's really important to be conscious of that because it skews these kids. We have ten thousand other things, so reflection time is few and far between, but I do like that [AR] gets you thinking about a lot of things.

Once again, critical reflection can help teacher candidates increase their self-awareness about their practice and determine how it promotes equity. To be an advocate for social justice candidates must become critically reflective in order to recognize and respond to policies and practices that may interfere with students' abilities to be success academically. Recognition of social oppression in our daily

environment is a precursor to taking action (Adams & Marchesani, 1997).

Process and Tools for Change

It is critical for teacher educators to provide candidates with the tools for change and to teach them the steps in a positive change process if we want them to believe in the possibilities for social and educational change (Hackman, 2005). Teacher candidates' responses in this study indicated that learning about the change process and/or tools for change prepared them for social justice advocacy.

For example, consideration of complex sources of information can be a tool for educational change because this can provide teacher candidates with multiple perspectives on their topic and develop their critical thinking skills to weigh the effectiveness of various educational approaches (Hackman, 2005). Anne describes how the literature review broadened her perspective about interventions in the classroom and prepared her for social justice advocacy:

> I was able to really take a look at kids who had special needs and find research to support [full inclusion] and found research that went in a different direction than I would have thought of. And that was exciting because I know with the literature review it gave me ideas that I never even thought of! And that also was something new, and I liked that a lot, because it made me look at things from a different perspective. There are so many different layers. I felt that's what the literature review gave us. I think it was the most beneficial in [preparing me to advocate for social justice].

In the following example, Lori explored English teachers' perceptions of curriculum planning and curriculum standards and discussed how conducting research helped her learn about the process of change and feel more prepared for social justice advocacy:

> I think it's been beneficial as far as what to avoid, what to do in some sort of tough bind in that professional circle. I think it's shown me realistic options and steps to take and how to be approachable and how to approach. I think to see something through, I have to gather more information and [be] more aware of the process of speaking out, [and] garnering interest. I can't go in guns blazing and expect immediate change. So I think it has taught me to reign in that focus; that was one of the challenges. 'What is my question, what is the phrasing, how can I make this relevant and applicable

to lots of colleagues? Seeing something that is realistic and that has a real hope for change.

In the last example, Marie discussed how learning to do a literature review and conducting research provided her with tools for social justice advocacy:

> Now when I need to look something up and I need something that's research based for my school, [when] we want to implement something in our building, I know how to find that stuff and know what to look for. It's nice. We are a compact school, so it's supposed to be teacher driven decision-making. We do a lot of research for school now to bring in new programs. It's so much easier now…I was really glad that it wasn't boring old research. You feel like you achieve something at the end. I can do this [in my own school] because I have been through the process. With a [research] proposal you have these grand ideas and they are not necessarily realistic because you don't have to implement them. I am glad we did the project. We had something tangible at the end.

To help teacher candidates counteract feelings of hopelessness and disempowerment about inequity in schools, it is necessary to teach them a process for change and discuss the myriad tools needed to enact change (Hackman, 2005). This information may help candidates feel more prepared to advocate for social justice and apply action strategies in their classrooms and schools.

The Classroom Community

Teacher candidates described the classroom community as participatory, collaborative, and supportive and discussed how this learning community contributed to their preparation for social justice advocacy. To an advocate for social justice taking individual action is important. However, it is critical for teacher candidates to move beyond "individual heroism" to collaborative action in oirder to enact change beyond the walls of their classrooms (Grant & Agosto, 2008).

Social justice educators see the classroom as a safe "laboratory for democratic social practice" (Adams, 2007, p. 31) where teacher candidates can "engage in a joint enterprise and develop a whole repertoire of activities, common stories, and ways of speaking and acting for social justice" (Grant & Agosto, 2008, p.189).

I encourage teacher candidates to participate in dialogue about their projects so that others can provide support while they engage in educational change, but also to critique one another and provide alternatives to enact change—thus illustrating a form of collaborative action. This approach can be the first step toward helping teacher candidates practice social justice work and develop allies who can support them as they attempt educational change. In addition, this approach may encourage candidates to incorporate similar strategies in their classrooms so that their students can become a community of learners that engages in critical inquiry (Howard & Aleman, 2008).

Collaborative. When asked what most contributed to their learning, one candidate wrote, "[the] collaborative nature—having the entire class involved in everyone's research made my project much more meaningful." In the next example, Tony, who explored how pop culture influences middle school students' view of themselves, described how the collaborative nature of the community prepared him for social justice advocacy:

> What I really liked was when we read our papers aloud. [It was] nerve-wracking, but was just great because you read aloud and you don't get one view from the professor, you get 7 other views. Even just reading the paper out loud, you see things. I think we established a good relationship. We were respectful to each other, we bounced ideas off each other, we worked together, and we were enthusiastic about each other's projects. We were all into each other's projects and it flowed very well. It never bothered me once that I was the only guy.

Supportive. Inid, who explored how high school aged students experience bullying through technology, discussed how the supportive nature of the community prepared her for social justice advocacy:

> We were a good community of support for each other and I think ultimately that's probably most of the success that our class had because we were able to support each other and say, "Oh too bad, but have you tried this, and maybe next week you can try this," and so I think we had a great group.

Rose described her experience in the course as "social justice in practice." She discussed how it prepared her for social justice advocacy in the following example:

> I believe very much it was the interaction among all of us—it completely amplified the concept of being part of change, of doing change. We cohered as a group. Everyone supported one another if anyone of us was a little more tentative about something. If you are going to learn how to participate in social justice, it would be antithetical to be less than tolerate and

supportive of your compeers. It was very much, "we are all in this together." It was interactive and emotionally collaborative. The course itself was social justice in practice as we became or tried to become social justice practitioners. The starting part for that was practicing that in the classroom among ourselves.

Discussion and Implications

The goal of this inquiry was to explore teacher candidate's experiences in an action research course that incorporated a social justice education approach to gain a greater understanding of how their experiences in the course helped to prepare them for social justice advocacy. Conducting AR that was meaningful and relevant to their lives, critically reflecting on their practice, learning about tools and a step-by-step process for positive change, and being involved in a collaborative, participatory, and supportive classroom community were identified as key factors in preparing these teacher candidates to become social justice advocates. These findings reflect social justice pedagogy. There may be several reasons for these findings.

First, all of the candidates provided responses that illustrated the importance of selecting a research topic that was meaningful and relevant to them personally. According to Joplin (1995), all knowing and learning begins with students' personal connection with a topic. A component of social justice pedagogy is to acknowledge and validate students lived experiences in the classroom (Adams, 2007).

The pedagogical implication is that teacher educators must help teacher candidates connect their lived experiences (personal experiences, classroom, community) to broader social issues of power and privilege and access and equity in schools (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). Doing this will help them understand the need for an emancipatory goal for their research as a way to commit to social justice advocacy.

However, this raises the tensions of support versus challenge and passion versus reason when teaching action research courses (Valli & Price, 2005). As a social justice educator, I also struggle with both of these factors when teaching AR courses. I want to support students' passions when selecting a research topic that is relevant to their practice, but I also want to remind them of the emancipatory goals of AR. However, this is a challenge if their passion focuses primarily on the technical and practical aspects of teaching.

Kinsler (2010) criticizes much of the

work in teacher education programs because it advances theory over the emancipatory goals of AR. In addition, Zeichner and Gore (1995) argue that the goal of pedagogy in teacher education programs has been to regulate students more than to promote emancipatory values. I plan to further examine how to support and challenge students without causing increased resistance toward social justice issues in the classroom—especially in situations where the faculty is a person of color and the students are primarily White.

Second, Valli and Price (2000) argue that praxis (i.e., reflection and action) can be used as a teaching strategy to help students develop greater understanding of the social change process and the various ways they can take action in schools and beyond.

Using reflection to help students increase their self-awareness during the learning process is another component of social justice pedagogy (Adams, 2007). The teacher candidates in my research provided responses that indicated AR helped them become reflective and provided them with a process for change. This process of reflection included in AR can help teachers and teacher candidates change their roles from being receivers of knowledge who implement only what educational "scholars" suggest to become creators of knowledge who theorize and make effective decisions about their practice (Manfra, 2009).

AR allows teachers to not only critically reflect on their own practice; it also encourages them to become active in the process of change (Picower, 2012). As Marie stated, "with a proposal you have these grand ideas…we were involved, the community was involved, we had something tangible in the end." Hackman (2005) argues that it is harmful to teach students about social inequality in schools and society without also providing them with the tools and a process to enact change.

In addition, I believe that it is necessary to discuss the risks and challenges as well as the benefits and successes of implementing strategies for social change in order to prepare teacher candidates for the realities of social justice work. The pedagogical implication is that discussing the risks and challenges of enacting change—as Rose said, "It can be exhausting"—could discourage teacher candidates and decrease the likelihood of them participating in social action in the future.

In my experience this tension is not addressed enough when many of the teachers and teacher candidates in our program profess that they feel powerless to create change in schools. I would add this factor of tension (risks versus rewards) to Valli and Price's (2005) framework for teacher educators to consider when teaching AR courses that have an emancipatory goal.

Third, all of the students described the classroom environment as collaborative, participatory, and supportive. These descriptions reflect social justice pedagogy and its social justice goals (Adams, 2010; Picower, 2012). A third component of social justice pedagogy is to focus on intergroup interactions in the classroom (Adams, 2007). Building community in the classroom can create a feeling of "we are all in this together" when examining social justice issues (hooks, 1994).

Through dialogue teacher candidates can broaden their perspectives and discuss strategies to promote equity in schools (Zúñiga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). In my classes I encourage candidates to become a community of learners where they can safely discuss the rewards and risks of enacting change and challenge one another to consider different perspectives. In addition, as Rose stated, it allows them to practice the goals of social justice among themselves as they become social justice workers.

The pedagogical implication for social justice educators is that we have to name our approach and explain to candidates the goals of social justice pedagogy. While the students studied here were able to provide responses that reflected the approach used in the course, I plan to be more explicit in the future about how this approach can better prepare them for advocacy in their own classrooms.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the length of time between students' course enrollment and the interviews may have affected their ability to reflect on their experiences accurately. I recommend that future studies interview students within a semester of course completion.

A second limitation is that five out of the ten students who participated in this study were enrolled in the multicultural education course I teach prior to taking the AR course. I incorporate social justice education approaches there as well and it may have influenced their responses. I recommend future studies consider using a comparison course that uses a different pedagogical approach to compare and contrast students' responses.

Third, while I did use peer reviewers throughout the process, my insider experience could have interfered with my ability to see nuances in the data during analysis.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This inquiry is the first step in understanding how a social justice education approach in an AR course can prepare students for social justice advocacy. While the findings indicate that I am "walking my talk" when teaching action research, it is necessary to continue investigating how teachers and candidates become change agents and the role that an AR approach plays in such a process since there remains a paucity of literature exploring pedagogy in action research courses.

In addition, I believe it is necessary for teacher educators to examine concepts of power and privilege and social inequality, within schools and beyond, if we want practicing and prospective teachers to examine these issues when conducting action research. In that case action research becomes a form of social justice education with the possibility of furthering the emancipatory goal of action research.

Notes

[1] The outcome statement is from an unpublished departmental document.

[2] The course description is from the college catalog.

[3] In 2008 and 2009 students were required to complete an action research proposal only. Based on student feedback, students are now required to conduct action research based on an educational issue of their choice. In addition, in Spring 2011 students could work in a team or alone on their project whereas students in Spring 2010 were required to work in teams.

[4] This an activity where students must "match" different definitions of social justice with the outcomes in society it promotes and how it looks in practice and research. Contact the author for a copy.

[5] There were seven students enrolled in both the 2010 and 2011 sections of the course. I was unable to reach three students and one was unable to participate due to family constraints. In all cases pseudonyms are used in this article to protect the privacy of participants.

[6] All names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of participants.

[7] This student was unemployed during data collection.

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