



Title of Project:

Immigration Policies Circulating in ESOL
Professional Development with K-12 Teachers

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Final Report

Motivation for the Research

Over the past ten years, dreams of higher education in the United States for immigrant students have taken various turns. Policies and sentiments on immigrant education at the local and state levels are at odds with national policy. While Supreme Court Case Plyler v. Doe (1982) ensures all children the right to attend K-12 public schools in the United States regardless of national origin, states have varying contexts of reception regarding immigrants. In addition, higher education opportunities vary widely around the country.

Teachers are often first points of contact for immigrant students, yet “little is known about how educators understand the immigration practices shaping students’ lives or how this impacts their teaching” (Gallo & Link, 2015, p. 359). My experiences told me that the topic of immigration policies and teacher training is not a “matter of fact,” but a “matter of concern” (Latour, 2005). Thus, I was at an ontological and epistemological impasse with other methods/theories and unable to imagine encapsulating multiple layers of the messiness of policy work without reducing to something I’m uncomfortable with and without positing an alternate view with alternate “facts.” I needed a way to think about this that accounts for the reductions and the multiple “facts.” Fenwick & Edwards (2011) asserted that using Actor Network Theory in educational research opens up “important questions about the complexity of communication – and especially about what to do” (p. 107).

Research Questions

1. What and how are immigration policies performing in English for Speakers of Other Languages teacher-education standards and curricula?
2. What can be learned about immigration policy as an actor from studying the



formation of an actor network in one ESOL teacher-education course?
3. What do K-12 teachers do with immigration policies presented in an ESOL teacher-education course?

Research Methodology

In a divisive climate of conflicting immigration policies at national, state, and local levels in the United States, I selected a way to analyze an issue that has repeatedly left me at an impasse as an educator. As part of the “new Latino diaspora” (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002), the communities where my study took place are large, suburban districts with varying demographics among schools. The state overall experienced a fast rate of immigration over the past twenty years. Considered a “new destination” state, immigration led to an increase of 348% between 1990 and 2000 (The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, 2004). In a Migration Policy Institute report in school year 2011-2012, one school district in the state fell in the top 25 school districts in the U.S. (Soto, Hooker, Batalova, 2015). The state is one of the top ten states of English Language Learner enrollment in U.S. public schools (Soto, Hooker, & Batalova. (2015). In this context, I attended high school, college, became a teacher, and in recent years began developing and delivering professional learning to other teachers.

This dissertation research study focused on 36 K-12 in-service teachers working in various content areas at various schools in one district with a high population of immigrant students. Informed by actor network theory, the ethnographic study attempted to follow this line and better understand knowledge production in the realm of immigration policies and educators.

Because of ANT’s focus on both human and non-human actors, and the analysis taking a diagrammatical approach (Freeman, 2017), this methodology intends to contribute research that incorporates but doesn't contribute to ideological gridlock, where my findings would always stand in direct contrast to another’s.

Summary of Findings

The contributions of translation analysis and ANT offer a way to study multiple actors and multidimensional moments of conflict without ascribing grand narratives or critical judgments. I have focused an account here on assembling, disassembling, and reassembling one professional development course for teachers through translation analysis (Callon, 1986). Through this work, I have attempted to create a bit of interference.

In line with Fenwick & Edwards’ (2010) argument that “education could be about experimenting and intervening rather than simply (re)presenting the facts” (p. 35), teachers in this study were presented with conflicting facts and charged with developing their own knowledge. While the teachers overwhelmingly reported in the course evaluation that they had increased understandings of how immigration policies might affect their students, very few participants in the focus groups said they had opportunities to apply what they had learned about immigration policy to their work. Had I provided the teachers with research-based reports of evidence citing statistics, charts, and tables that “proved” one side or another, would the teachers have perceived the information differently?

If the ANT-ish view of knowledge production has served its purpose and I have created new openings for understanding how immigration policy circulates in ESOL teacher professional learning, my goal of furthering the conversation has been met. While I cannot make conclusions regarding the effects of teachers doing immigration policy, my hope is that the teachers who participated in this study will continue to problematize the ways they are doing policy, as they act on policy and policy acts on them through the networks of which they are part and parcel.



Implications

In a fast-changing policy context, this study aligns with ANT's "ontological politics" (Mol, 1999), exploring how knowledge comes to be produced, and how resources are mobilized to establish an object of knowledge (Law, 1994). The United States continues to be divided on issues surrounding immigration. Educators continue to scramble to make sense of President Trump's policy changes regarding refugees and immigrant detention and deportation (Costello, 2016). Teachers and students continue teaching and learning. This research study explored a network of teacher-participants, policies, stakeholder-leaders, instructor, online learning system, course readings, instructor and teacher-participant discourses. Had any one of the actors taken a different path, the entire formation would have turned out differently, and the knowledge constructed therein would be altered. So what? Why do this work in language education?

I found that an ANT lens contributes new perspectives to research on education and policy. In traditional teacher preparation programs, the prospective teacher is the main reference point. What if the reference point were instead an assemblage of actors, both human and non-human? What if teachers learned to identify stronger and weaker relationships among actors rather than attempting to distribute knowledge? What if equitable access to knowledge were seen in associations rather than in one teacher providing access? In addition to research, this study has important implications for the fields of policy and practice by offering new ways of thinking about and studying how we can interrupt linear ideas of agency and power surrounding access to knowledge and knowledge production.



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