

## Chapter 2

# Creating Brave Spaces: Social Justice and Social Emotional Learning in Language Learner Classrooms

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides an interdisciplinary, conceptual social justice and social emotional learning framework and protocol to understand the varying competencies needed in critical learning paradigms with regard to multilingual learners (MLs). Engaging in social justice and social emotional (SJSE) work requires reflective practices to develop teacher identity. Therefore, reflection protocols before and after instruction in this chapter serve as a lever for building culturally reflective teachers through prompts that engage in self-awareness, student relations, and climate. Lesson plan delivery at different grade and language levels along with background and rationale of each topic further demonstrate SJSE integration. Discussion of challenges in SJSE are addressed that extend into three identified areas: professional, personal, and institutional.*

### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary racial and sociocultural climate beckons language educators to critically reflect upon their profession (Farrell, 2021; Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021), pedagogy and teacher identity. Educators in the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) field are confronted with three striking postcolonial realities. First, a significant portion of their students originate from former colonies, namely Asian and African (that gained independence between 1945 and 1960), Latin American (that became independent during the 1800s except for Belize, Cuba and Guyana), and Middle Eastern (that underwent decolonizing between the 1920s and 1970s). Second, the majority of students speak multiple languages and their families migrated (voluntarily or involuntarily) from their homeland to

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a host or asylum country. Third, students strive for native-like English proficiency because the global marketplace commodifies English and its variants (Kachru, 1985) as socio-linguistic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2009).

Given the racial and sociocultural demographics of Multilingual Learners (MLs), educators are charged with the Herculean task of creating brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013), “environments that invite interactions in which participants feel able to be honest, candid, self-disclosing, and generally genuine with one another” within their classrooms (Stanlick, 2015, p.117). Like restorative justice practitioners, language educators designate circles as brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013) because they foster inclusivity and respect (Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2021). As circle keepers, educators encourage engagement, empathy and emotional release within the circles. Rather than controlling the circle, keepers facilitate and empower circle participants (Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2021).

A literature review of restorative practices (Pentón Herrera & McNair, 2021) and social justice (SJ) studies (Pantić & Florian, 2015; Glodjo, 2017; West, 2021; Young, 2011) highlights competing SJ paradigms. West (2021) notes that SJ encompasses a vast array of issues ranging from antiracism, peacebuilding, and human rights for linguistic minorities. While Fraser (1997) proposes a simplistic material redistribution-social recognition dichotomy, Young (2011) argues for a more complex one in which “exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence” represent the “five faces of injustice” (West, 2021, p. 5).

This chapter draws heavily upon Young’s (2011) SJ model because it foregrounds power and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990). For Young (2011), “power needs to account for the complex ways that intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990) impacts the way individuals feel and are subject to injustice” (West, 2021, p. 5). Crenshaw’s (1990) framework not only underscores that “a person may experience one or more of the injustices that Young (2011) lays out,” but also notes “that people experience them differently depending on who they are” (West, 2021, p. 5).

For SJ and critical language (CL) educators, the conceptualization of the language teacher identity (LTI) is paramount. LTI has a direct impact on pedagogy, classroom practices and ultimately language learning development. Before entering a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013), it is incumbent upon CL educators to critically reflect upon their power (Young, 2011), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990), positionality and privilege vis-à-vis the racial (Fanon, 2008), colonial (De Sousa Santos, 2015; Smith, 2021), linguistic (Motha, 2016) and social class identities (Glodjo, 2017) of language learners. Social justice educators (SJEEds), as defined by the authors, proactively advocate for classrooms that cultivate a sense of belongingness.

LTI entails self-reflection (Larrivee, 2008; Farrell, 2015, 2018, 2021; Farrell & Macapinlac, 2021). Educators need to discern “who they are: the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). Morgan (2016) asserts that “LTI is a key source of agency for social change” (p. 205). Educators who are self-aware of their implicit bias and privilege (Glodjo, 2017) are more inclined to eradicate linguistic and cultural socialization processes that perpetuate oppression, cultural chauvinism, inequality and inequity.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First and foremost, the chapter is a call to action. It summons language educators, as intellectual-activists (De Sousa Santos, 2015), to deploy SJ paradigms and the varying social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies needed to create brave spaces (Arao & Clemens, 2013) for language learners. This chapter offers SJ and SEL theoretical lenses, adapted from the Learning for Justice’s Social Justice Standards (2018) and features adapted from Collaborative Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies (2021). Why? The authors believe that no

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