


Chapter 9

Integrating Instructional Conversation Pedagogy into ESOL Teacher Preparation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to explore pre-service ESOL teachers' views concerning the logistics of a course unit on instructional conversations (ICs). The chapter begins with an overview of sociocriticality and its foundational role in second language acquisition and moves to a review of sociocultural theory and critical theory in order to better understand the component parts of this concept. Next, the chapter provides a summary of the theory of instructional conversations along with a review of the instructional and conversational elements of such discussions and summarizes previous research on the contributions of ICs to English learners' content knowledge and language proficiency. The chapter then outlines the logistics of the course unit, provides a synopsis and discussion of the overall findings of the investigation along with a description of the relevancy of the unit to pre-service teachers' familiarity with and understanding of the theory and practice of IC pedagogy.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of sociality can be understood as “the interaction of organisms with other organisms and to their collective co-existence” (Casacuberta & Vallverdú, 2015, p. 115); Dyess (2024) concurs by describing sociality as “related to a person’s surrounding environment and lived experiences” (p. 166). These explanations highlight the notion that being sociality relates to the connections and relationships existing between members of a given community along with the interpersonal and reciprocal nature of these associations. With respect to critical, Boss et al. (2019) characterizes the term as “the process of interrogating systems and structures of power that serve to disenfranchise minoritized and marginalized persons” (p. 225), while Short and Keller-Bell (2019) visualize critical thinking as “a process of purposeful, self-regulatory judgment that gives reasoned consideration to evidence, contexts, conceptualizations, methods and criteria.” (p. 147). A common thread that unites these definitions is that a given person must utilize their cognitive abilities in careful and intentional ways when processing external information, particularly in light of whose interests are ultimately (not) being served in a particular situation. Merging thus both terms together, Collin and Brotcorne (2019) affirm that sociocriticality consists of exploring a given phenomenon “from a sociological standpoint combined with a critical dimension” (p. 171). In other words, a sociocritical approach explores circumstances within the context of their functionality in relation to society while also interrogating the nature and dynamics of the interpersonal relationships between individuals in these settings. This is particularly relevant concerning the field of second language acquisition in which pedagogy is customarily divorced from the ideological philosophies surrounding both language and education. Despite a common stereotype that language teaching in general, as well as English language teaching (ELT) more specifically, is a neutral, objective, and unbiased enterprise, Benesch (1993) counteracts this misconception by arguing that “all forms of ESL [and language] instruction are ideological, whether or not educators are conscious of the political implications of their instructional choice” (p. 705). Thus, it is incumbent upon all language educators to view their teaching from a sociocritical perspective together with a consideration of the social and critical implications of their instruction. Additionally, one might logically contend that the ultimate purpose of education should be to develop learners’ sociocritical awareness, or “the knowledge and the resources that students need to acquire and activate to transform the world they live in into a more democratic reality” (Férez Mora & Coyle, 2023), meaning that educators should ideally strive to advance students’ understanding of and appreciation for the inequalities existing in our current society in order to inspire them to work to create a more just society.

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