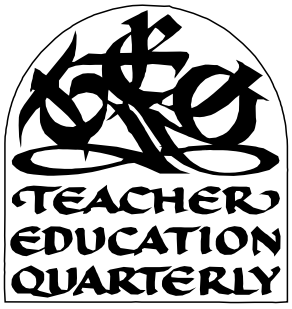

New Pathways to the Profession and Teacher Identity Development

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Abstract

This article responds to the collection of articles in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly.* It provides a brief discussion of how teacher educators are called to consider methods that support identity development of teachers who will value educational equity and who will stay in the profession. The article invites consideration of the way non-traditional teacher education programs impact the way teachers see themselves and of the needs of teachers as they develop skills for reflection, analysis, and academic language. Suggestions include countering deficit discourse about teachers and offering continuous acknowledgement of teachers as learners.

Introduction

The journey one takes in entering the teaching profession is monumental to who teachers become, what they deem important to teach, and how they interact with students. As the field grapples with the tension between the shortage of new

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teacher candidates and the high expectations we hold for those who earn credentials, thoughtful consideration of teacher identity development can provide direction. In 2008 when Olsen introduced a special issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* on the topic, underscoring the identity development of teachers as it values them "as whole persons in and across social contexts who continually reconstruct their views of themselves in relation to others, workplace characteristics, professional purposes, and cultures of teaching" (p. 5) was advocated. Likewise, the articles in this issue look across the whole person that teachers must develop into, exploring examples of non-traditional pathways and examples of teachers as learners, providing a variety of ways to imagine how we might better support teacher identity development in ways that promote equity and retention.

Non-Traditional Teacher Education

As schools and districts have scrambled to find qualified teachers to serve racially, linguistically, and disability diverse populations, alternative pathways to credentialing have been met with both hope and skepticism. Desires to provide a fast-track into the classroom or alternatives for attracting candidates into the profession have created questions about what new knowledge teachers really need to develop competence and commitment to equity and about what will keep them in the profession.

Cochran-Smith's invited article introduces the controversial phenomenon of new graduate schools of education (nGSEs) that move teacher preparation away from the university and reasonably invites us to not "dismiss or embrace" these programs yet. Inquiries about nGSEs are unfolding and might help us discover how alternate routes to credentialing attend to teacher identity development and how successful they are in scaffolding the learning of skills and dispositions. Also investigating alternative models of teacher preparation, Crawford-Garrett critiques New Zealand's Teach for All program as she finds that individuals recruited to address inequities in schools are given benefits that "concretize their privilege," ultimately impacting how they develop and how they view their role in teaching underprivileged students.

These contributions of Cochran-Smith and Crawford-Garrett both bring attention to the rhetoric that paints teachers as problems, as lacking skill and care, as not meeting the challenges they face in the under-acknowledged complexity of teaching contexts. The negative rhetoric, extending to teacher preparation programs, has initiated many of the alternative pathways we have today. The need to push back on deficit discourse is clear, regardless of the context in which we find ourselves as we support new teachers in their identity development.

Teachers as Learners

The basis for attending to teacher identity development is the continuous acknowledgement of teachers as learners. Candidates enter preparation programs with prior experience in schooling, motivations for entering the profession, unique personalities, and various skills. Building on these assets, candidates are expected to further develop skills in reflection, analysis, and academic language to support their growing pedagogical expertise. Falter and Barnes's article reminds us that preservice and new teachers often need support as they experience a range of emotions, including feelings of discomfort and vulnerability during the process. In grappling with the complexities of teacher retention, more affordance to the humanity of individuals will likely go farther than reiterating high standards.

Reflection offers teachers the opportunity to assess their own practice and to internalize new learning. Falter and Barne's model for reflection, using video analysis within friendly peer groups, is one of a number of models. Beltramo's study provides another model, that of cogenerative dialogue with students as a tool for critical reflection that solidifies the notion that teacher identity involves continuous learning, especially for the purpose of understanding student diversity and experience. Using yet another model of reflection, Assaf, Lussier, and Lopez, show how generative learning can scaffold linguistically responsive teaching that prioritizes relationships. Gaining better understanding of their responsibilities as teachers, those using the models for reflection described in these research studies learn to shift away from deficit perspectives and to manage the emotions that come with their own learning process.

During initiation into the profession, learning and demonstrating teacher competencies challenges most beginning teachers. Support in building competence and confidence may be the best way to keep teachers in the field (Simos, 2013; Yost, 2006). Plöger, Krepf, Scholl, and Seifert's work offers recommendations for supporting analytical competence, helping teachers ensure that "crucial knowledge elements are accessible and visible for the pupils." They illustrate why attention to the principles of effective teaching and the whole teaching process are needed for scaffolding analytical skill. Considering teacher's motivation and perceived knowledge for teaching academic language, Neugebauer and Heineke find that the concept of academic language is understood and valued to varying degrees. Their discussion of the complex relationship between these understandings and the various teaching endorsements held by teachers might lead preparation programs to more carefully consider how we promote a sense of responsibility for linguistic lessons within the everyday practice of all teachers. These studies reiterate that competency is often linked to motivation, and therefore the rationale for specific competencies must be made explicit for developing teachers.

Recommendations and Actions

Our attention to supporting teacher identity development can impact the resilience and competence new professionals carry into the field. In light of the emergence of more and more nontraditional preparation programs, we can explore how programs and practices enact goals for equity and social justice and consider the humanity of teachers and students alike. We can counter discourse that names teachers as the problem in education and further illuminate the systemic inequities that create the complex problems schools face.

Remembering that teachers are learners, we can promote environments that support teachers as they grow, allowing space for reflection and scaffolding to build competencies. This type of structured support during the first five years of teaching increases retention (Reitman & Karge, 2019). Beyond the first five years, we can continue to offer support that helps teachers make sense of their work, their role, and their needs, particularly when teachers move into new school communities, work with populations previously unfamiliar to them, and face yet other changing contexts.

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