



Examining Equitable Practices Within Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

The articles within this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* examined the role and impact of equity within teacher preparation. Each author described a commitment to preparing teachers with equitable, social justice minded practices to meet the needs of the diverse learners in U.S. classrooms, yet, demonstrated a need for a closer look at how teacher education programs are preparing educators for this work. This article poses the question: How are teacher education programs that identify as social justice leaders providing preservice teachers with opportunities to move theory into practice with integrity?

Introduction

To frame equity and social justice, this response builds on Sonia Nieto's (2000) call for placing equity at the center of teacher education programs and Linda Darling-Hammond's (2006) recommendations for training effective teachers. Twenty years ago Nieto (2000) challenged educational systems to transform

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policies and practices within teacher preparation to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse population of learners within our school systems. Then in 2006, Darling-Hammond called for 21st century teacher preparation to include critical components such as coherence between coursework and clinical practice, pedagogies that link theory to practice, and intentional relationships with schools that effectively serve students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Yet, as more and more programs claim a dedication to social justice and equity, evidence indicates there is a disconnect between the intentions of teacher preparation programs and how teachers are educating students from diverse backgrounds (Gay, 2013; Howard & Aleman, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2014). The articles in this issue illustrate the ongoing commitment to and challenges with centering teacher training on appropriate content knowledge, pedagogy, dispositions, and equitable practices to effectively meet the needs of all learners. The following sections use the lens of equity to examine preparation of teachers to support diverse learners and the impact of teacher identity on retention.

Preparing Teachers

Many teacher education programs state their dedication to preparing socially just and culturally responsive educators who are ready to teach students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, emergent bilinguals, and students with differing abilities. Whereas 82% of the teaching force is White, over half of the student population in K-12 schools are not White (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). Furthermore, there is an increase in learners who speak languages other than English, while the majority of teachers are monolingual English speakers (Bacon, 2020). Moreover, national educational policies call for teachers to implement practices to improve outcomes for low-achieving students (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Which leads to the question, how are teacher education programs preparing preservice teachers to work with students from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse backgrounds?

Teacher preparation programs strive for programmatic coherence by providing a clear vision statement, connecting theory to practice, developing core practices, and outlining comprehensive outcomes for their teacher candidates (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). In this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Sandoval, van Es, Campbell, and Santagata (2020) examined the coherence between how teacher candidates defined equity in an assignment at the beginning of their teacher education program with an examination of equitable practices demonstrated in their performance assessment at the end of their program. By comparing the two touch points during the teacher candidates' teacher preparation program, the researchers sought to find a relationship between the content students learned in their courses and the application of equitable practices within their clinical placement. The authors' examination of their program's coherence,

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through the lens of equity, brought attention to the publicized programmatic commitment to equity from theory to task. Because equity is a major tenet within the philosophy of the program described by the researchers, it would be useful to carefully examine the extent to which equity is presented, modeled, and assessed in all courses, assignments, and field experiences throughout the program. It begs the question, to what extent are teacher candidates aware of the sociopolitical context of the K-12 schools in which they are placed and provided with contextual strategies for enacting practices to promote equity within the field placements? How is the program explicitly embedding practices for promoting equity throughout praxis?

The next article by Mills, Villegas, and Cochran-Smith (2020) further challenged the educational and social inequities found in the research focused on preparing teachers to work with the ever increasing population of linguistically diverse students. Through their exploration of the literature, they too found a disconnect between teacher preparation programs' desire to address issues of equity and the implementation of this work. Mills and colleagues questioned research designs that aimed to address equity issues with a variety of pedagogical approaches without questioning the power dynamic that preserves oppressive anti-immigrant and White supremacist forces within our education system. As they noted, although federal law requires support of multilingual students, each state can determine their own requirements for training teacher candidates. One area that could be provided in their review of the literature is the locations in which the research studies were completed along with a summary of the states' teacher education program requirements for supporting linguistically diverse students. Their work compliments the recent resurgence of attention for anti-racist pedagogy which calls for educators to not only acknowledge the historic roots of inequity, but also to explicitly incorporate race and inequities into course content, challenge constructs (White privilege) and context (institutions and interactions), and to move from ideas to outcomes that dismantle the current system and support historically marginalized groups (Kashimoto, 2018).

Olmstead, Ashton, and Wilkens (2020) continued to challenge teacher preparation programs in the context of clinical practice placements. They studied teacher candidates who struggled within their clinical practices due to feeling overwhelmed with responsibilities, not having enough support, negativity from mentors, a lack of autonomy in teaching, and/or imperfect feedback about their teaching. The authors proposed using co-teaching as a way to ameliorate the negative effects of an imperfect clinical practice experience. On the one hand, this solution engages preservice teachers and their mentors in co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing learners, which in turn provides additional guidance and feedback for the teacher candidate and the learners in the classroom have access to more help immediately. Research (Sailor, 2017; Williams & Ditch, 2019) has found that when co-teaching is used effectively, there are opportunities to increase equity for emergent bilinguals and students receiving special education services through increased access to strategies and support in learning content. That being said, co-teaching requires

buy-in, equal voice, co-planning time, and good communication skills. Although this practice could benefit those in precarious placements, additional training of teacher candidates, mentor teachers, and university supervisors is needed to ensure the implementation of such practices is smooth. Are schools and teacher preparation programs ready to integrate co-teaching within their programs? Simmons and Magiera (2007) found that when teachers are truly co-teaching there is equity within the roles for both teachers, increased individualized instruction and support for students, and compatibility between the educators. If implemented well, this synergy could be a solution to the inequities within the current models of teacher clinical experiences; however, additional training and support are essential in order for this approach to be successful.

Teacher Identity and Retention

The final article in this issue by Mawhinney and Rinke (2020) scrutinizes the Teach for American (TFA) teacher identity model. TFA is a program that partners with universities to provide alternative certification pathways for what they call *corps members* to earn a teacher credential while working in a high-needs school for two years. TFA is often seen as a stepping stone in a career as evidenced through the recruitment and retention data (more than half of the TFA *corps members* who leave at the end of the two year commitment). Mawhinney and Rinke examined the impact of the TFA identity of two *corps members*, one who taught for six years and initially shunned association with TFA and the other who embraced the TFA identity and only taught for two years. To their credit, both *corps members* were drawn to the TFA experience because of their dedication to addressing the educational inequities within society. Yet, similar to Olmstead, Ashton, and Wilkens' (2020) description of teacher candidates who struggled with their imperfect clinical placements, the *corps member* with the brief teaching career described her job as having "unrelenting challenges" within her placement. This may be a result of the lack of teacher field experience prior to being placed as the teacher of record in a classroom (145 hours of preservice preparation in the TFA program versus 1,206 hours in a traditional teacher preparation program), the short-term TFA educational structure, or, as the authors suggested, the institutional identity of being a "corps member" versus a "teacher."

For these reasons, alternative pathway teacher certification programs, such as TFA, need to determine whether the fast-track system with fewer clinical hours and condensed coursework structures create inequitable experiences for the teachers as compared to traditional pathways. What is the impact for the learners within *corps members* classrooms? In addition, how are the schools impacted by employing teachers who have not had as much training, experience, and may have less of a commitment to the teaching profession? How are these alternative pathway programs training educators on equitable teaching practices necessary to disrupt

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the oppressive educational systems within historically marginalized communities? Furthermore, how are programs like TFA equipping teacher candidates with the pedagogical skills necessary to sustain a career in education and shift the TFA narrative of being a resume-building stepping stone?

Recommendations

All teacher education programs, especially those that identify as social justice focused, benefit when they examine the coherence between what they say they do and what their teacher candidates actually do in the field. Beyond meeting accreditation bodies' requests for evidence of coherence, institutions have an ethical responsibility to think critically about how they are preparing preservice teachers to address inequities within the education system. To this end, it is important for teacher preparation programs to define social justice. Within this issue, Sandovol, van Es, Campbell, and Santagata (2020) explained the need to connect aspects of education to the sociopolitical environments (Hand, 2012) by framing students' orientation to and participation in the education system using social justice (Freire, 1972; Gutstein, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1997). Whereas, Mills, Villegas, and Cochran-Smith (2020) highlighted the power schools hold in reproducing social inequities and the need for teacher training programs to prepare preservice teachers in pedagogical interventions designed to support learners in linguistically diverse classroom from a social, political, and institutional lens of social justice. Olmstead, Ashton, and Wilkens (2020) furthered the discussion concerning the impact of power within teacher preparation and proposed addressing parity between teachers and student teachers through the co-teaching model. Finally, Mawhinney and Rinke (2020) discussed the powerful impact of TFA *corps members'* image of promoting social justice and equity themes outweighing the development of their pedagogy and identity as a teacher.

Despite social justice and equity themes appearing across various teacher preparation programs, how programs are executing this work varies. Equally important for teacher preparation programs is to explicitly define what they are doing to prepare teachers with skills to disrupt and dismantle systemic oppression. The power dynamics described in this issue within recruitment, clinical practice, pedagogical development, and program coherence all play a part in sustaining the status quo of educational, social, and political inequities. By following the recommendations on how to be an anti-racist educator presented by scholars such as Ibram X. Kendi (2019) and Dena Simmons (2018), institutions can start to challenge the current systems and truly live out the actions written in their mission and vision statements.

Researchers from teacher education programs need to challenge their adherence to the status quo through examination of power dynamics within future studies. Educators trained in pedagogy to support diverse populations help not only students

with individualized needs but all students and families within the community. Innovative models, such as co-teaching, have the potential to aid the development of preservice teachers and veteran teachers alike. Yet, buy-in, designated planning time, and communication skills are necessary to see these approaches succeed. In addition, schools and teacher preparation programs need to ensure training and support are a part of the transition from traditional teaching and learning systems. Finally, a reexamination of the impact of how third-party teacher preparation programs such as TFA construct teacher identity is needed to determine whether these programs are equitable for learners, their families, and ultimately the schools.

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