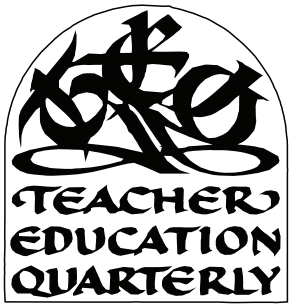

Understanding Preservice Teacher Dispositions

Implications for Social Justice and Educational Policy

Andrew Saultz, Abigail I. Lyons, Brittany Aronson, Scott A. Sander, & Joel R. Malin

Abstract

This study provides empirical evidence on preservice teachers' (PSTs) dispositions by surveying them on topics of educational policy in their first required course for a teacher preparation program in one mid-sized public university. Our survey used the same questions as did the Ed Next/Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance poll, which was administered nationally both to the general public and to public school teachers. The goal was to understand PSTs' dispositions when they enter teacher education programs. Results of the survey indicate that dispositions and attitudes of PSTs reflect a belief that schools are doing well and that PSTs are neutral with respect to many major educational policies. These findings suggest that

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students are entering teacher preparation programs with largely positive views of schooling and a general lack of knowledge about educational policy and teachers' working conditions. We provide several implications for teacher education and teacher educators who look to disrupt rather than reproduce structural inequalities.

Introduction

There are increasing calls for rigorous, empirical work analyzing teacher education program quality and curriculum and providing descriptive information regarding students and graduates, particularly as it relates to social justice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Tatto, Richmond, & Carter Andrews, 2016). Such research has the potential to better elucidate who enters the profession, identify specific ways that teacher education students can grow and change, and, ultimately, improve teacher education program quality. We see this research as equally important when considering the potential for preparing teachers not only for classrooms but also to be important actors in facilitating informed educational policy decision-making aimed at confronting social injustices. The research has confirmed demographically which students (82% White, predominantly female) are more likely to self-select into teacher preparation (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) and which students tend to continue into the workforce (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009). We know comparatively little about the dispositions and understandings about educational policy that preservice teachers (PSTs) bring with them into teacher preparation. While we discuss the term *dispositions* in more detail, we are using this term to describe the beliefs, values, and attitudes that PSTs hold. Understanding what students think and believe about broader educational issues as they enter these programs could enable teacher educators to better scaffold learning, measure changes throughout the program, and inform curricular reforms pertaining to issues of educational policy and social justice.

We assert that knowledge regarding what educational policy is—including federal, state, and local laws—and the impact these policies have on school policies and practices are an inherent social justice issue. Knowledge of educational policy is one component, but coupled with knowledge of social justice, it adds an additional layer that holds potential for informing action. For example, a social justice lens allows one to see that policies implemented by administrators and teachers in schools often vary based on the particular context (e.g., rural, urban) and student population (e.g., students of color, students living in poverty). Likewise, it enables us to see that schools that serve predominantly Black and Brown children undergo some of the most intense accountability measures, such as increased testing, standardized curriculum, less access to advanced courses, and qualified teachers. Also, teachers who are politically informed and have a social justice consciousness are empowered to take action to confront injustices in the form of grassroots organizing, as has been witnessed recently in teacher strikes in the Los Angeles Unified School District and Chicago Public Schools.

Of interest to us is the policy knowledge (or lack thereof) that our PSTs bring with them to our classrooms and how their beliefs, values, and attitudes shape the stances they take on such issues. Included in how we are using the term *dispositions*, we suggest that it is especially important to examine incoming students' views on the educational system and educational policy and how this relates to issues of social justice. Research has demonstrated that in-service teachers hold fundamentally different views on the educational system and educational policy than the general public (Peterson, Henderson, & West, 2014). While this research has not clearly specified why or how these differences exist, we posit several possible explanations for why teachers view educational issues differently than the general public. One hypothesis is that the teaching profession shapes in-service teachers' beliefs over time. A second hypothesis is that these differences could be a result of a selection bias, such that individuals who decide to go into a career in teaching fundamentally view education differently than those who do not enter the teaching profession. Finally, it could be that teacher education programs impact and shape how PSTs view education.

This last hypothesis is of particular interest to us, as we are researchers and teacher educators ultimately seeking to understand how the dispositions PSTs bring to their teacher education programs may be impacted in substantive ways. While some members of the public may think of education as a neutral process, those committed to equity and social justice realize that education is a political act (Freire, 1970). Using a critical lens to analyze systems like school does not come naturally, as we are all born into a world that has been structured to benefit dominant groups and maintain their political power (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). We therefore believe that it is the role of teacher educators/education to provide future teachers with informed knowledge that comes from those who continue to do critical social justice work. This critical social justice perspective can serve to challenge dominant narratives, such as meritocracy and individualism, that go largely unquestioned by most of today's society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Questioning who has the power to decide and who is most impacted can position PSTs to recognize the inequity in the policies and practices of an institution like schooling and position them as agents for social and political change.

Disconnects between public perceptions and teachers' perceptions of education are problematic given that we also know that disconnects exist between policy makers (who might hold little education background experience) and educators, who are often excluded from policy discourses (Ellison, Anderson, Aronson, & Clauson, 2018). We understand that teachers do not necessarily hold an epistemic view that privileges them over the schools and communities in which they work. Nevertheless, they certainly do hold areas of expertise and knowledge that can contribute to the development and implementation of the types of policies that are necessary to promote more equitable schools. By understanding entering PSTs' dispositions and knowledge related to educational policy, we can clarify the role

of teacher preparation in the vast differences of "informed knowledge" between teachers and the opinions of the general public. As PSTs move through the teacher preparation process, they should come to value the multiple perspectives and diverse viewpoints they are provided and grow an individualized, intellectual identity around foundational educational scholarship that has an informed voice ready to speak back against injustices they can now see and no longer accept.

Teacher educators need to understand what their students know and think about the education system and policy (e.g., how they think about public school quality, accountability, teacher salaries) upon entering the programs. Ultimately, by understanding the thoughts and beliefs PSTs possess upon entry, we can more accurately analyze curricular needs. Accordingly, the present study surveys incoming PSTs' dispositions relative to educational policy. Specifically, this study surveys PSTs' dispositions at the onset of one teacher education program and compares these attitudes to a general public and public school teachers survey (Peterson et al., 2014). We begin by connecting the literature related to teacher education and PSTs' understandings of dispositions. Following this, we share how this study is informed and framed by theories of social reproduction in relation to education. We then explain our methods and findings. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the implications this study holds for teacher education.

Relevant Literature

Within the last few decades, teacher education has increasingly been under attack in the broader educational landscape (Aydarova & Berliner, 2018; Baltodano, 2012; Bullough, 2014; Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). One such critique revolves around the issue of program design and the inability of teacher education to prepare teachers to be effective in "low-performing" schools. Many teacher educators and researchers regard a disposition toward social justice as an important component in the teacher preparation process to prepare effective teachers in our increasingly diverse society (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2010; Murray, 2008; Villegas, 2007). However, critics of social justice courses in teacher education assert that there is a preoccupation with multicultural issues that diverts attention away from "high standards" and "rigorous" coursework and that social justice work is poorly aligned with "rigorous" content-area instruction (Kanstoroom & Finn, 1999; Wasley, 2006; Will, 2006; Wilson, 2005). The critics also claim that the social justice agenda is a form of "political indoctrination" from those on the "left" (Villegas, 2007). Our goal is not to reinforce a binary of left or right rhetoric for students but rather for them to be informed of the sociopolitical and historical contexts that influence educational policy and thus schooling experiences. This should result in the ability both to leverage their personal experiences in schools and to see how power and privilege disproportionately impact those individuals and groups with marginalized social identities across race, class, gender, orientation, ability, and so on.

Interestingly, although critics are worried about a socially just teacher education focused on change, the reality is that teaching and schooling have not changed much over time. In his foundational study on teachers, Cuban (1993) found that teachers, instruction, and schooling had remained largely unchanged from 1890 to 1980. Going to school is a common experience for most people, and "schools, regardless of location, tend to look more similar than different" (Knowles, 1994, p. 121). Various sights and sounds of classroom life become quite familiar: desks filled with students aligned in rows, teacher positioned at the front of the room, students raising their hands to answer questions posed by the teacher. Generations of people share highly common experiences inside classrooms where large numbers of children are controlled by a single teacher and that teacher leads a predominantly one-way conversation within the classroom. This casts the teacher into the role of knowledge provider and casts students into the role of knowledge consumers who are expected to accept being on the receiving end of content-based information (Goodlad, 2004; Hess, 2010; P. Jackson, 1968). These findings have demonstrated the power of socialization in public education, indicating that substantive change is unusual and highlighting the systemic challenges faced by teacher educators and the education field. A social justice lens further allows us to question who is making the educational policies around "change" and who is most impacted when things stay the same.

Teaching as We Were Taught

In 1975, Lortie claimed that by the time students graduate from high school, they will have spent 13,000 hours of direct contact with classroom teachers. This infamous statistic has been widely referenced (Cuban, 1993; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Loughran, Berry, & Mulhall, 2012) as a barrier for teacher preparation programs and sets the stage for understanding that education is firmly entrenched as an institution that reproduces the status quo (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) of a dominant (Whitestream) culture (Urrieta, 2010).

Teacher socialization refers to the process of an individual becoming a participating member of the society of teachers (Danzinger, 1971; Zeichner, 1980). Evidence has shown that from the thousands of hours teachers spend in schools and classrooms prior to entering the profession, they exhibit the well-known phrase "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975), synonymous with "teachers teaching the way they were taught." Using this logic, individuals enter preservice education and the teaching profession with very clear ideas and dispositions about how teachers behave, what quality instruction looks like, and what a teacher–student relationship looks like (Lortie, 1975). In this view, teacher socialization occurs internally, throughout individuals' experiences as students. Considering that 82% of the teaching population remains White, middle class, and female, it becomes worth examining how this "apprenticeship of observation" is passed along through curriculum and teaching to an increasingly diverse student population.

With this in mind, it is clear that teacher training begins long before PSTs ever step into university classrooms to begin their education (Cuban, 1993; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Lortie, 1975). PSTs' early experiences in schools and with teachers have already created strong worldviews and expectations that are brought with them to teacher education classes (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Oftentimes, combining these worldviews with the "apprenticeship of teaching" fosters in PSTs a host of experiences that represent a disproportionate, one-sided view of what it means to teach (Britzman, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). These points have been widely used to explain the difficulty of creating meaningful change in teacher education programs on PSTs' beliefs and practices (Mewborn & Tyminski, 2006).

Teacher Dispositions

As we have established, teachers bring their own experiences and varying perspectives into the classroom. The idea of studying teacher dispositions is nothing new; researchers have examined teacher dispositions (albeit employing varied terms like *attitudes*, *perceptions*, and *beliefs*) for decades and have found relationships between these dispositions and teaching effectiveness (Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000). However, within the last decade, the focus on "highly qualified" teachers has brought the subject of teacher dispositions more fully into the spotlight. This ties back to the increasing attacks on teacher education to be more "rigorous" in order to produce teacher candidates who will be effective in "low-performing" schools. While rigid standardization measures claim to hold teachers and schools accountable, these Band-Aid measures are not changing outcomes. We believe that it will require fundamental shifts in how teachers are prepared—with a centralized focus on key social justice concepts like power, privilege, and oppression—for lifelong students in the current schooling system to evolve into transformative teachers for all students, but especially for those who have been traditionally marginalized.

Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) explained that "dispositions are often defined as the personal qualities or characteristics that are possessed by individuals, including attitudes, beliefs, interests, appreciations, values, and modes of adjustment" (p. 2). Additionally, the main teacher accreditation agency, the Council for the Accreditation for Educator Preparation (CAEP; n.p.), has defined professional dispositions as "the habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie an educator's performance." As educators who are part of a program with commitments to social justice and equity, we recognize that the dispositions with which PSTs enter are not necessarily aligned with those represented within our mission and vision statements. Therefore the teacher education process must work to transform the dispositions of PSTs so they come to see and identify as teachers for social justice.

Prior to becoming CAEP, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) defined dispositions in 2012 as

> professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and

> non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development. NCATE expects institutions to assess professional dispositions based on observable behaviors in educational settings. The two professional dispositions that NCATE expects institutions to assess are fairness and the belief that all students can learn. Based on their mission and conceptual framework, professional education units can identify, define, and operationalize additional professional dispositions.

It is important to note that NCATE removed the term *social justice* from its definition of dispositions in 2008; however, many teacher educators and researchers still regard a disposition toward social justice as an important component in the teacher preparation process (Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2010; Murray, 2008; Villegas, 2007). We concur, believing that an ability to critique the status quo, particularly as it relates to inherently reproducing the dominant culture, is of critical importance to social justice and educational policy.

There is concern regarding "assessing" PST dispositions in a teacher education program due to worry that a professor's ideological views will be put on PSTs. However, Villegas (2007) contended that, whether we like it or not, schools and teachers clearly play a significant role in the stratification of our society. While teaching for social justice cannot be reduced to a disposition, teachers need a broad range of knowledge and skills, deep understanding of pedagogical concepts, state and federal policy, and varied instructional strategies to build on strengths of historically marginalized students (Villegas, 2007). Sleeter and Owuor (2011) recommended allowing PSTs the opportunity to examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes prior to entering the classroom to identify the inequities in schools and the wider society.

Teacher Education and Diversity

Although there are many factors that influence educational outcomes in schools serving diverse student bodies, members of the educational community agree that teacher quality is a major consideration (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Wenglinsky, 2002). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs build the framework for how they develop their practice, the strategies they elect to use in the classroom, and the decisions they make.

Over the past three decades, teacher education research in the United States has also sought to determine effective ways to prepare PSTs to embrace culturally relevant pedagogies within their practice (Sleeter & Owuor, 2011). Dating back to the 1980s, researchers began to examine the relationships between PSTs and their previous diversity encounters, ultimately finding that teachers were often ill equipped to instruct students of diverse backgrounds (Hadaway & Florez, 1987–1988). In the early 1990s, research shifted to the attitudes and beliefs that PSTs held with regard to increasingly diverse schools. Studies showed that teacher candidates were willing to make accommodations for diversity and realized they probably would

need to, given the changing demographics in schools, but that prospective educators felt inadequately prepared to teach diverse students (Barry & Lechner, 1995; Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1994). However, some studies suggested that teacher education candidates may tend to be overconfident regarding their ability to teach diverse populations, despite not having (or rarely having) interacted with such populations. For example, Easter, Schultz, Neyhart, and Reck (1999) conducted a survey study to investigate the beliefs of 80 PSTs. Although many of the PSTs had little exposure to other cultures, 96% believed in their ability to handle diversity successfully. Dedeoglu and Lamme (2011) conducted a study of PSTs designed to examine how demographic variables like race, previous experiences in inner-city schools, religion affiliations, and cross-cultural friendships might influence their beliefs. Ultimately, they found PSTs' prior intercultural experiences were important in their understandings of difference and acceptance.

The studies outlined demonstrated that there are possibilities for change in beliefs through teacher education and professional development in efforts to develop social justice pedagogies. Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) asserted that "it is important for teacher educators to know and understand the dispositions of effective teachers, so as to design experiences that will help to develop these characteristics in students and to help students discover if they have the 'dispositions to teach'" (p. 2).

Teachers' Views Toward Policy

Of importance to this research, we see part of understanding PSTs' dispositions, including understanding the knowledge and beliefs PSTs bring with them related to educational policy. Accordingly, we are aligned with others (e.g., Horsford, Scott, & Anderson, 2018) who argue that teachers and other educators must take a more active role in education policy. The first step toward being able to do so, of course, is to develop an adequate understanding of education policy and politics. Accordingly, in this study, we are interested in understanding PSTs' policy knowledge and beliefs, which ultimately can aid in shaping a teacher education policy curriculum including issues of social justice.

Few research studies have analyzed teachers' views on key educational policy issues. Peterson et al. (2014) provided a detailed evaluation of teachers' views relative to the general public, finding that the gap between teachers and nonteachers is often wider and deeper than what is observed between other groups, including Republicans and Democrats. Specifically, they find that the teacher–public gap is widest on issues of teacher policy, including teacher's unions, merit pay, and teacher tenure. Likewise, many aspects of accountability show large teacher–public gaps. Teachers and the general public also differ substantially on support for vouchers, charter schools, and annual testing. The Ed Next/Program on Education Policy Governance survey also provided respondents with information about school quality, teacher pay, and school finances (Peterson et al., 2014). Of note, teachers' opinions

did not change on these issues when provided this new information, whereas the general public was more prone to changing opinions relative to supporting higher spending levels and evaluating schools. In sum, the limited knowledge on teachers' views on education policy suggests that teachers, by and large, have different views than the general public on school accountability, spending, and teacher policy.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we are informed by social reproduction theories stemming from functional approaches to inequality that are frequently cited in educational research (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Durkheim, 1982). Together these theories frame how teacher preparation programs are a cog in the social reproduction of American society—or, as Durkheim described, functioning to ensure the "conservation of a culture inherited from the past" (p. 18). Historically, schools have been a form of social control and a sorting mechanism with a focus on obedience and uniformity (Cuban, 1993; Lagemann, 2000). For example, schools have been shown to "train" working-class students to take orders (e.g., be obedient in relation to authority), while children of professionals are trained using more progressive methods, emphasizing self-regulation and self-presentation skills (Anyon, 1980).

Bowles and Gintis (1976) highlighted how social reproduction is perpetuated in schools and how "the history of U.S. education provides little support for the view that schools have been vehicles for the equalization of economic status or opportunity" (p. 66). Thus schools have served as sites of social reproduction that have allowed for individuals to secure certain positions in society largely based on class (and intersections of race and, with respect to certain programming, gender; Fuller-Hamilton, Malin, & Hackmann, 2015).

Essentially, Bowles and Gintis (1976) asserted that schools are training young people for their future economic and occupational positions according to their current social class positions. Additionally, Bowles and Gintis (2007) exposed how teachers teach more than the explicit curriculum (i.e., math, reading) and that through the "hidden curriculum," they are also teaching various kinds of knowledges, skills, and behaviors in sync with tracking students with their social class backgrounds. Jay (2003) argued that this hidden curriculum can "serve as a hegemonic device for the purposes of securing, for the ruling class (and other dominant groups in society), a continued position of power and leadership" (p. 6).

Additionally, Allen (2001) explained, "some reproduction theorists have extended and deepened this argument by contending that in addition to class status other factors such as language, culture, and political resistance also determine the perpetuation of inequality generation after generation" (p. 2). For example, Bourdieu (1973) argued that social class categories align with cultural backgrounds, knowledge, dispositions, and values that are transmitted through the family. The contribution made by the educational system to the reproduction of the structure

of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes is seen "by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among these classes" (p. 257). Bourdieu was concerned with how issues of habitus and cultural capital determined individuals' chances in life. *Habitus* refers to the signals that depict our cultural background, knowledge, and dispositions that are transmitted through our families, whereas *cultural capital* represents the knowledge and mannerisms of the dominant group in society (holding the most power and wealth) and becomes the knowledge that is most valued in schools. This is important to consider when we acknowledge the role that social reproduction plays in the knowledge and values teachers bring with them to the classroom. These ideas were further intensified when Bourdieu extended Durkheim's theory by describing how social reproduction is rooted in families who pass down social class values and other forms of cultural capital.

It is important to note the ways in which race and class intersect. Most social reproduction theories are rooted in Marxist economic critiques, often leaving out discussions of race (Allen, 2001). However, we see this as relevant to our conversations related to teacher dispositions given the demographic divide operationalized between a predominantly White teaching force among an increasingly diverse population of students. Should predominantly White teachers continue to dominate the teaching force, "the hidden curriculum serves as primary conduit of this sociocultural reproduction" (Jay, 2003, p. 7). Thus, as long as schools continue to perpetuate structural norms and cultural capital, teachers will continue to be the vessels that transmit them.

Data and Methods

We use data from an earlier study by Peterson et al. (2014) on public opinion and teacher attitudes toward schools and educational policy. Peterson et al. relied on questions on nationally representative data from 2007 to 2012 Ed Next surveys. We supplement these data with survey data from one large public university. Specifically, we had 164 students enrolled in an Introduction to Education course who were sent the survey. We target this course because it is required for all teacher education students and is viewed as the starting point in their preservice education. We acquired institutional review board approval for this study and received support and permission to administer the survey from the teacher education department chair and the coordinator of the course. The course has seven sections. Table 1 shows the demographic information for the respondents. Of the 164 students who received the survey, 151 responded (92% response rate).

Survey Instrument

We use questions from the public attitudes and teacher attitudes toward schools and educational policy surveys developed by Peterson et al. (2014). By using the

same questions, we are able to compare answers across groups. The survey has six categories: evaluating schools, role of the government, teacher salaries, evaluating teachers, standards and accountability, and neutrality (see the appendix for a complete listing of survey questions).

The data were collected from a representative sample population of PSTs ($N = 151$) enrolled in a mid-size midwestern teacher preparation program (TPP). We restrict our analysis to undergraduates enrolled in the first course of the TPP sequence, Introduction to Education. We excluded students in other courses because our analysis sought to understand the attitudes of teacher candidates at the beginning of the program, which may be fundamentally different than the attitudes expressed by PSTs later in the program.

We analyzed PSTs' dispositions related to six educational policy categories: evaluating schools, role of government, teacher salaries, evaluating teachers, standards and accountability, and neutrality. To capture the vast nature of dispositions toward education described in an original study by Peterson et al. (2014), we chose to modify the previously used survey. The questions we selected assessed latent constructs related to PSTs' dispositions toward evaluating schools, teacher salaries, the role of government, and standards and accountability (see sample questions in the appendix). The survey was modified with fewer questions than the original survey, to increase response rate and capture the specific dispositions of PSTs in the TPP so as to align with the initial intent of the findings and to inform the TPP curriculum.

We analyzed the attitudes of PSTs in two ways: (a) preservice attitudes compared to the sample of the general public and public school teachers surveyed by Peterson et al. (2014) and (b) PSTs as an isolated group to identify possible themes in the responses. One goal is to understand PSTs' dispositions related to the educational system to better instruct them in the future. We also hope that these comparisons

Table 1
Sample Demographics

	Number
Gender	
Female	137
Male	27
Race/nationality	
White	144
Multiracial	8
Black	7
Chinese (international)	5
College status	
Traditional[a]	161
Nontraditional	3

[a]Indicates students who entered college immediately after high school.

will help expand the literature on who enters into our TPP to better articulate who self-selects into the teaching profession.

Findings

Findings are presented by grouping the survey questions into six major categories.

Evaluating School Quality

First, we analyzed attitudes on evaluating schools at the national and local levels. Table 2 shows that PSTs grade both the nation's schools and local schools higher than the general public and public school teachers do.

Role of Government

PSTs expressed a general emphasis toward the state's role in educational issues regarding standards and identifying and fixing failing schools (Tables 3–5). Both teachers and the general public hold this belief as well; however, no trends compared to the other two groups were identified in the responses of PSTs, except the overwhelming agreement on state control over federal and local.

PSTs are more like teachers in their views of government roles in setting edu-

Table 2

Ed Next: Students Are Often Given the Grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to Denote the Quality of Their Work. Suppose the Public Schools Themselves Were Graded in the Same Way. What Grade Would You Give the Public Schools in Your Community?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Nation's schools			
A or B	35	30	25
C	59	56	53
D or F	6	14	22
Local schools			
A or B	80	69	55
C	16	25	32
D or F	4	7	14

Table 3

Ed Next: Based on Your Best Guess, What Level of Government Currently Plays the Biggest Role in Setting Educational Standards for What Students Should Know?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Federal	34.85	34	39
State	61.36	60	51
Local	3.79	6	11

cational standards for what students should know. All three groups believe that the state government plays the largest role in determining standards. PSTs reported a belief that the federal government plays a larger role (26%) and the local government plays a lesser role (10%) than either the general public or teachers, although a majority of respondents in all three groups reported that the state government had the biggest role. However, PSTs had a much larger percentage reporting that the federal government plays the biggest role in deciding how to fix failing schools than either of the other two groups.

Educational Finance

PSTs estimated a higher average yearly salary ($52,405) than teachers ($46,181) or the general public ($39,797). Of note, both PSTs and teachers had higher estimates than the general public. Both PSTs and teacher groups had a large majority of respondents reporting that public school teacher salaries should increase (Tables 6 and 7). While the general public also had a majority supporting an increase in teacher salary, it was a much lower number than the other two groups.

Table 4

Ed Next: Based on Your Best Guess, What Level of Government Currently Plays the Biggest Role in Deciding Whether or Not a School Is Failing?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Federal	25.76	17	17
State	64.39	70	62
Local	9.85	14	21

Table 5

Ed Next: Based on Your Best Guess, What Level of Government Currently Plays the Biggest Role in Deciding How to Fix Failing Schools?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Federal	40.91	17	18
State	38.64	58	57
Local	20.45	25	25

Table 6

Ed Next: Do You Think That Public School Teacher Salaries Should Increase, Decrease, or Stay About the Same?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Increase	87	89	65
Stay about the same	13	10	30
Decrease	0	1	5

PSTs' attitudes on taxes for public schools are more closely aligned with the general public than with teachers. The majority of PSTs (57%) want taxes to stay about the same, and a plurality of the general public (46%) agrees. However, 66% of teachers answered that they thought taxes to fund public school teacher salaries should increase.

Evaluating Teachers

Table 8 shows how each group evaluates teachers nationally and in their local schools. Of note, PSTs grade the nation's teachers higher than the general public but lower than teachers. However, PSTs grade local teachers higher than either of the other two groups. Seventy percent of our sample reported that they would grade local teachers an A or B. This suggests that PSTs generally grade teachers well and have a higher opinion of local teachers relative to teachers nationwide.

Standards and Accountability

Tables 9–13 show that PSTs are much more neutral on issues of mandated testing than either the general public or teachers, as 21% of our sample reported that they neither support nor oppose mandated testing in reading and math. PSTs also reported lower support for using the same standardized tests in every state and

Table 7

Ed Next: Do You Think Taxes to Fund Public School Teacher Salaries Should Increase, Decrease, or Stay About the Same?

	Preservice teachers	Teachers	General public
Increase	39	66	44
Stay about the same	57	31	46
Decrease	4	3	9

Table 8

Ed Next: Suppose You Had to Grade Each Teacher in Your Local Schools for the Quality of Their Work Using the Grades A, B, C, D, and F. What Percent of Teachers in Your Local Schools Would You Give Each Grade? Your Answers Should Add Up to 100%

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
National			
A or B	53	57	47
C	26	24	28
D or F	21	19	25
Local			
A or B	70	66	53
C	19	20	25
D or F	11	14	21

much lower support for the Common Core than either of the other two groups. PSTs' attitudes resembled teachers on basing part of teacher salaries on how much their students learn, with both groups mostly opposing the idea. However, the majority of the general public favored this policy. PSTs expressed attitudes more similar to teachers than the general public in most categories but were most strikingly unlike either teachers or the public in neutral attitudes (Table 14).

Table 9

Ed Next: Do You Support or Oppose the Federal Government Continuing to Require That All Students Be Tested in Math and Reading Each Year in Grades 3–8 and Once in High School?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Support	39	50	69
Neither support nor oppose	32	5	11
Oppose	29	45	20

Table 10

Ed Next: Do You Support or Oppose Using the Same Standardized Tests in Every State?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Support	47	53	63
Neither support nor oppose	23	9	14
Oppose	30	38	24

Table 11

Ed Next: Do You Support or Oppose the Use of the Common Core Standards in Your State?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Support	16	41	42
Neither support nor oppose	32	8	16
Oppose	52	51	42

Table 12

Ed Next: Has Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Your District Had a Generally Positive Impact on Schools, or Do You Think It Has Had a Generally Negative Impact?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Positive	10	32	28
Neither positive nor negative	45	20	21
Negative	45	49	51

Neutrality

Table 14 shows how PSTs appear to be more neutral on issues of educational policy than the general public or teachers. For example, 56% of PST respondents reported neutral feelings toward unions, and nearly one-third of PST respondents were neutral on whether they supported standards/accountability and discipline policies. In sum, PSTs clearly are more neutral on educational policy areas than the other two groups. Peterson et al. (2014) attributed stances of neutrality to the lack of substantial information necessary to take a stance. When comparing teachers and the public, "the teaching force is more decided than the public in general in its opinions on education matters" (p. 65). This could be for two reasons: (a) The teacher group is more informed and/or (b) the teacher group has more stake in the issues, and the issues pertain more closely to the personal lives of teachers. Most strikingly in our data analysis, we found that PSTs assume neutrality at more than twice the rate of teachers in all cases.

Discussion of Findings

Although the results of this study are situated in a single institution, this work is widely relevant because of similar demographics nationally. The individuals who come to TPPs across the nation have been largely rewarded by the traditional way of doing school (Britzman, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). It is these prior positive experiences in schools that lead to current expectations that PSTs bring with them to their teacher education programs. Having observed teaching for so long, many students fail to recognize there are other aspects to the teaching profession that they have not seen (Borg, 2004). So if TPPs do not significantly disrupt these notions, the PSTs will return to classrooms to continue the cycle of sameness and inequitable practices. We have identified two main themes in these data that nuance these notions about PSTs' dispositions: schools are doing well and passivity.

Schools Are Doing Well

PSTs in our sample, by and large, reported that schools are doing well. This echoes much of the research on who goes into teaching (Cuban, 1993; Lortie, 1975) that indicates TPPs draw mostly from populations that like, and do well in, school.

Table 13

Ed Next: Do You Favor or Oppose Basing Part of the Salaries of Teachers on How Much Their Students Learn?

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Favor	21	19	53
Neither favor nor oppose	30	4	13
Oppose	49	77	35

Table 14
Assessing Neutrality

	Preservice teachers	*Teachers*	*General public*
Standards/accountability	34	13	28
Questions Ed Next: As you may know, in the last few years, states have been deciding whether or not to use the Common Core, which are standards for reading and math that are the same across the states. In the states that have these standards, they will be used to hold public schools accountable for their performance. Do you support or oppose the use of the Common Core standards in your state? Ed Next: As far as you know, are the Common Core standards being implemented in your district? Ed Next: Has implementation of the Common Core standards in your district had a generally positive impact on schools, or do you think it has had a generally negative impact? Ed Next: Do you support or oppose using the same standardized tests in every state?			
Unions	56	16	34
Question Ed Next: Some people say that teacher unions are a stumbling block to school reform. Others say that unions right for better schools and better teachers. What do you think? Do you think teacher unions have a generally positive effect on schools, or do you think they have a generally negative effect?[a]			
Opt out	28	11	16
Question Ed Next: Some people say that ALL students should take state tests in math and reading. Other say that parents should decide whether or not their children take these tests. Do you support or oppose letting parents decide whether to have their children take state math and reading tests?			
Discipline policies	33	21	30
Questions Ed Next: Do you support or oppose school district policies that prevent schools from expelling or suspending Black and Hispanic students at higher rates than other students? Ed Next: Do you support or oppose federal policies that prevent schools from expelling or suspending Black and Hispanic students at higher rates than other students?			

Note. Percentage values based on average of all questions that included the following responses: neither agree nor disagree, neither favor nor oppose, or unsure. The questions were then categorized by the following: standards/accountability, unions, opt out, discipline policies. Unless otherwise noted, questions were analyzed compared to the 2015 Ed Next poll results.

[a]Results from the 2014 Peterson et al. study.

Eighty percent of PSTs felt that local schools were performing at an A or B level (Table 2). On the surface, this optimism regarding school quality might be lauded. Pride and enthusiasm for one's profession are important. However, PSTs' attitudes on school quality could also be problematic. For example, if PSTs see schools as largely doing well, they are less likely to want to reform teaching practices, school climate, or long-standing inequities. In connection to how social justice is a part of educational policy, PSTs are more likely to reproduce the systemic inequities embedded in schools if they think that schools are doing well. We anticipate that PSTs' attitudes would translate into overt and subvert practices that look to maintain the status quo rather than to disrupt it. As teacher educators, this is concerning and speaks to our role in "mak[ing] the familiar strange" (Feiman-Nemser & Featherstone, 1992, p. 7). According to this view, a good day in teacher education involves disrupting PSTs' notions that schools are doing fine. We speak more to this in our implications.

Passivity

The neutrality of thought of PSTs is further visible when they neither supported nor opposed a number of major educational topics (Table 13). For example, over 50% of respondents answered that they neither support nor oppose unions. This is surprising, as unionization is typically a very polarizing topic. In contrast, 16% of teachers and 34% of the general public were neutral on unions in education. The original survey also asked participants about their views regarding accountability/standards, opting out of standardized testing, and discipline policies. Approximately one-third of all respondents answered that they neither supported nor opposed these topics. This is particularly noteworthy, as these topics are historically controversial within the educational system.

Implications

Our findings present evidence that PSTs come into their TPPs with the beliefs that schools are doing well and are neutral toward many controversial educational topics. Teacher educators should take note that these dispositions suggest that PSTs may become complicit in the reproduction of societal inequalities. These findings, however, offer a unique opportunity for teacher educators and an important call to action. First, it is clear that PSTs are not aware of the structural inequities and injustices embedded within the educational system. Much of this is couched in the reality that many PSTs entering traditional TPPs come from more privileged backgrounds that include highly segregated communities and schools. This becomes an issue when considering the increasing diversity across race, class, gender, orientation, ability, and so on that we see in current and future classrooms across the nation. Teacher educators need to immerse PSTs in current educational policy debates and controversies and showcase the ways existing teachers are political

actors. PSTs need to go from an awareness of how policies have disproportionately impacted privileged individuals and groups (i.e., White, middle to upper class) to taking everyday actions in their future classrooms using more culturally responsive and socially just practices. This requires TPPs to scaffold conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion over the entirety of the program and not isolate conversations to any single course.

Next, teacher educators need to push back on the passivity our students have around political issues like testing and accountability. Love (2019) argued that we need to think about "accountability" as more than just test scores; rather, we need to be accountable to the humanity of children in our classrooms, particularly Black and Brown children, and ask, "How do we hold teachers accountable for injustices in their classrooms that they themselves have caused?" (p. 12). To be neutral on critical issues like racial opportunity gaps is to ignore their importance (Milner, 2012). To be neutral means that PSTs have been allowed to remain ignorant of issues that do not directly impact them. This is why it is incumbent on TPPs to holistically address concepts like identity, power, and privilege in the context of policy decisions that impact classroom teaching. Work like critically examining one's own positionality and how this impacts pedagogy is an essential part of connecting social justice and educational policy. Our PSTs cannot be defined by ignorance and passivity. We hope this study will serve as a wake-up call to teacher educators that our entering PSTs will more than likely bring dispositions that will lead them to reproduce inequalities if we do not use our TPPs as an educative space to support critical consciousness.

As teacher educators, we can take a lot away from these neutral attitudes in PSTs. Our analyses might suggest that PSTs are waiting to be told what to think on these issues. In other words, PSTs are entering our programs with a strong proclivity toward education as a "banking model" (Freire, 1970). This is important for two reasons. First, teacher educators need to understand the importance of resisting this expectation. PSTs need to be pushed to construct their own understandings of the educational system and to come to appreciate that teaching is a political act (Giroux & McLaren, 1986). These are teachers with the power to decide what gets addressed and what gets ignored. If we allow students to remain neutral, we miss an important opportunity to get students to reflect on the structural inequities and political underpinnings of schooling. PSTs' neutrality provides a critical forum to push students on their assumptions about the role of the teacher and the education system more generally. We do not see this as presenting two opposing binaries to students to debate for or against an issue; rather, we see this as an opportunity for students to learn how to ask and engage in critical questions that drive conversations deeper. Asking who benefits opens up possibilities for better understanding the consequences of the privatization of schools or the racialization of neoliberal reforms (Au, 2016) and simultaneously moves PSTs away from binary thinking.
Second, teacher educators must reject this passivity to provide an example for fu-

ture teachers. If we accept passivity at the higher education level, then our students are more likely to accept passivity at the K–12 levels. A banking model is further problematic because it presents the teacher as knowledge giver and students as passive learners. As successful products of this system, PSTs will likely continue this system if it is not disrupted during teacher preparation. PSTs who have never questioned or thought to question a system that they have been conditioned to see as "fair" must come to see that being silent also equates to being complicit with the status quo. Raising awareness of inequitable systems must be the first step toward creating socially just, informed teachers with the capacity to actively speak back to the system as advocates for children. It is up to TPPs to both initiate critical awareness and foster more critical dispositions that allow students to grow into agents of social justice in classrooms and in society.

How Does This Help Us Improve Teacher Education?

The teaching field continues to comprise predominantly White, middle-class, monolingual, female teachers who enter schools with little understanding of the historical, philosophical, sociological, and political foundations that shape our schools (National Education Association, 2004; Nieto, 2000). Additionally, the potential to become politically active and an informed classroom teacher may be hindered, depending on the type of dispositions PSTs bring with them to their TPPs. However, sharing this type of research with our PSTs and helping them to acknowledge that teaching is a political act, and that neutrality is actually an action in and of itself, could be one way that we begin to disrupt continuing to follow the status quo.

This research study was conducted at the onset of a Social Justice Teaching Collaborative (SJTC) that was formed at our university in 2016. Within the SJTC, several faculty members across departments serving PSTs came together to center social justice as a part of the curriculum for several required courses in the program (the Introduction to Education course used in this study was one of them). Using the findings from this research, we have been intentional to include critical aspects of the educational policy system as part of our curriculum. For example, we do not include only government processes (i.e., federal vs. local budget); although these are important, we also emphasize the ways that grassroots policy happens (e.g., teacher strikes, parental antitesting movements). We see these types of examples as promising for our future teachers to be exposed to and, we hope, motivated by as they move through the preparation process.

The SJTC takes a shared responsibility for the preparation of PSTs and has actively worked to construct a narrative that flows in and through courses. For example, our introductory course truly operates as a foundation course as it opens up conversations around diversity and inclusion for the next course to contextualize schools as institutions that reproduce inequality. The introductory course focuses on students learning to think and self-reflect critically (about teachers, teaching,

and schooling), which allows the next course to concentrate on curriculum, social foundations, history, and policy. This leads to a third course centered on teacher leadership and curriculum development. All courses include critical questioning and collaborative dialogue that situates PSTs as members of a learning community. With an overall goal to build knowledges and practices for socially just classrooms and schools, course instructors are able to collaborate around the following: (a) using scholarly resources, research, and theories for critical problem solving; (b) working in solidarity within schools, classrooms, and communities; (c) empowering professional/teacher agency; (d) having pride and joy for teaching profession; and (e) positioning teachers as intellectuals for critical inquiry and pedagogical practices. An overarching goal is to teach the differences between curriculum, pedagogy, and social foundations and why democracy is important to American education. We want our future teachers to see themselves as agents of change. We want our future teachers to be advocates for their students, but also for themselves and their profession.

Conclusion

Although we find great value in this work, we acknowledge that this study is limited in a number of ways. Though the survey had a large response rate (151 out of 164), the participants were all from one mid-sized public university. We caution readers not to overgeneralize our results, which should be taken as PSTs' dispositions in one context. We encourage others to analyze PSTs' dispositions upon entrance into traditional preparation programs. We also urge future researchers to analyze PSTs' dispositions at the ends of their programs, to evaluate the degree to which dispositions change throughout the TPP. Additionally, the literature on the program effects of TPPs could be expanded to provide evidence for how these programs might influence PSTs' understandings of social justice and educational policy.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

1. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose public schools themselves were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools in your community?
2. How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give them?
3. Based on your best guess, what is the average amount of money spent each year for a child in public schools in your local school district?
4. Based on your best guess, what is the average amount of money spent each year for a child in public schools in the United States as a whole?
5. Based on your best guess, what percent of funding for schools currently comes from each level of government? Your answers should add to 100% (federal, state, local).
6. What percent of funding should come from each level of government? Your answer should add up to 100% (federal, state, local).
7. As you may know, in the last few years, states have been deciding whether or not to use the

Common Core, which are standards for reading and math that are the same across the states. In the states that have these standards, they will be used to hold public schools accountable for their performance. Do you support or oppose the use of the Common Core standards in your state?

8. As far as you know, are the Common Core standards being implemented in your district?
9. Has implementation of the Common Core standards in your district had a generally positive impact on schools, or do you think it has had a generally negative impact?
10. Based on your best guess, what level of government currently plays the biggest role in setting educational standards for what students should know?
11. What level of government should play the biggest role in setting educational standards for what students should know?
12. Based on your best guess, what level of government currently plays the biggest role in deciding whether or not a school is failing?
13. What level of government should play the biggest role in deciding whether or not a school is failing?
14. Based on your best guess, what level of government currently plays the biggest role in deciding how to fix failing schools?
15. What level of government should play the biggest role in deciding how to fix failing schools?
16. Do you support or oppose the federal government continuing to require that all students be tested in math and reading each year in Grades 3–8 and once in high school?
17. Some people say that ALL students should take state tests in math and reading. Other say that parents should decide whether or not their children take these tests. Do you support or oppose letting parents decide whether to have their children take state math and reading tests?
18. How good of a job do you think state tests do at measuring what students learn in reading and math?
19. Do you support or oppose using the same standardized tests in every state?
20. About what share of instructional time in high school do you think students should spend receiving instruction independently or on a computer?
21. Suppose you had to grade each teacher in your local schools for the quality of their work using the grades A, B, C, D, and F. What percent of teachers in your local schools would you give each grade? Your answers should add up to 100%.
22. Suppose you had to grade each teacher in the country for the quality of their work using the grades A, B, C, D, and F. What percent of teachers in the country would you give each grade? Your answers should add up to 100%.
23. Based on your best guess, what is the average yearly salary of a public school teacher in your state?
24. Do you think that public school teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?
25. Do you think taxes to fund public school teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?
26. Do you favor or oppose basing part of the salaries of teachers on how much their students learn?
27. Some people say that teacher unions are a stumbling block to school reform. Others say that unions right for better schools and better teachers. What do you think? Do you think teacher unions have a generally positive effect on schools, or do you think they have a generally negative effect?

28. Do you support or oppose school district policies that prevent schools from expelling or suspending Black and Hispanic students at higher rates than other students?
29. Do you support or oppose federal policies that prevent schools from expelling or suspending Black and Hispanic students at higher rates than other students?
30. Some people say that students who have been diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disabilities should be taught in regular classrooms with other students. Some people say that these students should be taught in separate settings at the school. What do you think should be done with students in your local schools who have emotional and behavioral disabilities?
31. Should school districts across the country take the family income of students in account when assigning students to schools in order to ensure that each school has a mix of students from different backgrounds?