



Who Should Be Able to Teach Our Nation's Children?

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Abstract

Within this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, the authors examine the social justice knowledge of teachers, reflective practices, and predictors of performance on the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). This article is a response to those articles and offers continued probes into who should be allowed to teach our Nation's children and our most enduring priorities of attracting, preparing, cultivating, and retaining teachers appropriately.

Teacher Quality

Teacher quality indeed matters. This sentiment echoed by research (Aaronson et al., 2007; Angrist & Guryan, 2008; Clotfelter et al., 2010; Goldhaber et al., 2017) continues to create a loud buzz within schooling contexts, teacher education programs, and teacher licensure. The expectation for teachers to be equipped and efficient in the classroom makes sense. Teachers hold specialized knowledge, dispositions, and skill sets that have an impact on student outcomes. Like Sandel (2020) shared in his simplifications about merit and competency, "I will be better off if my plumber or dentist is capable rather than incompetent" (p. 33).

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Cultivating and assessing teacher competence, though sensible, remains a complex topic. Competencies can be vast and subjectively prioritized, while measuring teacher competency has become an attempt to further professionalize teaching and mirror professions such as law and medicine (Goldhaber et al., 2017). We remain in an era of accountability to rigid standards, select coursework, field experiences, and standardized assessments that not only are on the increase (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018), but don't always improve teacher quality (Angrist & Guryan, 2008) and more harshly prevent teachers of color from entering the field (Avent, 2020). Ultimately, we are left with significant interrogations asking ourselves and each other: What teacher qualities matter most? How do we best measure competencies? What are our most equitable practices around licensure and authorization? And at the end of the day, *Who should be allowed to teach our nation's children?*

The articles within this edition of *Teacher Education Quarterly* offer research topics covering teacher competencies, more specifically the knowledges that social justice teachers hold and the reflective practices of preservice teachers. Additionally, articles also address the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), a widespread measurement utilized throughout the United States to assess teacher competency. Though a range of topics are included in this edition, it allows opportunities for fundamental reflections and conversations about specific teacher competencies, standardized teacher licensure assessments, and perhaps a deeper probe into the needed transformational qualities and competencies that will equip teachers to address the markers of our time.

Ashley Boyd, Jeanne Dyches, and Angel Bonilla, in their article, "The Foundations of Critical Teaching: Exploring Practicing Teachers' Social Justice Knowledge," remind us about the criticality of knowledges that fund equity-based teaching. Their study sought to examine various types of teacher knowledge related to teaching for social justice. This research embraces the notion that if teachers are equipped with specific social justice knowledge, then they will be better prepared to address oppression and injustice in their classrooms. The findings of the study highlighted that the most prominent social justice knowledge teachers held included familiarity with theories of social inequity, the understanding that knowledge is socially constructed, an awareness of history, and a propensity for self-reflection. The findings perhaps sit well with teacher education programs as critical multicultural and social justice education courses are designed and developed to produce these same outcomes, also providing evidence that a teacher's social justice knowledge is part of the larger discourse about teacher qualities that matter.

Deepika Menon and Rosetta Ngugi focused on reflection approaches and microteaching in their article, "Preservice Secondary STEM Teachers' Reflective Practice in Microteaching: An Analysis of Journal Writing and Video-Mediated Reflections." Reflective practice is considered the "integration of ideas about multiple aspects of teaching..." (Davis, 2006, p.281) and research supports its importance as reflective practice allows "teachers to expose the actions of their teaching so that

Who Should Be Able to Teach Our Nation's Children?

various elements can be examined, discussed, analyzed, modified, and incorporated into one's practice" (Hawkins & Rogers, 2016, p.417). Though the study offered findings related specifically to video-mediated reflections in microteaching contexts, implications of this study assert that multiple modes of reflection are powerful ways to enhance pre-teachers' reflective thinking skills and ultimately facilitate the development of long term reflective practitioners. The ongoing research on reflective practice is indicative that it is a relevant competency within teaching and learning, and continues to be centered in numerous venues including teacher education courses, field experience settings, and teacher performance assessments.

Katherine Green and James Schwab tap into an analysis of the edTPA teacher portfolio assessment, a common measure to determine teacher certification. The study analyzed whether predictors existed between observable candidate variables and candidate performance on the Special Education edTPA assessment portfolio. Findings of this specific study determined age, race, major, year, and SES could not be used to predict performance, while GPA was found to be a significant predictor of success. The finding that race was not a significant predictor in this study may be a reason to conduct future research since earlier studies (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015) have suggested that teaching candidates of color and those from linguistically minority groups had disproportionate failure rates. As Green and Schwab state, "Researchers are concerned that race discrepancies could lead to employment discrepancies because edTPA is becoming a significant part of obtaining teacher licensure." The findings of this study, and the intentional probe into who is more likely to do better on state licensure assessments, is an opportunity for continued dialogue and perhaps action leading to a reconceptualization of gatekeeping practices.

Kristen Koetje's article, "Does Standardized Writing Predict Teacher Performance?" also looked at positive predictive relationships with edTPA performance focusing specifically on standardized writing scores. The researcher found that regardless of the common conception that strong academic writers perform better on the edTPA, the study was unable to empirically support this notion. Koetje stated, "It seems an intuitive relationship because the edTPA requires much writing and commentary, but I did not find empirical support for this idea either in the literature review or in the correlational analysis." As Koetje offered empirical claims that there is not a writing bias on the edTPA, the author still reminded that state licensure testing is complex, not always correlated with student outcomes, and "there is much more to being a quality teacher than simply knowing a discipline as demonstrated on a standardized test."

The charge to pay attention to the discourse about teacher competencies and teacher licensure assessments is ongoing and critical. The competencies and assessments we center, or do not center, determine the profile, characteristics, and qualities of who we grant access to teach our children.

As we deeply reflect on *Who should be able to teach our nation's children?*,

let us consider a heightened context where two teachers are on Day 20 of a hunger strike in Oakland, California. Maurice Andre San-Chez, a choir teacher and liaison for the campus's Gay Straight Alliance, and Moses Omolade, a teacher and community school program manager, are on a hunger strike for the future of Oakland schools. When California's Oakland Unified School District passed a plan to close or merge eleven schools in predominantly Black and Latino communities, Moses Omolade and Maurice Andre San-Chez went on a hunger strike. Omolade stated in an interview with *Democracy Now* (2022),

Why we're doing this is just very straightforward and clear. Systemic racism has run rampant in our communities for far too long, and this is another one of those times. To have community hubs in our neighborhoods be shut down without—or attempted to be shut down without community engagement is just not something that we're going to stand for. And that's what's currently happening. The school board is attempting to close predominantly Black and Brown schools without engaging us at all. So we are deciding to push back. We are deciding to make noise and to cry foul about the reasons in which they're choosing to close our schools, because balancing the budget, especially when it's only 2% of your budget, on Black and Brown bodies is not something that's acceptable. (53:10)

To make matters worse, the closing and merging of eleven schools comes at the cusp of the Covid 19 Omicron variant that has forced schools and communities to respond to crisis once again. Omolade reflected, "As you can imagine, during a global pandemic, to be sorting through mental health issues, to be struggling already, and then to be told that your school will be taken away from you, to be told that relationships will be severed..." (*Democracy Now*, 2022, 53:10). These two educators have not been alone in their arguments reinforcing that school closures push students from their closed schools into schools that are similarly low-performing, and in this process they are removed from their neighborhoods and displaced from friends and a sense of familiarity (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2017). Thousands of community members continue to apply pressure to stop the closings and mergers.

Though the extensive details and rationale for the hunger strike in Oakland sits within a historical narrative of school closures in major cities and the ongoing structural violence against Black and Brown students, the purpose for including the hunger strike in Oakland is to recognize the powerful manifestations of service and solitude that teachers Moses Omolade and Maurice Andre San-Chez have made with their students, students' families, and school communities. What can we learn from these educators that are willing to put everything on the line for their students, schools, and communities? What teacher qualities and competencies do they hold and which matter most? How does a teacher licensure assessment show up in the narrative?

In these times we are living and teaching in (eg., school closures, global pandemic, racial injustice, environmental collapse, etc.), our most enduring priority

Who Should Be Able to Teach Our Nation's Children?

continues to be about attracting, preparing, cultivating, and retaining teachers appropriately. May our work continue to probe relentless reflection, action, change, and transformation that leads our students, schools, and communities into new tomorrows. As Omolade (2022) stated, “the commitment is strong... This is for the children” (para. 28).

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