

**From Recruitment to Completer Effectiveness: How Are We Defining Equity at Each Stage of the Teacher Preparation Process in the Context of Our PDS Partnership Networks?**

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**Abstract:** In this article the authors consider how equity is defined in regards to various aspects of teacher education programs and Professional Development School partnerships. The authors provide questions to consider for those involved in teacher education as well as school-university partnerships.

**KEYWORDS:** educator preparation, equity, Professional Development Schools, PDSs, school-university partnerships, teacher education

**NAPDS REVISED NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:**

Essential 1: A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.

Essential 2: A PDS embraces the preparation of educators through clinical practice.

Essential 4: A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge.

### Addressing Equity

When considering whether our school-university partnerships are addressing equity in meaningful and effective ways, we must first consider how we define equity at each stage of the teacher preparation process in the context of our PDS partnership networks. A review of recent literature on equity in PDS partnerships in *School-University Partnerships Special Issue: Equity in Professional Development School Partnerships (2020)*, yields a diverse array of research topics that fall under the equity umbrella: preparing teacher candidates to work with diverse students; listening to the voices of students in designing curriculum and instruction; embedding equity concepts during the supervision of clinical field experiences; promoting service learning around social justice issues; designing course work and professional learning opportunities for inservice teachers working in PDSs, equipping clinical faculty with the conceptual and practical tools they will need to supervise teacher candidates, and the list goes on.

There is no question that each of these studies provides valuable, research-based information in supporting equitable PDS partnerships, in way one or another, and at one stage or another in the teacher preparation process. However, what new information might we discover when we consider these isolated examples of equity work in the holistic context of our teacher education programs and PDS networks? Are our equity efforts broad enough to encompass the many ways we should be addressing equity throughout the teacher candidate's entire experience? Not yet documented in the literature is an IHE's effort to address equity at *each stage* in the teacher preparation program – from recruitment to completion effectiveness – using a consistent definition of equity throughout the process to evaluate progress related to outcomes. It is the framing of equity efforts in the larger PDS context, that would allow for teacher education programs to holistically measure their success in posing a “threat to the existence of inequity” and actively cultivating equity in our “spheres of influence” (Gorski, 2020). As our teacher preparation program embarks on a self-study to evaluate the quality of our equity efforts, we have begun to ask ourselves a series of questions at each stage of the process. This article provides a summary of many of those questions in assisting us in creating an intentional and productive path forward.

According to Gorski (2021), there are four common approaches that schools and school districts adopt to address "equity" efforts. These include *celebrating diversity*, *cultural competence*, *inclusivity*, and *equity literacy*. Gorski (2021; 2019; 2015) defines *celebrating diversity* as surface level diversity celebrations which can ultimately stereotype marginalized populations. The *cultural competence* approach primarily focuses on learning about ourselves and others in an effort to relate and connect more to the communities we serve (Gorski, 2021; 2016). The *inclusivity* approach is characterized as providing a welcoming environment and designing curriculum and instruction that represents the diverse populations we serve (Gorski, 2021). While these three approaches are important in elevating attention to diversity and inclusion efforts in schools, none of them goes deep enough to address the systemic and institutional inequities that continue to exist in our schools and partnerships (Gorski, 2021).

It is equity literacy, Gorski's (2021; 2020; 2016) fourth approach to equity that challenges educators to identify and eliminate all elements of bias and inequity from all aspects of education by creating actively equitable policies, practices, and institutional cultures. Gorski (2021) defines equity literacy as

...a comprehensive approach for creating and sustaining equitable schools. The foundations of equity literacy are (1) a commitment to deepening individual and

institutional understandings of how equity and inequity operate in organizations and societies, and (2) the individual and institutional knowledge, skills, and will to vigilantly identify inequities, eliminate inequities, and actively cultivating equity. At the individual level, when we embrace equity literacy we learn to become a threat to the existence of inequity and an active cultivator of equity in our spheres of influence.

Gorski (2021) identifies five critical abilities of equity literate educators which can be applied to teacher education programs and PDS partnership networks:

1. Ability to recognize biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies in education;
2. Ability to respond to biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies in the moment;
3. Ability to redress biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies in by attacking root causes;
4. Ability to cultivate biasfree, equitable, anti-oppressive ideologies and institutional cultures;
5. Ability to sustain biasfree, equitable, and anti-oppressive classrooms, schools, ideologies, and institutional cultures.

Based on Gorski's equity literacy framework, the first question we should be asking ourselves as cultivators of equity is, '*What are we doing to recognize, respond to, and redress policies and practices that have a disproportionate negative impact on marginalized populations in our program and network's spheres of influence?*'

When considering advancing equity literacy in developing equity-minded teacher candidates, using PDS as the vehicle, each of the following components should be examined using an equity lens rooted in Gorski's definition of equity: recruitment and retention of candidates; teacher candidate induction; curriculum design; instruction in university classrooms; field experiences/placements; development of partnerships; preparation of clinical educators; assessments and evaluations of candidates; and completer effectiveness. We have begun to consider our own equity efforts through a series questions meant to address Gorski's first three critical abilities of equity literate educators: recognizing, responding to, and redressing biases, inequities, and oppressive ideologies in our programs and PDS networks. Each set of questions is followed by a suggestion we have considered in moving our PDS network from recognizing to responding and redressing inequitable practices that would most likely remain invisible in our teacher preparation program and PDS partnerships had the questions not been considered as all. The questions are not exhaustive and only act as a starting point in engaging in conversations about larger scale equity efforts that can be considered when cultivating equity in PDS networks.

### **Considering How to Address Equity**

#### **Recruitment and Retention**

*Questions to Consider:* What are the demographics associated with candidate application to our teacher preparation program? Are the demographics proportionate to representation in the general population? What policies and practices are in place to recruit diverse pools of candidates? How might these policies and practices be addressed to recruit and retain underrepresented students? Are data related to persistence and retention disaggregated by student demographics? Does our retention plan include additional supports for underrepresented populations who may experience societal structural barriers? Are we seeking feedback from our students about whether our current program is inclusive? What messages do our former students

send to future students about our program? How does this influence recruitment and retention efforts with our current emphasis on diversity and inclusion?

We considered these questions when evaluating recruitment and retention efforts through an equity lens, keeping in mind that recognizing potential inequities is only our first step.

*Next step:* To move the conversation to action, we recently partnered with one of our local school systems (LSS) to support a system wide teacher academy program. The LSS, a majority minority school district, recruits underrepresented, future educators within the school system to participate, and our university has agreed to provide credit for prior learning and/or tuition remission for underrepresented students who are interested in pursuing teaching as a career at our university.

### **Teacher Candidate Induction into the School of Education/Education Major**

*Questions to Consider:* Who is represented/underrepresented in our teacher candidacy application process? What is required outside of test scores and grades in the application process? What are our cutoff scores for induction? What support do we have in place for those who desire to be a teacher, but do not have the grades or standardized test scores to enter? How do current students in our teacher education program evaluate the program's inclusivity?

*Next step:* We are expanding the tools we currently use to evaluate and admit teacher candidates into our education program. In addition, we are considering developing a mentoring program for students who desire to pursue a degree in education but have not yet declared it as their major. By better advertising the teacher preparation program to students who are 'undecided' upon arrival, we are making efforts to showcase the profession as a way to identify potential candidates earlier in their college careers and provide mentoring experiences along the way.

### **Curriculum**

*Questions to Consider:* Are teacher educators held responsible for reflecting on their personal biases as part of the evaluation, promotion, and tenure process? Are diversity and inclusion considered when adopting theoretical frameworks for course work and in selecting textbooks and supplemental materials (books, articles, and podcasts)? Is course content updated regularly to include diverse perspectives and counter stories? Is compliance or critical questioning emphasized more in the curriculum? Does the curriculum align with the realities of the diverse classrooms and school communities we serve? Is curriculum developed through a culturally responsive and inclusive lens? What paradigms/ideologies are we cultivating in our curriculum (and teacher candidates) for interacting with historically marginalized students, families, and communities? Are we unintentionally perpetuating deficit ideology or promoting an understanding of structural ideology through our curriculum?

*Next step:* Efforts to decolonize syllabi in higher education are becoming increasingly more popular in practice. We recently participated in a professional development opportunity that allowed us to apply a decolonization tool in evaluating one of our syllabi. Changes were made in each of our syllabi to represent what we have learned about teaching for liberation in decolonizing our syllabi.

### **Instruction in University Coursework**

*Questions to Consider:* Do we consider student voice in the faculty evaluation process? Would current students share that they feel safe and valued in our classrooms? Is teaching modeled through culturally responsive and inclusive teaching practices? What culturally responsive and inclusive strategies are modeled in the courses we teach? Do we demonstrate compassion, empathy, and a critical understanding of the needs of our teacher candidates, especially those who are historically marginalized and underrepresented in education programs? Do our professors represent the racial and ethnic diversity represented in the larger population? Do students “see” themselves in our instructors? Do our professors spend time in the racially and ethnically diverse public schools we serve? Do professors participate in professional development opportunities that allow them to critically reflect on their personal biases? Do professor evaluations include criteria for modeling culturally responsive practices? How do professors score in these areas? Are teacher candidates provided with opportunities to reflect on their personal biases? Are candidates asked to reflect on and share their personal stories and their identities as learners? Are candidates’ personal experiences treated as assets in classrooms?

*Next step:* To begin making the connections between theory and practice, we initiated an annual departmental book study on a recommended equity topic. We also open each departmental meeting with an equity exercise to engage in ongoing conversations about our teaching and learning experiences. Finally, we encourage each of our professors to supervise at least one teacher candidate each year in an effort to stay up-to-date with the realities in the local schools we serve.

### **Co-constructed PDS Partnerships**

*Questions to Consider:* How are our PDS partnerships selected and supported? Are the partnerships mutually beneficial and co-constructed? What can we learn through the equity work conducted in our schools and school systems? Are diverse populations of students represented in our partnership schools? Do teacher candidates gain experiences in different settings and modalities through partnership efforts? Are diverse communities represented in the schools with which we partner? Because teacher-turnover tends to be higher in schools that are more ethnically and racially diverse, what mechanisms are put into place to be sure that the mentors who support our teacher candidates each year are not burning out?

*Next step:* PDS partners are working together to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to be considered for employment in the PDSs in which they are student teaching. Facilitating observations, setting up mock interviews, and working closely with human resources departments are all parts of the process that are helping to ensure good matches between teacher candidates and our PDSs.

### **Clinical Field Experiences/Placements**

*Questions to Consider:* What accommodations are we making to be sure that there is equity in the experiences of our teacher candidates? Mentors are usually middle class, white teachers; what are we doing to expand our mentor pools to address racial/ethnic diversity? What qualifications are required to mentor our teacher candidates; is there a diversity/inclusion component included? What intentional connections are made between theory and practice? Are we certain that deficit thinking is not perpetuated in the schools and classrooms to which our teacher candidates are assigned? Do we intentionally scaffold opportunities to address misconceptions? How do we dispel negative perceptions that teacher candidates may have prior

to being placed in an under-resourced school (lack of resources, understaffing, underprepared teachers, high turnover)? How are our mentors and supervisors selected? What are their qualifications? What level of competence do they display as it relates to culturally responsive instruction? How do teacher candidates evaluate their mentors and supervisors in relation to equity literacy? Are our teacher candidates prepared to engage in difficult conversations with mentors and supervisors who may not be equity literate, given the power structure in place? What support systems exist to address this? Do teacher candidates have the tools to engage in difficult conversations with students, parents, and community members?

*Next Step:* Our placement coordinator keeps an up-to-date placement matrix for teacher candidates to ensure that there is diversity associated with each teacher candidate placement assignment. We are currently updating criteria on our mentor and supervisor evaluations to include language related to knowledge and application best practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We hope to disaggregate data based on this criterion and address identified professional development needs of our clinical educators.

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

*Questions to Consider:* Are teacher candidate assessments multi-faceted? Are performance-based and standardized assessments aligned? Do the assessments allow our teacher candidates to make connections between their learning and real-life classroom experiences? Are some forms of evidence of learning privileged over others? Do assessments consider civic and community engagement, problems of practice, and methods for creating positive change? Are teacher candidates provided with opportunities to choose from a variety of assessment approaches or design how they will be assessed in cooperation with faculty members? Are assessment data disaggregated by race/ethnicity? Do disparities exist in outcomes? What policies and practices should be considered to alleviate any identified structural barriers to success?

*Next Step:* We are embarking on a backwards-mapping of our programs to gather information about the variety and quality of the assessments currently used to measure teacher candidate mastery of the content. In addition, we are discussing how best to disaggregate performance-based assessment data by race/ethnicity to determine if there are any hidden disparities that we need to address.

### **Completer Effectiveness**

*Questions to Consider:* How are we working with local school systems to measure the success of our former teacher candidates in meeting the diverse needs of their students during the first year of teaching? How are we working with local school systems to identify supports for former teacher candidates who are struggling? How are the students of our former teacher candidates evaluating their teachers during their first year of teaching? Are the students of our former teacher candidates meeting with success in the classroom? How do former teacher candidates perceive their teacher preparation in relation to their work in schools as first-year teachers? What changes to policies and practices are we making based on first-year teacher feedback?

*Next Step:* Over the past several years, we have worked with an assessment collaborative in our state to draft an employer survey to distribute to principals of our former teacher candidates. The survey asks principals to provide us with information about former teacher

candidate success as first-year teachers in their schools. Disaggregating these data will be important in identifying patterns related to first-year teacher success of our program graduates.

As our university begins to embark on a self-study focused on current and future equity efforts, the questions posed in this article have allowed us to begin courageous conversations about the direction we are heading. While the questions and next steps posed are not exhaustive of the possibilities, the exercise has allowed us to be more intentional about how we can best serve our future candidates. Not only is it our goal to expose examples of inequities in our teacher preparation programs and PDS networks, but to respond to and redress the inequities brought to light in our courageous conversations.

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