"My Training Did Not Prepare Me for This.": Supporting New Teachers and Bridging the Gap Between the University and the Classroom

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Abstract

This critical case study examines the experiences of teachers who are within their first three years of teaching; specifically, this study sought to understand new teachers' level of self-efficacy as it pertains to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as the barriers that exist to doing this work and the supports that new teachers need. Generally, new teachers describe feelings of fear, as well as a lack of time and a general feeling of being overwhelmed. I center the voices of new teachers and highlight where teacher preparation programs fall short and how to support new teachers on a path to becoming transformative educators.

Keywords: *Teacher Preparation; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Critical Education*

Introduction

In spite of the push for schools of education to include concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their curriculum, research has shown (Bidwell, 2001; Diamond et al., 2004; Margolis et al., 2007; Smagorinsky, et al., 2004) that once pre-service teachers leave their college campuses, they tend to adopt the beliefs and culture of their school community and teacher peers, regardless of previous instruction, commitment, and/or desire to teach for diversity, equity, and inclusion. With that in mind, I hypothesize that if first- and second- year teachers are supported by university faculty in their ongoing growth and development as it pertains to diversity, equity, and inclusion, they will be better able to continue their commitments that began at the university level and bring those commitments into their current classrooms. It is crucial that pre-service and in-service teachers gain the skills and confidence to take what were once just theoretical concepts and move toward action. This action will help them act as transformative educators for all students in all classrooms.

The research questions explored in this study include: 1) How do early career elementary teachers trained in a teacher preparation program dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion experience teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion; and 2) What barriers exist for early career elementary teachers who are trained in and committed to teaching for DEI?

Literature Review

I draw upon two strands of literature in order to provide context for this study. The first is literature that explicates the divide between what occurs in teacher preparation programs and what occurs in PK12 school buildings. The second helps to outline not just approaches for teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion but also the imperative need to train future teachers in a way that they will be able to enact these practices in their own classrooms.

The Divide Between the University and the PK12 Classroom

Previous research provides support for the notion that pre-service teachers (PSTs) and teachers new to the field receive conflicting messages between their teacher preparation programs and their school buildings. This disconnect (Bain and Moje, 2012; Hammerness, 2006) not only creates internal conflict for pre-service and new in-service teachers, but it also frequently causes them to temporarily postpone—or sometimes abandon completely—ideas they were once passionate about due to the climate and pressures of their school buildings and districts. The pressures all educators face, but especially those new to the field, can be incredibly daunting. From curricular demands and the focus on state standards to the political climate and demands from parents and communities, the pressures reach far and wide and can have a significant impact on how new teachers spend their time and energy. Because of these pressures, new teachers often find themselves gravitating "towards the conservative values of schools" (Smagorinsky, et al., 2004, p. 21), all while their beliefs about teaching and teaching practices are influenced by the organization of their school (Diamond et al, 2004). The concepts taught in teacher preparation programs too often are understood as just theory or concepts, rather than praxis, which results in a push and pull between the concepts taught at the university level and what they are observing in everyday classrooms. This can cause newer teachers to lose their confidence in teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as their ability to continue growing in this area, both personally and professionally. Not only are the confidence of new teachers and their ability to grow impacted, but it is also possible that they will no longer see the importance of these issues. Or, while new teachers may still know and understand the importance of teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion, they may end up downplaying it in order to assimilate to their work environment.

A recurring issue with teacher preparation historically has been the mismatch between what PSTs learn at the university and then what they learn out in the field (Bain and Moje, 2012; Hammerness, 2006). While PSTs may at first take on the dispositions and behaviors that their programs require of them, they often end up seeing different professional behaviors in the classroom, or hearing narratives that do not match what their program has taught. One of these dispositions is the idea of shared power (McEwan-Landau, 1994; Richard-Amato, 2002). This concept helps them understand that students should have a voice in the classroom, and have choice when possible. It also suggests that the classroom should feel like the students' space, and that the role each student plays is an important one. However, even though PSTs may leave the university holding tight to that ideal, they end up in classrooms that are micromanaged and behaviorist in nature. PSTs enter their mentor classrooms or new teachers enter their schools and see walls covered in clip charts and colored cards and students' names displayed on the board publicly, so everyone can see what infraction they are being found guilty of (see also, Ligocki & Monreal, 2023). While these new teachers may want to hold tight to their ideals about how to run a productive classroom, they are instead encouraged to "manage" their classrooms.

In addition to their approach to running a classroom, new teachers often enter buildings where their ideas regarding curriculum and pedagogy do not align with those of the school. For example, Davila (2011) found that, even when PSTs come from strong programs, they still end up struggling to enact culturally responsive pedagogies. This enactment is difficult enough on its own, let alone when there is little to no peer or administrative support. Even though research has repeatedly shown the value and need for culturally responsive pedagogy in every classroom (Gay, 2002; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), schools have become hesitant to enact this style of teaching, partly due to the current political climate.

Teaching for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The work of PSTs in updated teacher preparation programs often centers around teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion (Ticknor et al., 2020). For many students, this is the first time they have had to engage in difficult identity work, in conversations often deemed "impolite" (Daniel-Tatum, 2017), or with readings that potentially run counter to how they were raised and what they were taught in their communities. Ticknor et al. (2020) explains, "Some students have reported that they are uncomfortable discussing diversity, have misconceptions about social issues, and are unfamiliar with language that is affirmative and accurate and that does not perpetuate deficit, socially constructed norms" (p. 3). There is an added layer of difficulty here for women of color in these spaces, as they often run the risk of being labeled as angry or aggressive in these difficult conversations. In spite of this discomfort, the efforts of teacher preparation programs that are centered on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion often move the needle for many PSTs, at least during the time they are at the university (Crowley, 2016; Page, 2009). Again though, once they enter the workforce, fear begins to take over (Ağalday & Yiğit, 2022) and they shy away from simple practices that could honor inclusivity and anti-racist teaching practices.

In spite of potentially making progress with some PSTs while they are in their programs, the reality is that, while many teacher preparation programs have recently begun to make claims regarding the work they do to prepare future teachers for diverse classrooms, "teacher preparation plays a large role in maintaining the status quo" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 42). That is, we may want to make claims about what our programs are doing, but we still fall woefully short. Bissonnette (2016) makes clear that part of the reasoning for these shortcomings is hiding behind 'niceness'. When programs lean toward niceness, they allow "PSTs to offer 'nice', liberal-oriented insights without truly engaging in the complex, and arduous, self-reflection processes culturally responsive teaching requires" (Bissonnette, 2016, p. 10). Castagno (2014) echoes this point as well, making clear that educational policies and practices simply protect whiteness and the status quo, while hiding behind a facade of neutrality and compassion. With this in mind, asking PSTs to head out into the field as transformative educators, when their programs may have only scratched the surface of the deep work necessary to be that kind of teacher, it becomes clear why many new teachers quickly lose their commitment to this type of teaching.

However, research also shows (Baker-Doyle, 2017; Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2011; Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2017) that with the proper supports, explicit instruction, and modeling of practices, teachers at all stages of their career can be successful in becoming transformative educators who enact culturally responsive teaching strategies in a way that honors and celebrates diversity, equity, and inclusion. Key to this work is a supportive professional learning community where the participants feel they have allies and advocates to continue this work.

For example, Cohan and Honigsfeld (2011) share the work of multiple educators and scholars as a way to focus on making real change in the way PSTs are trained and new teachers are supported. This focus on change is meant to be sustainable, meaning new teachers not only leave their programs with these knowledge, skills, and dispositions, but they actually continue to enact them. A large part of this changed approach focuses on creating space for ongoing, professional learning, so that teachers may collaborate, learn from one another, and support each other. Additionally, the editors also make clear that teachers at all stages in their career must have experiences that lead to changes in their teaching practices. These changes should be focused on improving outcomes for all students, which cannot happen in an environment that is not inclusive, equitable, or celebratory of diversity.

Additionally, Hammond (2015) explains clearly the ongoing work that teachers can do in order to promote authentic engagement with a diverse student body, while continuing to refine one's own teaching practices. For example, Hammond reminds teachers that they must start with a self-examination. While some teacher preparation programs have their students engage in this type of identity work, it is critical to engage in it regularly, especially when working with new groups of students. This self-work can help educators identify their cultural frames of reference, while also pushing them to consider what they both know and assume about those outside of their cultural frames. These practices can then lead to both self-management and an expansion of interpretations regarding students and their behaviors. This type of work is critical for both pre-service and in-service teachers, but is rarely done in a guided, explicit way.

Finally, Baker-Doyle (2017) offers a slightly different take on how to explicitly support the ongoing development of teachers. She leans on the power of community, and how there is power in teacher communities that can help push toward collective action. Baker-Doyle (2017) views transformative teachers as those who "seek to foster positive social change through his or her work" (p.4). These types of teachers have a (political) purpose, often organizing for social justice and equity in schools. In order to work toward this type of transformation, Baker-Doyle (2017) makes clear that teachers must immerse themselves in a participatory culture and community organizing, while also interacting with teacher inquiry frameworks. These frameworks, "are guided by beliefs in student-centered teaching, teaching knowledge built through collective inquiry, teaching as an interactive process driven through inquiry, and a phenomenological stance on gathering and interpreting information about students and their educational contexts" (p.9). This transformational approach, while not easy, speaks to the fact that it is possible to take the commitments that begin at the university and continue them in schools.

In sum, the above research highlights the layers involved in the work of teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion in this present moment. While the pressures on new teachers and the barriers to doing this work well might appear to be overwhelming, the reality is that there is still hope that—with the correct support from mentors, critical peers, and university faculty—pre-service teachers can begin their careers holding strong to the critical dispositions they had when they left the university. These critical dispositions and a commitment to teaching for all students is necessary in order to be a transformative educator who truly makes change in the classroom.

Theoretical Framework.

I have spent nearly 20 years in education, first in the K12 environment and now in higher education. While I may not have begun my career with a critical eye, I now take a clear stance as a critical educator, and one who is deeply committed to and invested in public education. This

criticality is the stance I take when I utilize critical theory and pedagogy as lenses through which to view my work with both pre-service teachers and in-service teachers. The frames of critical theory and critical pedagogy allow me to clearly see and name the power structures that are constantly in place in education. These power structures not only play a role in the day-to-day workings of school buildings, but they are also deeply embedded in the connections between education and politics. With critical theory and critical pedagogy in mind, I look to literature and educators who are clear about the ways in which schools function as hegemonic spaces that sort and label children of all ages, working to reproduce the status quo and marginalize both teachers and students who might fall outside the very narrowly defined "norm."

Over 100 years ago, Horace Mann (1848) made the statement that education should be the "great equalizer" (p.86). Unfortunately, the operative word in that statement is should. Rather than educational spaces leveling the playing field for students everywhere, public schools instead operate in a way that regularly reproduces unequal and unjust social hierarchies (Friere, 1970; Oakes, et. al, 2018; Picower, 2021). I say this even as an educator and teacher educator of almost two decades. This recognition of schools and spaces of formal education as places with the capacity to do harm acts as the starting point for my work, as I actively work to 1) not do harm in my own classroom and 2) educate pre-service teachers in such a way that they will enter the field of education ready to be transformative, rather than reproductive. However, it is exactly this power that I must be aware of in my work, because I am functioning from a position of power when I am advising pre-service teachers about all of the change that needs to happen in education while they are entering spaces where books, words, and even thoughts are being banned.

Much of this power is wrapped up in the ability to simply not confront uncomfortable truths, which are often tied to whiteness. For example, Bennett (2019) makes clear that the color-blind approach that many white women want to take with them into their classrooms does nothing to advance equity in the classroom. It does, however, allow the teacher to stay comfortable and avoid any kind of critical stance. Additionally, Bissonnette's (2016) work on niceness as a function of whiteness describes not only the role that teachers play in not disrupting the system, but also how teacher preparation programs are complicit in leaving whiteness unexamined and instead falling back on a culture that leaves race and power unexamined as it relates to education.

This understanding of power and positionality in education matters, because education is inherently political in nature. Any claims to neutrality are false, especially for a critical educator. Alyssa Hadley Dunn, in a 2018 interview with Tim Walker, made this clear when she explained,

> Everything in education—from the textbooks to the curriculum to the policies that govern teachers' work and students' learning—is political and ideologically-informed. Both what is taught and how it is taught is shaped by the cultural, social, political, and historical contexts in which a school is situated. We can't pretend that teachers can leave these contexts at the door. (Walker, para. 8)

Thus, being a critical educator means engaging in praxis that is political and that feels scary for some educators. In spite of this, teacher educators must work with pre-service teachers in a way that makes clear how imperative it is to take this stance in the classroom and to not shy away from what some may define as "controversial" issues. Notions of 'professionalism' which are often "tied to amorphous performances of 'professionalism' that reproduce neoliberal logic about color-blindness, apolitical practice, accountability, instrumentalism, surveillance, efficiency, and perpetual self-improvement" (Monreal & McCorkle, 2022) are easy to hide behind, which only ends up

perpetuating the status quo. This active avoidance, combined with incessant news stories about book banning and school board meetings gone awry, leave many practicing teachers in a situation where they simply do not follow through on their original plans to take a critical stance in the classroom.

These assaults on education are exactly why I take the stance of a critical educator; because I know that, in spite of the struggle many educators are facing right now, the reality is that schools and teaching are never neutral and it is imperative that we are both critical and thoughtful in regard to the work of teachers and teaching. Peter McLaren (1994) made this idea clear for his readers when he explained, "Critical theorists [of education] begin with the premise that men and women …inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege [and] knowledge acquired in school is never neutral or objective but is ordered and structured in particular ways" (p. 175). It is these (political) spaces that I am preparing teachers to enter, and it is in these spaces where they either work to actively take what they learned at the university into the field, or they fall back into the habits, practices, and beliefs of their peers and school communities (Diamond et al., 2004). With this in mind, I strongly believe in how Godley (2013) described the work of teacher education; namely, that it "should be inexplicably linked to critically transforming the school setting and, by extension, the wider social setting" (p. 438).

However, it should be noted that shifting the school setting to take on a culture of transformation is not an easy task and one that cannot be accomplished if teacher preparation programs are not well-prepared to address the need for multicultural education. Castagno (2014) tells her reader how educators have been advocating for multicultural education for more than 40 years (Sleeter, 2018), yet still have not met that goal. Problematically, there is now such a wide range of definitions as they relate to describing multicultural education that instead of aiming for "educating for critical awareness" (Castagno, 2014, p. 49) or better yet, "educating for social action" (Castagno, 2014, p. 49), multicultural education has simply become a gentle way to ease into issues of diversity, but never actually address inequity. If teacher preparation programs are truly interested in preparing critical, transformative pre-service teachers who will live into multicultural education, then they need to model an

> Education that focuses on equity, culture, and power by requiring high academic expectations for all students; centering multiple perspectives, cultures, people, and worldviews in the curriculum; and equipping students with an understanding of issues of power, privilege, and oppression as well as ideas about how they might educate against whiteness. (Castagno, 2014, p. 49)

This modeling of multicultural education could and should fall in line with the newer focus many programs are taking, which includes instruction in culturally responsive teaching.

While teacher education programs are shifting their focus to preparing teachers who are prepared to enact culturally responsive teaching, they often still fall short in this mission, preferring 'niceness' to critical work with pre-service teachers (Bissonnette, 2016). This 'niceness' approach acts as a fantastic shield to hide the political nature of critical educators. Yes, some teacher preparation programs may believe they are teaching principles of equity and justice in the classroom, but the unfortunate reality is that new teachers will still enter public schools that still tightly hold hegemonic ideas of what success looks like in the classroom. Often, these visions of success rarely get questioned or critiqued, nor do the practices used to achieve 'success'—practices often rooted in compliance and control, practices that far too often exclude or marginalize certain student

groups. Many of these unquestioned practices focus solely on "managing" students, rather than working to guide them, to teach them the social and emotional skills that they need, or even to ensure that all students feel safe, seen, and represented in the classroom. Even when new teachers enter the classroom with the intent to push back against these harmful practices, when lacking support of a critical peer who might help them be reflective in their teaching practices (Bernstein, 2000; Brookfield, 2017), they end up falling prey to the same harmful practices, policies, and systems that pervade educational spaces. This may be, in part, to feeling the need for a sense of belonging in their current school (Monreal & Stutts, 2023); however, quickly reverting to harmful practices that run counter to what was learned in their university classrooms means that the change teacher education programs hope for ends up dying at graduation, or shortly after.

It is these harmful practices that we must actively work to disrupt, acting as critical peda-gogues who "go in search of a critical pedagogy of significance" (Greene, 2009, p. 434). It is Greene's "passion of possibility" (2009, p. 84) that I work to instill in my students, but it is also this passion that ends up tamped down after a very short time in the classroom. Greene, Freire, and other critical scholars of education make clear that the vision of education that is loving and col-laborative does not currently match the existing reality of public schools. However, it is that mis-match that I am looking to disrupt in the work that I do. While I believe teacher preparation pro-grams do have the power to make change, I also believe that this is—and will continue to be—an uphill battle.

Methods

Participants and Context

This study engaged 14 research participants, all of whom were at the beginning stages of their teaching careers (from entering their first year of teaching to entering their third year of teach-ing). All of the participants had previously taken a class I redesigned entitled, "Managing the Classroom Community for U.S. Diverse Learners." This class was a mixture of traditional "class-room management," as well as topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion. While this course has been rewritten two years ago, the course as it was experienced then was supposed to both meet the needs of the university in regard to its "diversity requirement," as well as serve as a writing inten-sive course. Additionally, the course was supposed to provide practical knowledge of "classroom management." I put that phrase in quotes, as that is not a phrase that I prefer to use with my pre-service teachers, instead choosing the language of how to run a productive classroom. With that said, I did my best to balance all of the requirements of both the program and the university, while focusing my efforts on teaching pre-service teachers the importance of building relationships with students, of doing deep identity work, and of engaging with ideas, assignments, and readings to which they likely had not previously been exposed. This class often begins a journey for most students in relation to their understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion; unfortunately, this journey often stops once they enter their classroom, or even once they pass the class.

This study took place at a mid-sized university in the Midwestern United States, located in a suburban setting. As of Fall 2022, the total student enrollment was 16,108 students, with over 11,000 of those students identifying as white (Oakland University, n.d.). In the School of Educa-tion and Human Services, when looking at the student population who are enrolled in the Elemen-tary Education program, of the 428 students in the Fall of 2022, 85% identified as white, with only

3% identifying as Black and 4% identifying as Hispanic. Additionally, 93% of the students en-rolled in Elementary Education identified as female.

For this study, 14 participants responded to the initial call, with 13 out of 14 (93%) iden-tifying as female, 11 identifying as white (79%); 1 identifying as Chaldean/Middle Eastern (7%), 1 identifying as Hispanic/Latina (7%), and 1 identifying as Asian (7%). This is representative of the teaching force at large, which, during the 2017-2018 school year was comprised of 79% white teachers, with just 9% Hispanic, 7% Black, 2% Asian, 2% two or more races, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native (NCES, 2021). During this same time period, 89% of elementary school teachers identified as women.

The average age of all participants was 23 ½ years old and all 14 participants were within their first three years of teaching.

Data Sources and Analysis

Research participants first agreed to complete an online survey composed of both quanti-tative and qualitative questions. The survey also asked for their name, age, race and ethnicity, current school and district, and current grade level. *Table 1* (which can be found in the Appendix) illustrates the survey questions.

Next, we met as a focus group, with some participants joining in person, others joining online, and a few participating via email. Participants had a variety of ways to engage in order to be flexible and acknowledge their very busy lives. The focus group lasted approximately two hours and was conducted using a semi-structured interview format (Yin, 2003). As participants were leaving, they were given an exit slip in order to gather final thoughts and possibilities for future contact. After the focus group, I followed up with all participants via email, sending questions that we did not get to during the focus group and asking who might be willing to meet for a follow-up interview. Of the 14 participants, I later met with 7 in a one-on-one format. These one-on-one interviews were semi-structured and focused on clarifying statements they made in either the focus group, the survey, or both.

I used qualitative analysis methods when working with the data, specifically an explanatory case study design (Yin, 2003) to examine early career teachers' identities as they relate to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The case was described as first-, second-, and third- year teachers who graduated from Oakland University. The unit of analysis was the group of teachers, and each unit of observation was the individual teacher. I utilized a within-case analysis (Yin, 2003) in order to analyze the qualitative data. All interviews were recorded and transcribed and multiple coding procedures were utilized when analyzing data in order to find themes. Open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilized in order to develop categories and themes as a way to understand teacher identities and self-efficacy in regard to teaching for diver-sity, equity, and inclusion. I also used open coding (Carspecken, 1996) to analyze the needs early career teachers have as it relates to personal and professional growth, as well as support in the area of teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Findings

When looking at the response values from the initial survey (*Table 2* in the Appendix), it is heartening to see how participants quantified their own personal commitment to teaching for

diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a teacher educator, my goal is always to have pre-service teachers leave my course feeling as though they are ready to become transformative educators. While I cannot (and would not) attribute this response value to my course alone, it is still a positive finding when viewed through the lens of a teacher educator who is committed to social justice and equity in education.

However, in spite of this personal commitment to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion, response items concerning collegial support show how maintaining that commitment may be difficult in practice. While response values showed a general comfort level in regard to teaching, the response values began to fall when participants were asked about the level of support from their teaching peers, and values fell even further when asked about support from parents and guardians. These values are cause for concern, given what we already know about the practices of new teachers once they enter the field and leave the university classroom (Smagorinsky, et al., 2004).

When working with the qualitative data, three themes emerged from the coding of the data. The first and most overwhelming was the issue of fear; namely, new teachers fear teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion due to a number of factors. The second theme that was quite prevalent was the idea of "fitting it all in" as it pertains to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The final theme spoke to a general lack of comfort for new graduates now in the role of teacher. Each of these themes are explored in greater depth below.

"So You're Feeling Paralyzed by the Community"

When looking at the quantitative data, the mostly highly scored response was in regard to personal commitment to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion. This high score was followed by the idea of being comfortable teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, a different narrative emerged during our focus group and follow up interviews, when participants spoke about how they define what it means to teach for diversity, equity, and inclusion and what that can and should look like in the classroom. These participants, all of whom took classes focused on these topics, all of whom discussed issues of social justice and equity in a number of their classes, and most of whom feel strongly on a personal level about the need for transformative educators still experienced a pervasive feeling of fear as it pertains to actually doing this work in their own classrooms, with their own students.

Throughout different points in the conversation, participants talked about assumptions that parents and guardians make; how the media instills fear in regard to what is happening in schools, and even instances of being told to "be careful" when they shared their teaching plans or ideas for units around Black History Month. For example, one participant shared, ". . .teaching about anything other than white people or white experiences has become so politicized that teachers have to worry about how students and their parents are going to respond." This young teacher had already experienced parents asking if she teaches "that CRT stuff," as well as anger from a student when she discussed electric cars in class. After just three years of teaching, she already felt so paralyzed by the community around her, that her passion for running a diverse and inclusive classroom had already been scared out of her.

This fear carried over in other areas for these young teachers as well. With all participants being in their first three years of teaching, many were hesitant to make waves or draw attention to themselves, as they were still getting their footing in their schools and districts. So even when they knew the type of teaching they should be engaging in, or the types of policies and practices they should have in place in their classrooms, many defaulted to what they were seeing or hearing from

veteran teachers in their building, simply out of White self-preservation. One participant is worth quoting at length:

> Um, my very first year, I wanted to do, like, a mini-unit on, um, Black History Month. And I had another teacher say, like, "Be careful, you don't wanna end up on the news." And I was like, "This is my first job. Like, I don't want to get fired. I—I wanna move outta my parents' house." So I was like, not doing it. And so, like, it's so hard because I wanna do all these things, but at the same time, it's like, where—where do I pick? Like, I want, I wanna have kids, I wanna have a family, I wanna have my own life. But I'm, so, it's like…I'm either doing what I want and the service to other people, or I'm doing what they—what they need, at a disservice to myself. So it's like, as much as I would love to do this, at what point do I put myself before them without feeling guilty?

This new teacher knew on some level that ignoring Black History Month was wrong, that not doing this work regularly was not in the best interest of students, but this level of knowledge butted up directly against the feedback from other teachers in the building. When thinking about the best interest of students though, it is important to question *which* students. For example, while the teacher alluded to ignoring Black History Month as not being in the best interest of students, it could be argued that succumbing to her fear allows her to keep the best interest of white students in place, as ignoring the need for a diverse curriculum actually helps reproduce white supremacy. The fear that was instilled in her became too much and she found herself already teaching in a way that she swore she would never do. This anecdote is just one of many that illustrated the fear that was so pervasive in this group of newly practicing teachers.

"…But there Often isn't Time for Explicit Education about the Importance of DEI"

Throughout the Elementary Education program at my university, the importance of teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion was reiterated. Students saw this across multiple courses, in additional programming put on by the department and school and even in the research agendas of many faculty members. As pre-service teachers, students were taught that diversity, equity, and inclusion is not an add-on or a box to check, but rather work that is foundational to all teaching, and work that needs to be embedded in their pedagogy and lessons. In spite of this, almost half of the participants (43%) reported that they either did not have time to teach for diversity, equity, and inclusion or that they did not know how to "fit it in." Both issues are troubling, given the time spent on instructing students not to take a "heroes and holidays" approach (Lee, et al., 1998) as well as the time spent working to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to act as a transformative educator.

When discussing the challenges faced when teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion, the concern over saying the wrong thing came up more than once. One participant said bluntly, "I just don't wanna sound ignorant." Many others mentioned their concern over how their identities played a role in their discomfort talking about certain issues. For example, participants who are white struggled with how to discuss race. While I respect the concern over saying the wrong thing, I fear that this is an easy excuse to hide behind in order to dismiss oneself from doing difficult work. When teachers make excuses for why they cannot teach for diversity, equity, and inclusion, the window of opportunity closes and they quickly develop practices that run counter to much of the work we did in the university classroom.

There were other moments that indicated what transpired in the university classroom did not translate to the field, as evidenced by the "add-on" approach many of the participants described. For example, the idea of just "celebrating months" or teaching about a variety of holidays came up quite frequently during both the focus group as well as the follow-up interviews. This approach ends up still centering "the norm" and placing all others outside of this perceived norm. When the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion feels like something additional to the curriculum, rather than something integral to the curriculum, the genuine, authentic nature of the work disappears. Not only does the authenticity disappear, but the opportunities to continue making excuses for why meaningful, inclusive work is not being done in the classroom continue to abound.

"My Training did not Prepare Me for This"

Looking across multiple questions, the issue of simply not being prepared came up frequently, specifically in relation to three different areas of teaching: 3 participants mentioned not feeling prepared to deal with racial issues, 5 participants shared they do not feel equipped to handle the trauma of their students and 6 participants mentioned that classroom management was an area where they felt unprepared. As a teacher educator in the program in question, I know that (at least on paper) students were exposed to materials and practice in each of these areas. However, as most educators know, what we think we taught and what students actually learned are often two very different things.

In regard to addressing racial issues in the classroom, I was intrigued by the three anecdotes shared, as they were all similar; namely, all three participants articulated situations where a student accused the teacher of not liking them because they (the student) was Black and the teacher (the research participant) was white. Particularly of interest to me was the participant who shared a story like this, but who had also illustrated both a deficit perspective (Garcia & Guerra, 2004) as well as a stance that oversimplified (and I would argue, did harm in regard to) race relations. More than once throughout the research project, this participant made statements that made me question if any of the work we had previously done together really took root. For example, this participant was describing a situation that occurred in her class. Her anecdote is worth sharing at length:

> But in terms of race, uh, a lot of time, if they bring it up, uh, we had a separate is never equal book we are reading. I just said, "Yeah, this was done in the past, and it was not OK." Um, and I, you know, kind of just put it at that, like, yes, whites were very mean to blacks. But I said, is that the way today? And they're like, no, not like, not as much, you know. They kind of, they know, and we don't get really into it too too much, just because, you know, like yes, it was done in the past. It's not like that. It's not the way it was anymore. Um, obviously we wouldn't have, be in the school if we, were, um…but that kind of thing.

It is apparent to me, as a researcher and educator, that this new teacher is not comfortable discussing race with her students. This is disheartening, given that her entire class is made up of children of color.

In addition to feeling uncomfortable talking about race, participants indicated feeling unprepared to deal with the trauma of their students. These new teachers shared detailed stories regarding the trauma they witnessed playing out in their classrooms, from students sharing stories of death and loss without warning to emotional and behavioral issues stemming from different lived trauma. Many of these teachers indicated feeling as though their teacher preparation program

had not prepared them for these situations and that they had little to no help in their buildings or districts. One participant, after describing a particularly difficult situation she had experienced said, "There is something big happening here and it's more than I can handle." Not only did the research participants share how frustrated they were by their inability to help their students, but some also reported developing their own health issues, due in part to the stress of the job.

Finally, almost half of the participants shared feeling unprepared in the area of "classroom management." I put that phrase in quotation marks as I deliberately do not use that phrase with my students, choosing the language instead of running a productive classroom. We do a great deal of explicit work in regard to dismantling behaviorist practices in the classroom and learning the practice and pedagogy of running a democratic, equitable classroom. In spite of this focus, many of the participants shared their frustration, going so far as to share that they knew the practices they were resorting to were not good for students (taking away recess, using clip charts, assigning table points) but they did them anyway out of desperation. Even worse was how many participants seemed to advocate for punitive practices, which is something we had discussed quite often throughout their time in the program. One participant described her frustration (and seeming support for punitive measures) when she said,

> So like, a lot of times, if he was having a rough day, they'd be like, "Alright, we're just going to send you home." I was like, he just wreaked havoc in my classroom and you're just going to be like, "Go home buddy, see you tomorrow?"

As someone who actively pushes against punitive measures and instead teaches restorative practices, relationship building, and intrinsic motivation, this was particularly disheartening to hear.

Discussion

The significance of this study rests in its response to current concerns in education. Not only are demographics shifting in public schools around the nation (Oakes, et al., 2018) but tensions surrounding everything from what to teach in schools to what books can be assigned to students (or even housed in libraries) to the handling of diversity, equity, and inclusion are higher than ever, with educators and administrators feeling this strain. That said, it is imperative that all educators enter the field prepared to act in a transformative way that honors the identity, well-being, and needs of every student in front of them.

Currently, The Michigan Department of Education states in its Code of Educator Ethics that teachers will demonstrate a "commitment to equality, equity, and inclusion as well as respecting and accommodating diversity among members of the school community" (2019, p. 4). While this statement can be understood in different ways by different people, it should be clear that it is expected of teachers in Michigan that they can and will make a commitment to equitable practices in their classrooms.

Additionally, the new Elementary Education Program at my university is purposefully committed to teaching for social justice and equity (e.g., Emdin, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Love, 2019; Milner, 2015) in addition to preparing future teachers for the authentic practice of teaching (e.g., Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, et al., 2009; Grossman, 2018). With this in mind, this study attempted to gain an understanding of how/if the commitment of the university and its teacher preparation program is being carried out in local classrooms by new teachers.

With that said, when looking at the findings it appears that, even for new teachers who claim to feel a personal commitment to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, very few of these educators are actually bringing these values into in their classrooms due to fear, worry about how to "fit it all in," and a general lack of comfort and preparation. With that in mind, it is worth discussing how much I am expecting of new teachers when the data shows that—no matter how pre-service teachers are educated—schools, buildings, and classroom spaces are simply not prepared for or invested in this work. And if the larger system is not invested, then we are left relying on the individual courage or motivation of singular teachers, which is rarely enough given the pressure of their surroundings.

These ideas of fear, comfort, and courage are worth discussing. The fear that so many of the participants mentioned, was it real, based on actual documented cases of termination? Or was it manufactured in a way that drew in media narratives and provided a fertile ground for supporting their need to avoid potential conflict? When thinking about avoiding conflict, it is also worth mentioning what else new teachers might either be avoiding or misinterpreting. For example, there was very little talk of culturally responsive pedagogy by participants, even though that is an important topic in our program. Were they enacting these practices, but just not talking about them? Or had that piece of course content not stuck with them? Either way, even when culturally responsive pedagogy is enacted in the classroom, it is frequently used as a behaviorist practice, rather than as intended (Vassallo, 2017). There was very little talk about restorative practices, with many participants reverting back to punitive ways of being in the classroom. So while the talk of fear was pervasive, it seems the need to feel comfortable played a role in instructional decisions.

But is it really fair to place all of this on the shoulders of teachers? If teachers leave the program ready to take on the work of teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion, but only see this as something they do as individuals, then of course they are destined to fail. And if that is the understanding they took away from their program, then we have failed as well. The work of transformative teaching needs to come from an understanding of the structural inequalities that pervade formal schooling. With that in mind, perhaps it is not teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion that new teachers were unprepared for, but rather the peek behind the curtain of systemic issues for which they were unprepared.

Implications

As so often is the case in education, the question of "how" remains. How do teacher educators do the work of ensuring that the university commitment to being transformative educators who teach for diversity, equity, and inclusion gets carried into local classrooms by program graduates? How do we ensure that our approach to teaching and learning gives pre-service teachers the level of comfort and preparation that they are looking for? How can teacher preparation programs help novice teachers understand that issues in education run far deeper than just the work done in the classroom? Is that even possible?

I would argue that, while the work at the university level must be improved, teacher preparation programs could go farther by supporting new teachers in their first two years of teaching. The partnership between universities and schools is so wildly important, but the connection gets lost once the pre-service teachers become practicing teachers. To that end, I propose we extend that connection by building a "bridge program" of sorts. This bridge program could act as a mentor, a way to not only connect new teachers to one another on a regular basis, but also as a way to continue professional learning and development. If the interaction with concepts of teaching for

diversity, equity, and inclusion can stay consistent, and if new teachers can hear real life examples of how teachers are doing this work in the classroom, then the potential exists to tamp down the fear so many participants shared and instead bolster the courage and motivation that is often relied upon. Additionally, this mentoring program could also help support new teachers' needs as they relate to the work of teaching, the basics that so many participants mentioned as well. If teacher preparation programs are serious about making real, lasting change in education, then we must stop just letting go once our students leave us and instead work to support them in their early years in the classroom. If not us, then who?

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Dr. Ligocki, Associate Professor and Department Chair in the Department of Teaching and Learning, is excited about the work being done to change the field of teacher development. Prior to her time at Oakland University, Dr. Ligocki had been a middle school educator for eleven years, circumnavigating the ever-changing standards and values of public education, while putting the needs

of her students above all else. Dr. Ligocki's time spent in a historically marginalized school sparked the fire for her now fervent interest in social justice issues in education. This focus guides the ways in which she works with pre-service teachers in order to become transformative educators focused on teaching for diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Appendix

Table 1: *Survey Questions*

Question	Type of Question
Have you taught in any other schools or grades since graduating from OU? If so, please explain. If not, please respond 'no'.	Open Ended
Thinking back to EED3001, what topics, ideas, or concepts are still important to you?	Open Ended
Thinking back to EED3001, what topics, ideas, or concepts now feel irrelevant or unrealistic?	Open Ended
Thinking about your teaching experience so far, what is your comfort level in teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	Likert Scale (1 as not at all comfortable, 5 as extremely comfortable)
Thinking about your teaching peers, what level of support do you feel in regard to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	Likert Scale (1 as no support at all, 5 as extremely supported)
Thinking about your administrators, what level of support do you feel in regard to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	Likert Scale (1 as no support at all, 5 as extremely supported)
Thinking about the parents and guardians of your students, what level of support do you feel in regard to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	Likert Scale (1 as no support at all, 5 as extremely supported)
How would you label your own personal commitment to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	Likert Scale (1 as not at all committed, 5 as deeply committed)
What has been the biggest challenge or barrier in regard to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	Open Ended
Do you have any examples of specific lessons or activities that illustrated your commitment to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	Open Ended
Please share any final comments you have that might explain some of your responses from above, or that might help me understand your teaching experiences thus far.	Open Ended

The initial survey sent to participants contained open-ended questions as well as questions using a Likert scale, with 1 being not at all comfortable and 5 being extremely comfortable. The questions and the mean response values can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: *Mean Response Values to Likert Scale Questions*

Question	Mean Response Value
Thinking about your teaching experience so far, what is your comfort level in teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	3.93
Thinking about your teaching peers, what level of support do you feel in regard to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	3.79
Thinking about your administrators, what level of support do you feel in regard to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	3.93
Thinking about the parents and guardians of your students, what level of support do you feel in regard to teaching for diversity, equity and inclusion?	3.21
How would you label your own personal commitment to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion?	4.21