



Teacher Education for Equity

Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

In the coming decades, the United States' population is expected to become more diverse. Despite this, teachers of color remain significantly underrepresented in K-12 classrooms, and those serving historically marginalized communities are increasingly leaving their teaching positions. This highlights an ongoing challenge in teacher education, both in the United States and internationally: the ability of programs to prepare teachers to teach effectively and remain committed to historically marginalized communities over time. This issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly (TEQ)* offers teacher educators an opportunity to reflect on how we prepare teacher candidates to work with historically marginalized communities. Drawing from these three articles, I offer a response of key questions for teacher educators to reflect on and recommendations to support retention of teacher candidates serving historically marginalized communities, including ongoing professional learning opportunities that are context specific such as the Cultural Proficiency framework.

Introduction

In this issue, Zeichner (2024) addresses a significant and ongoing challenge in teacher education both in the United States and internationally: the ability of pro-

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grams to prepare teachers to teach effectively and remain committed to historically marginalized communities over time. He recommends incorporating “both a more hybrid and less hierarchical structure for teacher preparation programs, along with external policies and supports to help programs provide and sustain high-quality, culturally responsive education for all children” (2024, p.1). Conklin, Gatti, and Matsko’s (2024) case study compares the experiences of teacher candidates in an urban residency program and its partner university-based program, highlighting the role that context plays in teacher preparation. Donley’s (2024) study offers pedagogical considerations for supporting teacher candidates in developing critical consciousness related to translanguaging. Based on insights from these three articles, this *Teacher Education Quarterly* response reviews key questions for teacher educators to consider and provides recommendations to support the retention of teacher candidates working with historically marginalized communities. It emphasizes the importance of ongoing, context-specific professional learning opportunities that encourage ongoing assessment and reflection, such as the Cultural Proficiency framework.

Who Are the Teacher Educators?

Zeichner (2024) addresses a significant and ongoing challenge in teacher education: the ability of programs to prepare teachers to teach effectively and remain committed to historically marginalized communities over time. He invites us to consider and rethink: “who the teacher educators are and whose knowledge is needed to educate teachers for schools in nondominant communities” (p. 7). Teacher education has traditionally been led by college and university faculty and staff, with school educators playing a secondary role and family and community members often excluded (Zeichner, 2018). He proposes a shared responsibility among higher education institutions, schools, teacher unions, and communities on the development, governance, and implementation of teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, he advocates for democratizing teacher education by collaborating closely with district partners and being open to learning from them. He emphasizes that traditional approaches where partner school districts are not part of the conceptualization and design of innovation, have often hindered teacher educators and candidates from benefiting from the valuable expertise of experienced teachers, families, and communities, and has also contributed to the underfunding of teacher preparation. The implications of this for teachers and teacher educators is that we must relinquish power and come together with our district partners, learn alongside to ensure that our teacher preparation programs are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of our communities.

Zeichner (2024) proposes two pathways to democratizing teacher education: “one path is doing a better job in preparing teachers from outside historically marginalized communities to teach students in culturally responsive and sustaining

ways—teachers who see their work as serving the community as a whole, rather than as trying to “save” students from their communities” (p. 8) The second path is to do a better job of recruiting, preparing, and retaining diverse teachers who live in particular communities to stay there and teach.

Where Are Teacher Candidates Learning to Become Teachers?

To illustrate Zeichner’s ideas, Conklin, Gatti, and Matsko’s (2024) case study discusses the role that context plays in teacher preparation programs. They explore the cases of two teachers who earned their degrees from the same institution, one enrolled in an urban residency program and one enrolled in the partner university-based program. Their findings indicate that context plays a crucial role in the learning processes of novice teachers: “learning to teach happens in multiple and intersecting contexts rather than within a linear and stable set of programmatic elements” (2024). They encourage us to expand how we think about teacher preparation programs to include not just coursework and field placements. Furthermore, they ask teacher educators to consider the responsibility these programs have in preparing novice teachers for the multiple, intersecting, and complex systems in which they will teach. However, helping these teachers identify, consider, and analyze the intersecting systems of context that shape their learning is often neither a central nor explicit component of teacher education programs. Conklin, Gatti, and Matsko (2024) recommend that teacher education programs should “explicitly incorporate the analysis of the many layers of context into the curriculum.” This would provide novice teachers with deliberate and supported opportunities to consider how their work is situated within multiple, intersecting, and dynamic dimensions of context. It would help them think about how these systems might influence their decision-making, relationships with students, and the broader purpose of their students’ learning.

Both Zeichner and Conklin, Gatti and Matsko’s articles, highlight the potential of residency programs as innovative hybrid models in teacher preparation while acknowledging the variety that exists among them. They also raise concerns that investing heavily in residencies and other innovative pathways might create “powerful but short-lived and unsustainable models,” while universities, which still prepare the majority of teachers, face growing resource constraints.

What Are Teacher Candidates’ Knowledge of Language, Identity, and Power? Where in the Teacher Preparation Curricula Are We Supporting Teacher Candidates to Reflect and Develop These Understandings?

Donley’s (2024) study specifically examines preservice teachers’ initial understanding of language, linguistic competence, and teaching, offering valuable implications for curriculum development. In a qualitative study, 76 participants

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completed a survey on language, linguistic competence, and teaching as their initial course activity. The findings highlight the need to support preservice teachers' critical consciousness regarding translanguaging. By mapping the translanguaging awareness of incoming preservice teachers, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how to begin integrating translanguaging theory into teacher education curricula to enhance critical language awareness.

To situate Donley's study in this larger discussion on programmatic transformation, some questions for teacher educators to consider in advancing translanguaging pedagogies during both pre and inservice teaching:

- **Alignment Between Coursework and Fieldwork:**
 - How are we collaborating with partner districts to ensure alignment between coursework and fieldwork placement expectations, particularly concerning language policies and practices in the classroom?
 - Given that translanguaging pedagogy is not widely accepted in many school districts, how are we sharing research and building capacity in this area? How are we helping district partners recognize the value of translanguaging pedagogy in their classrooms?
- **Integrating Translanguaging and Culturally Responsive Pedagogies:**
 - Where in the teacher preparation curricula are we providing opportunities for candidates to develop instruction that systematically integrates translanguaging and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies?
- **Equipping All Teachers to Work with Multilingual Learners:**
 - How are we training all teachers to become language teachers (including "non dominant languages") or to effectively work with multilingual learners, as suggested by Garcia and Kleyn (2013)? This also includes developing competencies such as understanding multilingual learners and their families, knowing how multilingualism works, and creating classroom spaces that allow for language flexibility.

These questions are crucial for ensuring that teacher candidates are well-prepared to meet the diverse needs of the multilingual learners and to foster inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Summary

The three articles offer teacher educators several recommendations and opportunities for reflection as to how we may continue to support and improve teacher education. Here is what they propose:

- Zeichner (2024) invites us to consider who are the teacher educators and "whose knowledge is needed to educate teachers for schools in nondominant communities" (p. 7).
- Conklin, Gatti and Matsko (2024) encourages teacher educators and teacher candidates to develop a deep understanding of the contexts in which teaching and learning occur. This involves expanding their thinking beyond coursework

and field placements to consider the complex systems that influence education. They propose integrating the analysis of these contexts into the curriculum. As we enter a new year and face administrative changes, it is important to be mindful of how the political climate will impact both the communities served by teacher candidates and the candidates themselves.

- With the rise of residency programs, it is crucial to ensure clear alignment and coherence between the goals and visions of partner districts and university/teacher preparation programs. This involves ongoing conversations between district partners and university teacher educators about expectations for teacher candidates and alignment with coursework. Reflecting on who controls what teacher candidates are learning is also important. We must consider how we might conceptualize, understand, and define the role of various contexts in teacher education programs.
- Teacher educators should ensure that research on innovative pedagogical approaches, such as translanguaging, is effectively shared with partner districts. This collaboration is essential for advancing culturally sustaining pedagogies for all students.
- Funding and sustainability are critical factors. Recognizing the central role that funding plays in amplifying particular programmatic visions is necessary. It is important to consider the long-term sustainability and ability to maintain and expand effective teacher preparation programs.

To support teacher candidates in remaining committed to teaching historically marginalized communities, teacher preparation programs should consider specific strategies including ongoing professional learning opportunities. Although teacher candidates are often expected to enroll in induction programs to support teacher candidates transition from pre to inservice teaching, there is a need for ongoing professional learning opportunities that are context specific, engaging teachers in assessment of district and school culture. Teachers of color indicated that effective retention strategies encompass innovative teacher education programs designed to prepare them for urban or high-poverty, high-minority settings. They also highlighted the importance of improved working conditions, including active teacher involvement in school decision-making, increased instructional autonomy, and professional development tailored to the unique challenges they encounter in classrooms and school environments (Aragon, 2016). An example of this is the Cultural Proficiency, a framework to assess and evaluate school culture, recognize biases, and address deficit perspectives (D. Lindsey, R. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrel, 2019). Through self-examination, analysis of practice, and consideration of district policies, participants learn the tools for implementing culturally proficient practices in their classrooms and school districts. For an example case study, refer to “The Dreams and Reality of Cultural Proficiency Work” (Garcia & Groth, 2022). This framework helps teachers view students and families from a strengths-based perspective. Other Cultural Proficiency practices include supporting English Learner students, children of migrant farmworkers with an equity perspective in order to further support family, school and community engagement (Quezada, Lindsey &

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Lindsey, 2012, Quezada, Lindsey & Rodriguez-Valls, 2016, Louque, et.al, 2020) By integrating these strategies, districts and university/teacher preparation programs can create the conditions for teacher candidates to remain committed to serving historically marginalized communities beyond their coursework and engaged in transformational change.

Lastly, as we enter a new year and face changes in administration, Zeichner's (2024) call to action is more urgent than ever: teacher educators and teachers must "to step up and join the struggles of historically marginalized communities to secure resources for affordable housing, access to nutritious food, and more, alongside their advocacy for high-quality education for their children" (p. 14).

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