

Shaping a Profession: Teacher Educators Explore Teaching for Equity and Social Justice

Keywords : (1) teacher education, (2) social justice, (3) equity, (4) professional learning, (5) self-study of teacher education practices

Abstract :

ISSUE: Drawing on the admonition of the European Commission on the Modernisation of Higher Education (2013) which wrote, “if teachers are the most important factor influencing the quality of students’ learning, the competences of those who educate and support teachers (teacher educators) must be of the highest order,” and the subsequent work of InFo-TED (<https://info-ted.eu/>) which focuses on the professional learning of teacher educators, we focus on the practice of 4 North American teacher educators engaged in preparing teachers to enact inclusive, justice-oriented reflective practices. Like Paris and Alim (2017) who ask educators “to explicitly center issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in ways that operationalize these concepts into skills and content that can be learned, rehearsed, and continuously reflected upon, that is, to ‘curricularize’ these critical key features in instructional design and creation of our learning environments” (p. 14), we think it essential to examine the practice of teacher educators. For, it is teacher educators who are the architects of the profession (Hollins & Warner, 2021) and the linchpins in educational reforms of all kinds.

METHOD (field, process, tools, corpus): Following the conceptual model of InFo-TED’s identification of a full appreciation of teacher educators’ enacted work (Vanassche et al., 2018) and drawing on Self-Study research methods (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2007; Loughran, 2007), we have built here on the work of Snow et al (2022) who adapted the “The Slice” protocol from the School Reform Initiative (<http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/slice.pdf>) to identify the work of teacher educators and its implications for focused teacher education practice. That prior research (see Snow et al, 2022) highlights the educative functions of Design, Leadership, and Advocacy as essential and overlapping activities that comprise the complex work of teacher educators. The Design function -- “an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which practitioners bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict” (Schon, 1983, p. 49) -- related to course/class design; professional development/design of adult learning; and program design. Leadership referred to action, activity, or tasks necessary to design, implement, and sustain research-informed practice. Advocacy focused on social justice, equity, anti-racism, and/or cultural responsiveness within programs and preparation of new teachers as advocates.

Our “deep dive” into our own Slices and the accompanying conversation of practice that has ensued represents our effort to get beneath the surface of our respective programs and courses that were revealed by the adaptation of the “The Slice” protocol in order to see the ways in which design, leadership, and advocacy actually live in our practice. Here, we use textual analysis, in-depth narrative inquiries, and collaborative interviews to probe the underlying structures of our programs and courses vis-à-vis the relevance and usefulness of those designs in our respective efforts towards enacting inclusive, justice-oriented reflective practices -- practices that can be taken up by our students as they confront the increasing inequities and injustices PK-12 students encounter (Paris and Alim, 2017; Zeichner & McDonald, 2009) in their teaching settings. Research like this is in keeping with Liu and Ball’s (2019) highlighting “the need to base research on actual teaching and learning practices in classrooms (and) the need to encourage critical reflection for transformative learning to be systematically applied throughout teacher education practice” (p. 70).

RESULTS: While this deep examination of four distinct programs can hardly hold universal lessons

for other teacher educators, it has already enabled a conversation of practice that, while often encouraged among student teachers, is rarely embraced among teacher educators within and across teacher education programs. Hence, its influence could well reach far beyond us and our programs. Our work makes clear that it is through the critical reflection on practice that such sharing promotes examination of practice, that practice is improved, and that the tying together of research and practice becomes visible within the teacher education community and, it follows, among our students as members of that professional conversation.

Link with the theme of the conference: This study is aligned to the ISATT goal to promote research aimed at increasing insights into the work of teachers and the process of teaching. Here, the focus is on teacher educators' efforts to prepare and support teachers to enact inclusive, justice-oriented reflective practice. We think it essential to examine the curriculum and practice of teacher educators, for teacher educators are the architects of the profession and the linchpins in educational reforms of all kinds.

Thematic axis involved: AXIS 2: Focus is on teacher educators' efforts to prepare teachers to teach for equity and social justice

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