

Transforming Teacher Education for **Social Justice**

Eva Zygmunt
Patricia Clark

with Jon Clausen, Wilfridah Mucherah, & Susan Tancock

Foreword by Peter C. Murrell



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Introduction

We have a major problem on our hands, and schools of education are implicated in it. . . . We have a problem that significantly challenges the future of this country . . . the fact is that if we don't find ways to educate all of our children, and if we don't find ways to prepare teachers to take on that task and create schools that can meet their needs, then our future as a nation is in peril.

—Pedro Noguera

In 2011, 2 years into a developing initiative in community-engaged teacher preparation at Ball State University, we attentively listened to Pedro Noguera's articulate and emotional narration. His address to a standing-room-only audience of teacher educators was clear and compelling, and the takeaway simple. If you are a member of a college of education with a program of teacher preparation in a community with failing schools, then *shame on you*.

Noguera's reprimand was timely. Evidence continues to support the fact that children of color and those from families with lower socioeconomic status are failing at a rate that is significantly higher than their White and more advantaged peers (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011; Rardon, 2011; Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). With educational segregation still rampant on the 60th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, schools serving majority populations of poor and minority children have some of the worst facilities and the least prepared teachers (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). And while U.S. classrooms become increasingly diverse (Center for Public Education, 2012), we continue to prepare a majority of White, female, middle-class educators to tackle the complex issues of equity in education. With good reason, institutions of teacher education are under increased scrutiny for their relevance to the dynamics and demographics of the 21st century (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Many have posited reasons for the achievement gap. While some clearly cling to a cultural deficit perspective (Trueba, 1988; Valencia, 1997),

others blame structural and institutional factors resulting in inequitable access to the teachers and schools most likely to impact educational success (Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Crowley, 2006). Additionally, cultural and environmental factors, including the low expectations of teachers (McKown & Weinstein, 2008), stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), and a cultural discontinuity between home and school (Graybill, 1997), have further fueled the dialogue. While the root cause of these discrepancies in achievement continues to be debated, it remains apparent that teacher education programs have a responsibility to equip future teachers with the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions through which to most effectively engage all students in the process of equitable learning. Given the context in which we are currently residing, one could easily argue that the need to prepare culturally responsive teachers has never been more germane. And, as the sage counsel of Pedro Noguera would indicate, our responsibility to our local communities must not be underestimated.

The question of how best to instill in candidates the “omnipresent trinity” of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Misco & Shively, 2007, p. 2) has been heavily debated, particularly in the area of dispositional attainment. While some allege the improbability of coursework and teacher development activities as a mechanism through which to instill in candidates the requisite dispositions toward working with ethnically and economically diverse populations of students, others believe in an intentional, constructivist approach to preparing teachers for real life in real schools. Representing the first group, Haberman (2011) states: “Thus far the direct teaching of these beliefs has proven illusive if not impossible. My fervent advice is to select those with star teacher beliefs to begin with and stop trying to demonstrate that college coursework or teacher development activities have significant impact on teachers’ belief systems” (last para.). Diez and Murrell (2010) counter this proposition, asserting that dispositions can be cultivated and developed. They specifically state: “Dispositions are neither invisible aspects of a teacher’s psyche, nor fixed personality traits. They are commitments of habit and thought and action that grow as the teacher learns, acts, and reflects under the guidance of teachers and mentors in a preparation program and in the first years of practice” (pp. 14–15).

So what might a teacher preparation program look like that would develop such dispositions? Under what circumstances might such commitments of habit, thought, and action unfold? What experiences must teacher candidates have in order to understand and embrace the contexts in which children are growing and learning and their integral impact on development? What can be done to ensure that teacher candidates enter the field with high expectations for all children? It is these very questions that this volume seeks to address.

According to Etta Hollins (2015),

Teaching is an interpretive practice that requires knowledge of the community where students grow and develop, and where they are socialized. . . . Learning is most likely to be meaningful and productive when situated within the everyday life experiences of the learner, so an important aspect of teaching is interpreting and translating students' everyday experiences to support formal academic learning. This means that the extent to which teachers understand the communities where students live influences their ability to provide access to high-quality opportunities for learning and has an impact on learning outcomes, especially for urban and other underserved students. And of course, the stakes are high: The quality of education students receive in school impacts the quality of life they provide for themselves and their families as adults, and the quality of their contribution to the community in which they live. (paras. 1–2)

While a consideration of the importance of understanding family and community contexts on the development and education of children is common rhetoric in teacher education programs, practices in the academy often belie this appreciation. All too frequently, teacher candidates practice a form of “guerrilla teaching”—going into unfamiliar schools, briefly depositing limited content to children whom they have never met, and testing theory in the absence of even a basic understanding of the community in which the school is situated (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, Malaby, & Clausen, 2010). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework addresses the imperative of understanding the many influences that inform child development if we are to maximize outcomes. As a theoretical framework for our efforts, this theory underscores the many influences impacting child development and experiences at school. Bronfenbrenner's framework emphasizes that both direct (school, home, church, community) and indirect (parents' workplace, city hall, national policy, social ills) forces are mutually shaping children's experience and development. Future teachers are well served by understanding the full impression these influences exert on children's development. Without this cogent understanding, preservice candidates miss a valuable piece of the puzzle required to maximize student learning. With this in mind, one can argue that we must remedy an antiquated model of teacher education in which field experiences occur in the absence of contextual cognizance, if we are to guide candidates toward conceptual understandings, attitudes, and beliefs that inform how to situate their work.

With a limited consciousness of the circumstances that inform student experience, teaching can be perceived solely as a skill set, with a

naive view that effective lesson plans, with well-developed objectives, translate directly to patterns of achievement. We do a great disservice to new teachers if this is the mindset they have when they finish their teacher education program. A strict transfer of knowledge regarding the “techniques” of teaching, however supported in past and current teacher education models (Hunter, 1994; Slavin & Madden, 2001), can no longer be endorsed as adequate, even in the current climate of standards-driven teaching, if relevant and lasting learning is our goal.

Reform in teacher education over the past 2 decades has shown promise in addressing some of these concerns. Dialogue about the nature of clinical experience in teacher preparation (Hammerness & Darling-Hammond, 2005; Zeichner, 2010) has spurred initiatives such as professional development–partner schools (Holmes Group, 1995; Osguthorpe, Harris, Harris, & Black, 1995), which promote increased partnership between schools, universities, and teacher candidates. While these partnerships have mutual benefits for teacher education programs, schools, and candidates, the role of the community in these partnerships is often ill defined. Ken Zeichner (2005) cautions that the strengthened alliances between schools and universities may actually result in even less responsiveness to community need. Furthermore, the extent to which professional development school (PDS) partnerships strengthen the capacity of schools to provide an equitable education for all children has been critically examined (Valli, Cooper, & Frankes, 1997). Findings from this research suggest that issues of context, culture, race, class, and power are, at best, peripherally related to the goals and activities of the traditional PDS structure.

Urban teacher residency (UTR) programs, a more recent innovation that seeks to provide candidates with a longer-term, mentor-based experience in urban schools, are showing promise in the preparation and retention of urban teachers (Berry, Montgomery, Curtis, Hernandez, Wurtzel, & Snyder, 2008). While the emphasis on connecting theory and practice in a year-long, postgraduate residency experience further prepares candidates for the transition from preservice to practicing teacher, the extent to which knowledge of community context is woven into such programs is seldom clearly articulated. In fact, in the *Quality Standards for Teacher Residency Programs* published by Urban Teacher Residency United (2010)—a best practice network of the largest urban residency programs across the country—there is sadly no mention of intentional community connection as part of the preparation of urban teachers.

With a need to more intentionally integrate teacher education within the context of communities, Murrell (2001) calls for the development of “community teachers” who possess “contextualized knowledge of the culture, community, and identity of the children and families he or she serves and draws on this knowledge to create the core teaching practices necessary for effectiveness in diverse settings” (p. 52). The community

teacher, according to Murrell, works to understand the cultural knowledge traditions of the children, families, and community being served, and uses these traditions to make meaningful connections for and with children and families. Uncovering these “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) within a community, recognizing them as significant resources through which to improve teaching, and subsequently mobilizing them to more effectively engage students in learning can significantly impact the relevance of students’ experience in school.

There is mounting evidence that teacher preparation is directly correlated to teacher effectiveness, resulting in patterns of achievement for diverse populations of children (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Additional research points specifically to the potential of teaching that is culturally responsive to directly impact the achievement gap (Howard, 2010). Differentiated from multicultural education, which is typically embedded in teacher education programs, cultural responsiveness goes beyond awareness and appreciation of difference, toward the meaningful integration of “cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching [students] more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). This framework, focusing on student achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness, invites teacher candidates to move beyond a peripheral understanding of difference toward the discovery of contextual cognizance, which has the potential to inform—and indeed transform—their teaching and student learning. When children’s backgrounds are meaningfully and effectively incorporated into teaching, dramatic increases in engagement and motivation logically lead to improvement in students’ achievement across all areas of the curriculum (Gay, 2010). Of particular note are studies relative to literacy acquisition (Diamond & Moore, 1995; Krater, Zeni, & Cason, 1994) and math proficiency (Moses & Cobb, 2001).

Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2003) found that preservice and inservice teachers often manifest a “cultural discontinuity” or incongruence with alternative values and norms of some cultural communities, which has the potential to result in negative beliefs and low expectations for students. Interestingly, results from Irvine’s research indicate that this dissonance was frequently present even after candidates had completed a course in multicultural education, suggesting the need for further exposure and experience in order to counter the disconnect and its ramifications for students. Moving beyond the limitations of multicultural education and into the realm of culturally responsive teacher education thus surfaces as a more meaningful and significant use of effort.

With this in mind, Villegas and Lucas (2002) remind us that teacher candidates, when presented with the concept of culturally responsive teaching, often view it as a theoretical orientation, and can be challenged to make the leap from theory to practice. Indeed, without direct

opportunities for meaningful interaction in cultural communities to bridge thought and action, the limitations of this instruction are apparent. If candidates are to work to integrate students' cultural knowledge, experience, values, and beliefs into their content and pedagogy, then they must have the opportunity to experience the culture from which children come in order to begin to understand, and eventually internalize, the "ways of knowing" (Noel, 2008) that inform student experience.

While learning within community settings can provide teacher candidates with important opportunities beyond those of traditional teacher preparation, we draw on the counsel of others and with them caution that strictly sending candidates into cultural communities without the benefit of mediation can thwart intended efforts. Multiple studies have confirmed that without negotiation, and left to their own interpretation, candidates' stereotypes can be further cemented as a result of such experiences (Garcia, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Margaret Gallego (2001) comments, "Indeed, without connections between the classroom, school, and local communities, classroom field experiences may work to strengthen preservice teachers' stereotypes of children, rather than stimulate their examination, and ultimately compromise teachers' effectiveness in the classroom" (p. 314).

We propose an alternative scenario. We argue that the intentional engagement of community wisdom and expertise in the training of teachers is a missing piece in preparing future educators for effective practice. We assert, based on our experience with a model in practice, that this work can be accomplished in partnership with universities, schools, and the communities in which children live and learn. We contend, in the words of David Johns (2014) that, when we "conspire for children's success" through the alignment of our joint priorities, commitment, and resources, realizing the promise and potential of all children becomes an imaginable goal. We have written this volume in order to share our experiences in the development and implementation of this model, the lessons we have learned over time, and the impressive impact that has been realized based on true collaboration and a shared commitment to ensuring educational equity.

Nested within the context of a growing population of diverse learners and a national failure to equitably educate all children, *Transforming Teacher Education for Social Justice* details the engagement of community expertise in the education of teachers as a new paradigm in educator preparation. Drawing on 6 years of experience in successful program implementation and research, we tell the story of Schools Within the Context of Community, teacher education program at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.

Chapter 1 discusses the notion of "situated learning" in "communities of practice" as a structural framework through which such reform can

be accomplished. This chapter also provides the community context for our work, a description of the program framework, and the theoretical underpinnings of our efforts. In Chapter 2 strategies used to interweave theory, content, pedagogy, and practice are reviewed, emphasizing the importance of an interdisciplinary approach. The chapter also addresses the need for extensive clinical experience in authentic teaching situations, showcasing promising practices in which faculty members are regularly involved and engaged in candidates' construction of knowledge, and proposes the expansion of current models of clinical experience beyond the walls of the school practicum site in order to more fully understand the context in which children are learning. Additional emphasis is placed on InTASC and CAEP standards relative to culturally responsive practice, which provide a compelling rationale for the approach to teacher preparation we describe.

Chapter 3 describes the portrait of a "community teacher" and demonstrates how the Schools Within the Context of Community program encourages candidates' learning about the community. The impact of neighborhood host families on candidates' development of agency is fully detailed, as is their subsequent action in providing culturally relevant pedagogy and participating in education for social justice. Chapter 3 also details the construct of "critical service learning" and the impact on community conditions we have realized together with our community of practice. Chapter 4 provides a thorough description of the impact of our program of community-engaged preparation on teacher candidates. Data provided include candidate development relative to efficacy, ability to enact culturally responsive pedagogy, and strategies employed such as mind mapping and digital storytelling, through which candidates have documented their cognitive and affective journey. This chapter also provides compelling evidence of promising practices from program graduates, many of whom are working in urban schools and employing culturally responsive practice.

In Chapter 5 we explore how university-school-community collaboration has resulted in school improvement and impact on student learning. As the ultimate measure of our program success, we are proud to chart the positive trajectory of school culture and student achievement. Finally, Chapter 6 challenges the reader to examine the future of teacher education within the context of the community-engaged approach showcased within this volume's pages. We discuss the flexibility of this approach, along with requisite ingredients for success. Of critical emphasis, in the closing pages, are the actions to which we must commit if the notion of educational equity is to be a reality for all children.

Transforming Teacher Education for Social Justice has been a 6-year journey. It continues to be our privilege to live and learn among the members of our collaborative and to envision a system through which