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“Social Justice Needs to Be Everywhere”: Imagining the Future of Anti-Oppression Education in Teacher Preparation

This article analyzes a social-justice teacher education project in a larger teacher education program in Western Canada. This program-within-a-program took an anti-oppressive education approach designed to help teacher candidates to understand and challenge various forms of inequity and their interconnections. We review the social justice project first, through a descriptive analysis of our teaching, and second, through hour-long qualitative, semistructured interviews with 20 graduates of our program (all beginning teachers). Our alumni provided examples of teaching against the grain and also spoke to the challenges of implementing critical pedagogies. We conclude by providing four key recommendations and reflecting on the implications for future teacher preparation.

Cet article analyse un projet de justice sociale dans le cadre d'un important programme de formation des enseignants dans l'Ouest canadien. Ce « programme à l'intérieur d'un programme » a adopté une approche pédagogique contre l'oppression, conçue pour aider les étudiants en pédagogie à comprendre et à remettre en question diverses formes d'iniquité et les liens entre elles. Nous nous penchons sur le programme de justice sociale, d'abord par une analyse descriptive de notre enseignement, ensuite par des entrevues qualitatives et semi-structurées d'une heure auprès de finissants de notre programme (tous débutant leur carrière d'enseignant). Nos anciens ont fourni des exemples d'enseignement à contre-courant et ont évoqué les défis liés à la mise en œuvre de pédagogies critiques. Nous concluons en présentant quatre recommandations clés et en réfléchissant aux conséquences pour la formation des enseignants à l'avenir.

A number of teacher education programs both in Canada and the United States have made an explicit commitment to equity albeit under diverse banners. Through the lens of equity, research is starting to emerge that explores programs, teacher education courses, pedagogy, inquiry or service-learning components, practicum placements, and field placement supervision.¹ Little research, however, has been conducted on the effect of equity-oriented teacher education on K-12 classroom practices (for a review that reaches this con-

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clusion, see Sleeter, 2000-2001; for a couple of exceptions, see Flores, 2007; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003). The research reported here, based on interviews with 20 beginning teachers, aims to begin filling this gap.

Educational researchers have helped to develop a number of conceptual approaches to understanding the notion of equity, including an anti-oppressive approach to teaching for social justice (Bell, 1997; Ellsworth, 1994; Gale & Densmore, 2000; Greene, 1998; Kelly, 2007; Kelly, Brandes, & Orłowski, 2003-2004; Kumashiro, 2000, 2004). We drew primarily from an anti-oppressive education approach in helping to form the Social Justice Cohort (SJC) located in a much larger 12-month (after-degree) teacher education program in British Columbia and in existence from 1998 to 2005. We wove the theme of teaching for social justice explicitly across courses. Each year, up to 36 teacher candidates preparing to teach secondary social studies, English, or both were introduced to an anti-oppression model aimed at helping their future students to understand and challenge injustices such as sexism, racism, homophobia and heterosexism, class inequality, and their interconnections. Across all courses, teacher educators in the program encouraged teacher candidates to read and write "against the grain" (Davies, 1993). For example, teacher educators (while respecting the differences in focus, structure, and curricular materials between English and social studies) emphasized that both subjects were heavily dependent on the ability to read, interpret, and write texts. All teacher educators highlighted that knowledge is differentially valued depending on one's perspective in prevailing power relations, encouraging teacher candidates to see and teach the struggles of marginalized groups in the curriculum.

Although the teacher educators in the program came from diverse theoretical and political backgrounds, we agreed that teaching is inevitably political and that teachers cannot be value neutral. As such, we endeavored to treat the teacher candidates as active agents in their own learning, people who brought their prior knowledge into the program and were prompted to examine critically their own social locations in relation to their prospective students.

Methodology

This project is part of a larger qualitative study that aims to record and analyze what teachers are actually saying and doing when teaching for social justice in order to map beginning and veteran teachers' perspectives and pedagogical possibilities for public schools. One component drawn on for this article consists of interviews with SJC alumni recruited from among the graduates of the first five cohorts. Because these participants are our former students, the research we report here can also be seen in part as a self-study of our practices as educators preparing beginning teachers to teach for social justice with the purpose of "enhanced understanding of teacher education practices, processes, programs, and contexts" (Cole & Knowles, 1998, p. 225). We start by describing our own work as teacher educators; this description provides a context for our inquiry into how graduates of our program took up conceptual understandings of anti-oppression education in their teaching. The interviews with SJC alumni, in turn, provide a lens through which to reflect on how teacher education practices might be improved.

We recruited participants by contacting all SJC alumni by mail. Among those who volunteered, we narrowed the potential sample to those teaching in

British Columbia and then selected interviewees purposively with an eye to diversity in terms of cohort (four from each of years 1 through 5), sex, and racialized identity. The final group of participants consisted of nine men and 11 women; 12 were European Canadian (White), six Asian Canadian, one Aboriginal, and one part Arab Canadian and part White. They had from one to six years of teaching experience. At the time of their interview, they taught in 12 school districts across British Columbia: 13 in urban schools, two in suburban schools, four in big-town schools, and one in a high-poverty rural school.

We employed a post-positivist approach to qualitative research interviewing (Kvale, 1996). We did not view interviews as a transparent window into our participants' realities that we would then neutrally transmit through our research. We did assume, however, that there is "a relationship between people's ambiguous representations and their experiences" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 3). We were aware of how the various decisions we made all along the way (e.g., how various interview questions were phrased and probed) shaped data-generation and analysis.

The overarching research questions informing the semistructured interviews were: How do beginning teachers who see themselves as teaching for social justice translate a concern for equity into their classroom teaching practices? What supports and barriers do they encounter? In hour-long, qualitative interviews, we encouraged participants to tell stories about teaching that made them think about the social justice discussions they had had in their teacher education classes in the SJC. In analyzing the qualitative research interview transcripts, we established patterns and themes, highlighted tensions and challenges, and compared and contrasted categories and concepts used by the participants themselves with those derived from the anti-oppression education approach we use in our teaching (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). We also kept at the forefront of our analysis the multiple and complex identities of the interviewer vis-à-vis each interviewee. Once we had a draft, we shared with participants the sections where they were quoted or mentioned (including our interpretations), invited their comments and clarifications, and gave them the option of being named (under the ethics protocol that we developed and for which we received university approval, participants could elect to use their real name or a pseudonym).

The rest of the article unfolds in three parts. To start, we highlight key elements of our approach to teaching for social justice and analyze and reflect on some of our activities and assignments. Next, we share stories of how our alumni taught against the grain, and we end with four recommendations for an anti-oppressive teacher education program and reflect on their implications for future teacher preparation.

SJC's Approach to Teaching for Social Justice

In this section, we discuss in some detail the elements in our courses that highlighted teaching for social justice, because these became a key part of the repertoire that SJC alumni drew on as they grappled with teaching against the grain. We used, modeled, and debriefed a variety of activities and assignments to prompt teacher candidates to highlight three main elements of teaching for social justice: (a) critically analyzing social and institutional inequities; (b) taking into account how positions of privilege and oppression shape pedagog-

ical decisions; and (c) linking deliberative inquiry to working toward social justice.

In the first term of the program, we raised questions about the dynamics of power, visible and invisible social markers, and the complexities of identity. We wanted teacher candidates—many of whom, like us (middle-class White women), benefit from prevailing economic, political, and social arrangements—to think about who is privileged and who is disadvantaged across a variety of contexts. In some cases, therefore, we saw our role as challenging teacher candidates' core beliefs; in other cases, our role was to encourage them to think more deeply and in more nuanced ways about their commitments to social justice. We then worked on linking beliefs to action in the contexts of classroom teaching and working in schools, asking teacher candidates to consider whether and in what circumstances various school policies and practices implicitly sustain material and social inequalities. In the process, we analyzed together various theories of social change, including the role of teacher and school in the change process. We discussed the challenges of teaching for social justice in an institution that often maintains the inequitable status quo and yet still sometimes provides opportunities for interrupting prevailing power dynamics.

To give a few specific examples: to assist teacher candidates to recognize and analyze social and institutional inequities, we used critical incident case studies, developed to spotlight the role of schooling in perpetuating various social inequities and drawn from research done in schools. In one year, for example, the critical incidents included: the vandalism of a school's totem pole; the banning of two lesbians from a school prom; parents accusing a social studies teacher of indoctrinating students with an anti-logging, environmentalist perspective; denial that a school's mascot was evidence of institutional racism; White parents and their sons' resistance to a teacher's selection of *The Joy Luck Club* for a novel study; and sexual harassment causing a boy to drop out of school. In the simulation that followed, we asked teacher candidates to imagine that they were teachers in the school who had gotten together to brainstorm possible responses. Guiding questions for debriefing the critical incidents were as follows: How can teachers or administrators challenge or overcome the problematic aspects of the incident? Are the intervention strategies you propose focused on students, teachers, curriculum and pedagogy, parents, other? What obstacles might you face in trying to implement your response (and action plan)? What supports do you have? How can you measure or evaluate your success? How can slow change be differentiated from failure? How do markers of identity of teachers and students mentioned in the incident influence what teachers think they can and cannot do, both inside and outside schools?

Early program assignments sought to foster a research disposition and direct teacher candidates to reflect on how teachers' daily actions can and do make a difference in the lives of their students. In one assignment, they had the option of describing and critically evaluating a policy document (e.g., a school district's race relations policy, the provincial government's statement on gender equity programs), a new course curriculum document (e.g., First Nations 12), or an existing resource that pertained to teaching for social justice. In

all these assignments, we asked teacher candidates to explore how their pedagogical decisions were shaped by their understanding of who their prospective students were. How, for example, would they adapt a social studies unit on poverty according to the social class composition of the group that they were teaching?

We asked all teacher candidates to observe an experienced teacher teach a lesson. As a part of the observation, they were asked to notice how students' diverse social locations and various power asymmetries shaped patterns of classroom interactions. For example, the teacher candidates took notes on (and later asked about) possible gender patterns in interactions between the teacher and students during class discussions. Based on their observations, they retrospectively created the plan for the lesson, reflected on their field notes, and discussed both of these with the inservice teacher.

In a related vein, we asked all teacher candidates to conduct a semistructured interview with an experienced teacher about teaching for social justice. Interview questions included the following.

In my courses, we are exploring how gender, race, culture and language, social class, and sexual orientation affect teaching and learning. What are your thoughts about how any of these affect your teaching and the students' learning? What are some of the challenges that you face or have faced as a teacher in addressing any of these aspects of teaching and learning? What are some strategies you have used to address these issues?

In assessing these assignments, we were struck by how many teacher candidates struggled to realize that teachers are non-neutral agents for social change (Kelly & Brandes, 2001/2003). We thus found it crucial to return to this theme—that teaching is always political—at various points and using a variety of strategies. Popular theater techniques (role-playing, simulation, forum theater) emerged as our most effective means to convey this key message. In one year, we developed a series of scenes drawn from earlier research, each of which involved a teacher candidate on long practicum confronted by some form of racism. Some class members enacted the scene, and others in the audience had the opportunity to replace the teacher candidate character and improvise a new, “realistic” response to the dilemma presented. In every instance, teacher candidates saw that difficult situations arise and neutrality is impossible; they must act in one way or another, with uncertain and uneven results. The facilitator debriefed each scene (e.g., by exploring a character's dilemma, actions, and possible motivations), and teacher candidates wrote individually on questions like: What circumstances would warrant a teacher taking a stand? What does taking a stand look like? Do you agree or disagree that there is no neutral ground on the issue of multicultural and anti-racist education? Why or why not?

A final set of assignments sought to link deliberative inquiry to an awareness of arenas and possibilities for action and individual (and later, collective) agency. For example, in a follow-up to the observation of a lesson (described above), we asked teacher candidates to propose alternative ways to address some elements of social justice in the lesson. Their suggestions in the re-created lesson could be about what was taught (e.g., which new resources to use) or how it was taught (e.g., how to divide the class into groups that take into

account the language makeup of the class). In our debriefing of the assignment, we underscored that teachers can take action in the classroom, the school context, and the community at large to challenge or interrupt social inequities and institutional constraints; there are spaces in and beyond classrooms to resist oppressive representations and improvise new ones.

Taken as a whole, these various assignments and exercises conjured the messy reality of schools as arenas of conflict and groups (inside and outside schools) vying for status and control over resources and ideas. Teaching for social justice involves a vision of the society we hope to create, but it also necessarily focuses attention on material and social inequities, winners and losers, the painful legacy of colonialism, and so on. As teacher educators, we felt called on in debriefing teaching moments to balance hope against despair. As a check on our own practice, it became important for us to see what SJC teacher candidates were learning about the complexities and multiple contexts of schooling as they embarked on their teaching careers.

Alumni Perspectives on the Challenges of Teaching Against the Grain

At the time of their interview, all the alumni indicated that they still believed that teaching for social justice was both valuable and possible. What they meant by teaching for social justice varied. All but one said that they conceived of teaching for social justice just as they had on completion of their teacher education program. The exception, Greta, said that with experience, she now placed more emphasis on students becoming their “own agents of change” rather than “telling them about social movements.” The alumni were unanimous in pointing to various facets of context—diversity of students, school micro-politics and bureaucratic constraints, prevalence of material inequalities, and dominant community values—that had made them realize how challenging it is to translate one’s vision of social justice into the realities of everyday classroom teaching. Jennifer (in her second year of teaching) summed this up well: “My idea about what it [teaching for social justice] is hasn’t changed. My ideas have changed about what is possible, within the confines of all the things I am trying to deal with all at once.”

Jennifer is typical of beginning teachers, whether they see themselves as teaching for social justice (as our alumni did) or not. In our experience, however, equity-minded educators must cope with added layers of complexity, and they report that the work of anti-oppressive education is particularly demanding intellectually and emotionally. It did not surprise us, therefore, to learn that alumni participants sometimes felt they were falling short. Nevertheless, many told us that they were well equipped to teach for social justice as they made decisions about curriculum selection, highlighted and analyzed omissions, and supplemented the existing curricular materials. While making decisions about what and how they taught, they took into consideration the complexity of intersecting identities such as who they were in relation to their students. Dave, of Aboriginal heritage, grew up in a middle-class community. His experiences of teaching for several years in a poor, remote First Nations community prompted him to highlight the gap between the official curricular documents in British Columbia and the reality in his classroom: “Social justice or equity-based theory is missing in most [provincial curriculum documents]. They are largely inconsiderate to the context of some communities. We need to

ask, ‘What will work here? What can we do to make [our] students want to come to school?’” In their teaching, the alumni often challenged the status quo, addressing complicity and invisible privileges. Those with the most teaching experience also described how they anticipated and were prepared to address stereotypes and students’ defensiveness, prompted students to explore multiple perspectives, and modeled solidarity and building coalitions across difference.

In interviews, we asked a number of questions aimed at eliciting alumni perspectives on the challenges they faced as they taught with social justice in mind. For example, we asked: “How hard (or how easy) has it been so far for you to match your teaching practices to your vision of what schooling ought to be about?” All the alumni said that they felt they had experienced some gap between their vision and the realities in their classrooms and schools. A detailed discussion of the challenges they identified is beyond the scope of this article, but we have grouped the most common ones into four categories: resistance from students; resistance from colleagues and administrators; externally imposed accountability and assessment measures; and translating anti-oppression education theory into practice.

As Cheryl put it, “There is always [student] resistance” when teachers introduce social justice issues, and this resistance posed challenges. Alice struggled early on with the complexities of trying to “counter oppression” in the classroom, noting her surprise that an oppressed group of students could in turn hold demeaning views toward others. She got a job as a resource teacher in a First Nations program located in an upper-middle-class area where there was “resentment toward Asians.” Explained Alice: “For the first three weeks, I was known as the ‘Chinese Lady’—that was my name. Everyone else who wasn’t Native was suspect.” Reflecting back, Alice “realized that it [teaching for social justice] is not just dealing with oppression. It is dealing with the kids’ biases, wherever they may come from.”

A second set of challenges consisted of resistance from colleagues and administrators. Brad noted, “Colleagues find infusing social justice into their classes too much work, and administrators find it a hassle to support and encourage teachers in doing so.” As a new teacher, Cheryl had been assigned to teach a remedial English class to grade 10s deemed at risk of dropping out of school, an assignment nobody else wanted. Rather than offer advice and encouragement, however, colleagues would tease her:

One teacher [in the staffroom] actually said to me, “Oh, I had to teach that in my first two years of teaching, and every time I walked in the room, I could literally feel my brain dying and oozing out my ears.” It made me feel so bad.

Often the lack of support in the schools was mirrored in the wider communities. A number of alumni said they felt challenged to maintain the energy and attitude necessary to teach for social justice in places that by and large were unfriendly to such teaching philosophies. Robyn, for example, was teaching in an agricultural community with a prevalence of fundamentalist churches. “Even though we’re growing, there’s still that small town mindset—that narrow-mindedness—that I had thought didn’t exist anymore.” Robyn discovered: “You can only do so much in a classroom, and it’s really difficult

when students go home, and home is an opposite idea. So that everything you've been fighting or hoping to deconstruct is being reconstructed at home."

A third set of challenges related to externally imposed assessment practices: cross-grade or cross-department and provincial exams, and published school rankings based on narrow accountability measures. For Harkiran, the problem with departmentally imposed exams was balancing what she thought was important versus what other teachers in the school thought was important and eventually, what would end up on the exam.

The problem is that, say, you are teaching for social justice ... and you spend a fair amount of time talking about something that other teachers have not, and they don't want it on the test. They haven't taught it to their kids. What do you do? Do you throw it out the window because your kids were the only ones who learned it?

Gillian made a similar point, explaining that a focus on dates of historical events crowded out attention to critical thinking about the meaning of these events.

Barbara expressed concern about the new Ministry-mandated grade 10 provincial exam in social studies, which to her meant less flexibility to pursue student-generated ideas and a narrow focus on content. For example, Barbara's students had read an article about the province's new child labor laws coming into effect, and in a discussion, she had asked them what they might do about the new laws. "Some kid threw out the idea, 'Well, we could make a child labor website.' So I put what we had been doing temporarily aside, and we formed into groups, and each of them had tasks researching and getting images and building our site." Barbara concluded: "With the new exams, I can't just take the time out now and do a website."

A fourth set of challenges relates to what Michael referred to as needing more "nuts and bolts." Over half the alumni we interviewed said they wanted more "hands-on strategies," practical advice about "having difficult discussions," "more planning of units with content for teaching students about social justice," more on assessment and classroom management, and more lesson planning. Jane told us that we "should have discussed more the difference between having an ideology and putting it into practice." This desire for more practical advice will come as no surprise to experienced teacher educators. "If—as a teacher education student—you start to believe that teaching is about translating theory into practice in a direct manner, the confrontation with the complexities of practice is shocking" (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006, p. 1027).

On the one hand, we do not wish to fall into the trap of thinking that a teacher education program can ever provide beginning teachers with all the tools they will need. "Teachers' practice is not a mere reflection of an abstract theory, easily placed in typologies, but rather much more organic and personal, shaped by the nested contexts of their professional lives" (Niesz, 2006, p. 339). We conclude that teacher educators need to encourage a sustained focus on inquiry so that teacher candidates will get into the habit of searching out multiple answers for questions that arise from teaching and the messy realities of schools. On the other hand, there is no doubt that we could have done a better job of preparing the alumni, and we conclude that this preparation might

well involve more theorizing about the forces that shape life in schools, not less. The resulting discussions will help teacher candidates to see how various decisions are embedded in certain theories and not others. The enduring tension for teacher educators committed to an anti-oppression approach is: How do we prepare teacher candidates to be mindful of societal inequities and at the same time inspire them to take pleasure in the choices they make daily that may not strike them initially as significant but are nevertheless important?

Recommendations for Anti-Oppression Teacher Education

In the light of the difficulties and tensions, we end with recommendations for anti-oppression teacher education. These focus on how (a) to make deliberative and transformative inquiry central and focused on social justice; (b) to invite reflection about the implications of social locations for teaching; (c) to create and sustain communities of inquiry and action among social justice educators; and (d) to articulate warrants for anti-oppressive teaching. Each of our recommendations links back either to what we tried to accomplish via SJC activities and assignments or to weaknesses and tensions in our approach that have surfaced in debriefing and analyzing our alumni's early teaching experiences in the schools.

Make Deliberative and Transformative Inquiry Central and Focused on Social Justice

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1998/1972, p. 53)

It is common to call for inquiry as a part of teacher education these days. The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2006), for example, states: "An effective initial teacher education program provides opportunities for candidates to investigate their practices" (Principle 11). Yet we need to attend closely to who is calling for such inquiry, with whom, and for what purposes, because this approach, ideally aimed at improving practice through encouragement of critical reflection, can easily be made to serve the status quo. We incorporated inquiry into SJC with an eye to creating or fostering a disposition toward inquiry that could inform and challenge current teaching practices. We incorporated a series of assignments under the umbrella of Reflective Inquiry as one way to connect theory to practice. The reflective inquiry encompassed our belief that teaching for social justice means pausing, asking critical questions, and taking action to challenge the status quo. Based on what we learned from our year-to-year experimenting with inquiry, we offer five key suggestions on how to sharpen the focus on social justice and to make teacher candidates' investigation of their own practices central to teacher education.

The first suggestion is to make the underlying epistemology of a reflective and transformative inquiry more explicit to teacher candidates. The participatory tradition of practitioner inquiry, for example, challenges the top-down model of much academic research (including traditional action research) and encourages reducing the hierarchy between researchers and researched. This approach would encourage teacher candidates to view children and youth, family and community members as knowledgeable co-inquirers. It

would from the outset raise questions about who creates what knowledge and for what purposes.

Our second suggestion is to make the role of the teacher educator more explicit in the inquiry process. This role, in our view, includes helping teacher candidates to frame or reframe inquiry topics in the light of current research, policy debates, and conceptual tools to which classroom teachers might not have ready access. It should be oriented toward two goals: (a) enhancing the teacher candidates' awareness of the institutional practices and power dynamics in schools that sustain or challenge inequality; and (b) deepening their understanding of how these power dynamics play out in classrooms and schools through systematic analysis of data collected or generated with a social justice question in mind. In our experience, structured phases of inquiry with teacher educators continually asking critical questions have been most conducive to achieving these goals, because the teacher candidates are learning to see how inequality is embedded in the day-to-day practices and realities in particular school contexts. The structures of schooling are often taken for granted and "naturalized"; inquiry can thus make the familiar strange. We have, for example, asked questions such as: In what ways, implicitly or explicitly, do various teaching practices (e.g., how to manage a classroom or facilitate a discussion of controversial issues) support an inequitable status quo? How does the school position itself in relation to the larger community? Does the school perpetuate the status quo or challenge it? How do various markers of teachers' identities—race, social class, sex, or sexuality—shape what and how they teach? How might teachers adapt what they do depending on the social locations of the students in their classrooms (e.g., if they are White and middle class but most of the students are not, or vice versa)?

A third suggestion is to attend to transformative action, not just to ask teacher candidates to imagine it, but also to do it. We acknowledge that teacher candidates are often teaching in the classroom of their supervising teacher and can feel scrutinized and restrained. If their supervising teacher is not supportive of teaching for social justice, this may constrain the possibilities for action (Jacobs, 2006). In any event, they could take action pedagogically, for example, collaborating with students on assessment practices, allowing students to have choices in book selection, and seizing opportunities to engage students in critically analyzing demeaning language that links to forms of institutional oppression.

A fourth suggestion is that inquiry be sustained throughout the entire teacher education program, which allows time for systematic data-collection, reflection, and analysis. Although what counts as inquiry in education is broad, what we have in mind emphasizes an empirical component: an engagement "in the world and with the world," to echo the quote by Freire that opens this section. Inquiry in our sense emphasizes close observation and other forms of data-generation, including critically analyzing texts or media representations, informal interviews with parents, compiling basic statistics on referrals for discipline, videotaping and analyzing patterns of student-teacher interaction, and so on. This kind of sustained focus on inquiry allows for more opportunities for analysis of a particular problem. This inquiry should lead to action that challenges an inequity and results in further study and action.

A fifth suggestion is that the results of a reflective and transformative inquiry need to be made public in a variety of ways (some of which we discuss in more detail below). When teacher candidates (and inservice teachers) communicate the results of their inquiries with others, they learn more (Korthagen et al., 2006), in part because “it allow[s] for ideas to be challenged and judgment developed” (Naylor, 2007, p. iii). For teacher educators, an obvious value of making social justice-oriented practitioner inquiries more public is twofold. First, the shared examples suggest that teaching for social justice is possible even within current constraints and prevailing power dynamics, albeit within limits. Second, teacher educators can draw from a rich set of inquiries made by earlier teacher candidates as well as beginning and veteran teachers that allow them to challenge directly the notion of a so-called irreconcilable theory-practice divide.

Invite Reflection About the Implications of Social Locations for Teaching

Inquiry is a powerful tool to get teacher candidates to think more deeply about social locations or dimensions of power and identity (race, social class, ethnicity, sex, ability, age, and so on) that influence teaching and learning. The SJC alumni spoke to the complexities of social location, including school-based politics around certain forms of institutional inequities (e.g., a gay-positive environment) and whether a social marker of power was visible or invisible. In a section above, we give examples of activities that provided a springboard for teacher candidates’ self-inquiry focused on an analysis of their own “positionality” and ideology. In the feedback that we gave teacher candidates on their assignments, we asked further questions to encourage them in their curricular and pedagogical planning to consider the various social locations of their students. However, this sort of preparation, modeled in our assignments and activities, proved inadequate. We base this assessment on the number of sobering stories told by alumni where they were accused of having an agenda or verbally abused based on markers of their identity (e.g., Alice’s story), where relatively privileged students resisted an examination of that privilege or relatively disadvantaged students were made vulnerable or were complicit in maintaining the status quo.

We recommend, therefore, that teacher educators provide teacher candidates with more strategies in the light of the realities of K-12 teaching settings and with more sensitivity to the difference between teaching adult learners in a university setting and teaching children and youth whose attendance is compulsory in a setting with timetable and curricular mandates. Rather than model strategies that strongly encourage students to confront their own privileges, for example, teacher educators could suggest that teacher candidates use a textual approach such as examining the homogenizing *we* frequently found in textbooks.

Create and Sustain Communities of Inquiry and Action Among Social Justice Educators

I find working with [like-minded] colleagues in the school is what supports me in teaching for social justice. But if somebody from the [SJC] cohort didn’t have somebody like that, they would probably adapt to the way their department teaches. (Shannon, SJC cohort 2)

Teaching for social justice can be risky and lonely (Niesz, 2006; Flores, 2007). Beginning teachers need to find allies; yet identifying these allies is not always quick or easy. We recommend creating and sustaining communities of inquiry and action among social justice educators in various locations. We highlight the importance of establishing organic communities of inquiry around the shared goal of teaching for social justice; and seeking allies in established teacher and other networks committed to social justice (e.g., community-based activist groups, unions). One forum for such a community is school seminars where teacher candidates and experienced teachers meet regularly to inquire into teaching for social justice. In our experience, when teachers are given university credits or other incentives to collaborate with teacher candidates, they are more involved in and committed to the inquiry. In these instances, the community may rotate its location and focus between the university and the school, thus helping to bridge the gaps between the two contexts. Another forum for such communities of inquiry and action is annual conferences that bring together teacher candidates, veteran teachers (working with the teacher candidates), and teacher educators. Yet another forum is electronic communication spaces where educators share resources (including links to social justice-oriented organizations), lesson plans, and topics that arise from teaching for social justice. Ideally, such communities and networks might feed into coalitions with the collective will to “advocate for the societal conditions that need to be present, if equality in the educational arena is to be achieved, such as access to quality food, housing, affordable health care, and to a job that pays a living wage” (Zeichner, 2003, p. 513). Ultimately, communities of inquiry oriented to transformation must lead in political directions to address the forces that are limiting what is possible under the banner of teaching for social justice.

Articulate Warrants for Anti-Oppressive Teaching

I would say that the social justice cohort was a great thing to have—just to argue that education should be about social justice. But teaching for social justice doesn’t have to be done only in social studies and English. It is not as though you can’t teach phys ed from a social justice standpoint. It should be a part of how [teacher] education is done overall. (Michael, SJC cohort 3)

Teacher education programs often have some foundations courses or a cohort committed to “diversity” or multiculturalism, but these are typically marginalized in the program as a whole. As Daniel stated, “Social justice needs to be everywhere; it can’t just be in one place.” To echo Daniel and Michael, we believe that teaching for social justice should infuse the entire teacher education program. Without clear and official sanctioning, teacher candidates (and beginning teachers) often find themselves out on a limb in the schools when they promote ideas of teaching for social justice. Harkiran (a South Asian woman), for example, described much resistance from upper-middle-class, White students to her anti-racist pedagogy and felt that more “institutional backup” would have helped: “How do you prevent resistance from the students? Well, if all the teachers are on the same side, and if it [anti-racism] is a policy in the school, then the parents know that ahead of time. So if they have resistance to it, then change schools. That is the policy. We all believe in it.”

Warrants (what Harkiran called “institutional backup”) need to be evident in multiple domains: reflected in the teacher education program’s key theoretical assumptions (e.g., teaching is never neutral), embodied in practices that are modeled in the teacher education program and its schools, and stated in official documents and policies recognized by school districts and universities. The Association of Canadian Deans of Education’s (2006) *Accord*, as we interpret it, provides one such warrant by calling for initial teacher education that: “encourages teachers to assume a social and political leadership role” (Principle 3), “promotes diversity, inclusion, understanding, acceptance and social responsibility in continuing dialogue with local, national, and global communities” (Principle 6), and “engages teachers with the politics of identity and difference and prepares them to develop and enact inclusive curricula and pedagogies” (Principle 7). Of course, any official document that might serve as a warrant will be contested and open to multiple interpretations. What it stands for is not always, or even usually, self-evident until broad value statements are put into practice and contested in local arenas.

Conclusion

Participants in our study, all beginning teachers and alumni of a social-justice teacher education program-within-a-program, said that they had begun to think differently about what it means to teach for social justice compared with when they completed the teacher education program. Foremost among the differences was their deepening understanding of the complexities introduced by their social location and the social locations of their students. The beginning teachers explored the ramifications of social locations for pedagogical decisions. Clearly, taking the diversity of both student and teacher populations seriously (including global immigration flows) is critical to preparing teachers for the 21st century. Deliberative and transformative inquiry, as we argue, is a key tool for teachers to investigate their practices and theorize how those practices either challenge or maintain the status quo. This kind of inquiry necessarily involves ongoing debate and contestation. As teacher educators, we need to model a disposition toward inquiry and action. We also need to recognize that all educators face myriad pedagogical decisions (and non-decisions) in teaching about the social forces shaping who they and their students are as well as their arenas for action locally, nationally, and globally.

Note

¹For recent work that explores teacher education programs focusing on equity, see Brandes and Kelly (2000); Cochran-Smith (2004); Darling-Hammond, French, and Garcia-Lopez (2002); Glass and Wong (2003); Quartz and Oakes (2003); and Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003). For work on teacher education courses, see Sleeter (1996) and Solomon and Allen (2001). For pedagogy, see Leistyna, Lavandez, and Nelson (2004) and Schick and St. Denis (2003). For inquiry or service-learning components, see Merino and Holmes (2006) and Sleeter, Torres, and Laughlin (2004). For practicum placements, see Kelly and Brandes (2003) and Montano, Lopez-Torres, DeLissovoy, Pacheco, and Stillman (2002). For field placement supervision, see Jacobs (2006).

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