

Chapter 88

Effectively Managing Bias in Teacher Preparation

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ABSTRACT

This is the call for teacher preparation programs to actively incorporate an emphasis on social justice education and the development of teachers committed to creating equitable schools. Education in today's multicultural, pluralistic society must be actively concentrated on and successful at creating more just and unbiased schools for underserved students. Similar to Ladson-Billings' argument for a redefining of 'good teaching,' there must be a redefinition of that which constitutes social justice teaching. It is the role of today's teacher preparation programs to equip teachers with the essential skills necessary to develop students, manage bias, and create a culture of equity for all. Particularly as it relates to the education, understanding, cultivation, and development of all students in the K-12 school system, a required component of every teacher preparation program must be an increased focus on teaching that is comprehensive, socially just, and impartial.

THE CURRENT STATE OF TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

White Americans increasingly reject racial injustice in principle, but remain reluctant to accept the measures necessary to eliminate the injustice. –Pettigrew, 1979

Every year, in the United States of America, more than 1,300 institutions of higher academic learning – public and private colleges and universities, as well as alternative programs offered by individual districts, states, and other federal entities – prepare and graduate a burgeoning class of teachers for induction into the K-12 educational space. Much divergence exists between these programs, including core elements directly related to their very design, program dissemination, and implementation, as well as in the palatability of teacher preparation. Furthermore, teacher education programs are often prescribed by state

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regulation, accreditation standards, or the limited number of credits available. For this reason, it is much more likely for programs to directly address issues on which the students will be tested – primarily as it pertains to mathematics and English language arts instruction. This is especially true as educational leaders continue to measure the quality of schools and, through value-added assessments, the value of schools and colleges of education on the basis of standardized, summative test scores. In regions serving urban populations, where colleges supply a large number of teachers for a particular system, there is pressure to focus on the adopted curriculum in areas to be measured at the expense of all else. Especially pertinent to students and families in urban regions is this: an overemphasis on classroom management and instruction directly relates to an under-emphasis on cultural diversity, student development, and primarily, on the increasingly important implementation of anti-bias curriculum.

The diversification of the population of school-age children in the U.S. continues to increase; yet, the pool of potential teachers does not, furthering the need to prepare educators to work with students who fundamentally differ from themselves. A millennial report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy in collaboration with Michigan State University (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) found the persistent disparity between teachers, students, families, and the adjoining communities they serve to be a pervasive reality. More recent studies include the work of collaborators at the New York and Washington, D.C. Centers for Social and Emotional Education, along with the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). As a result of this study, researchers found ‘significant gaps’ between school climate research and teacher education. Given the fact that “school climate is a relatively recent focus of interest, it is not surprising that many teacher educators are unaware of contemporary work in this area and [it] is not part of teacher education programs or standards for such programs” (Cohen, et al., 2009, p. 202). A prime factor in managing bias in teacher preparation is the work involved in reducing the gap between school culture, climate, and teacher readiness for the multicultural school environment. Formerly viewed by educational institutions as a supplemental activity, advocacy in education has become an absolute necessity in promoting a positive, holistic school culture and climate. Teachers are now called upon to do more than simply translate curricular material; in this multicultural, pluralistic society, today’s teachers must be an instructive and educational advocate, infusing the tenets of social justice into the curriculum. Teacher preparation programs serve as a fundamental first step in training educators to become active agents of change, betterment, and social justice. This important work can only occur once the educational leaders who are charged with developing teacher preparation programs make the intentional effort to design curriculum, construct syllabi, and develop coursework that continually reinforces the role of educators in serving as active agents of equity and equality in and beyond the four walls of the school building.

Advocacy as a Necessity to Managing Bias

Public education in the U.S. continues to undergo significant transformations. At the present time, a number of states are elucidating their procedures regarding Common Core and new Learning Standards, all while implementing a host of ongoing assessments in the effort to measure and report summative progress. Additionally, educational agencies are currently awaiting the full implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law on December 10, 2015, while concurrently anticipating updates regarding the state of sweeping, revamped higher educational regulations for colleges and universities (Hodge and Welch, 2016). Moreover, states are currently engaged in the revision of Equity

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