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Imperatives for Social Justice in Teacher Education: Realization in Theory and Practice

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 Justice simply defined is synonymous with fairness, equity, adherence to the rule of law with impartiality. What justice means in practice in the field of education, however—how it is taught, how it is expressed in action, and how it can be supported and assessed—fosters considerable confusion. In this article, I define the term *social justice* in teacher education as instructing and supporting preservice teachers to enact those policies and pedagogical practices that will improve the learning and life opportunities of typically underserved students while equipping and empowering all students to work for social justice in society. The specifics of these policies and pedagogies and the best methods for preparing and assessing preservice teachers in their practice warrant considerable theoretical and empirical attention. In this article, I restrict my focus to two aspects that I believe are imperative if teacher educators are to teach and support socially just education in their preservice teachers.

First, the most pressing enhancement of social justice in teacher education is a move away from theorizing about social justice—with accompanying rhetoric that, though inspirational, often produces little effect in the classroom—and a move into practical implementation (for an examination of this movement, see volume 61, issue 3, of the *Journal of Teacher Education*, 2010). What do preservice teachers who want to be socially just actually do in their classrooms and professional lives? Answers to that question will fill volumes. To conceptualize, learn, and embrace a practical implementation of socially just education, preservice teachers need to expand their thinking from an exclusively individual orientation toward student academic success to include a structural orientation as well (Chubbuck, 2010).

Most students choosing the teaching profession have a strong care for the well-being of individual students, a fierce commitment to providing equal and fair support for the learning of each child. In the words of one preservice teacher, “A child is a child, not a demographic!” That commendable attitude is to be nurtured in our preservice teachers. By itself, this attitude can

produce an incomplete interpretation of what each child needs in order to succeed academically. Quite accurately, an individual child may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed; a teacher who desires justice for that child—fairness, equity, impartiality—will supply the missing pieces to move the child to greater success. Skilled pedagogy, rigorous curriculum, caring support, and guidance—all are expressions of justice produced by individual interpretive lenses; preservice teachers who are socially just must master and implement each of these.

Equally important is the understanding that any given child is indeed a member of a demographic group—race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, language—and that his or her group will have had advantaged or disadvantaged access to learning on the basis of structurally embedded, societal, and school-level privileges or marginalization. When preservice teachers grasp structural understanding, they can imagine a wider view of social justice education for students. In addition to meeting the child's individual need for knowledge and skills, the socially just teacher will select culturally relevant methods and curriculum and eventually advocate for changes in school and societal-level policy to provide a more just, equitable experience for groups typically marginalized in schools and society. As teacher educators, we need to nurture the deep sense of individual fairness that our preservice teachers bring to the profession; we also need to challenge them to consider a wider, structural understanding of how injustice occurs in society and, with that understanding, to embrace a deeper, more comprehensive conceptualization of the shape of justice in educational practice.

Helping preservice teachers reach this level of understanding and then supporting them in their socially just practice raises the second imperative that teacher educators must address: that social justice education, whether in the teacher education classroom or our future teachers' own classrooms, is not merely a cognitive task. Emotions are fundamentally implicated in either supporting or hindering this effort and are themselves constitutive of justice/injustice. Consequently, emotions need to be interrogated as means to reproduce or disrupt inequality through permitting or suppressing particular emotional practices and as sociopolitical sites to support and reproduce inequitable structures or resist and transform such inequity.

Preservice teachers may feel strong emotions of compassion and empathy for their students; however, they may also be subject to societal emotion discourses that require withholding particular emotional responses (e.g., grief, remorse, compassion, caring) from certain groups of people defined as *other*. These discourses and the attending expression or suppression of emotion will interfere with preservice teachers' ability to respond equitably to their students. Yet preservice teachers' experience of anger and indignation over social injustice in children's lives, when they occur in the context of collegial support (Chulibuck & Zembylas, 2008), can move teachers to embrace anger as a site to transform the policies that perpetuate that injustice. Thus, rather than simply serve as

sites for social control, emotions may constitute the very spaces needed for recognizing, challenging, and transforming existing inequity.

Emotions also work to either sustain or transform structural inequities. Social norms create and sustain privileging/oppressive structures; deeply embedded, these norms evoke significant emotional responses. For example, when a cherished belief in objective meritocracy as the sole explanation of success is challenged by information about the inequitable effects of privilege institutionalized by gender, class, or race, uncomfortable emotions can surface in preservice teachers who have benefited, often unwittingly, from such institutionalized privilege. The emotional discomfort and frequent resistance from White preservice teachers in discussions of White privilege bear this out. Simply learning about race privilege cognitively, without supplying equal attention to the powerful emotions associated with the cherished beliefs attending those privileges, fails to address emotion's power to sustain or disrupt historically rooted systems. Emotion, then, is not simply a private, psychological experience accompanying the pursuit of justice; rather, emotion either reproduces or transforms the social norms that create injustice. Teacher educators, preservice teachers, and their future students are emotionally invested in assumptions and beliefs; these emotional investments serve to either sustain or challenge social injustices.

Ignoring the importance of emotion in socially just education presents two dangers: the oversimplification of what equitable teaching/learning requires and the loss of sites where teacher educators and preservice students can invent pedagogies and policies to disrupt the unjust structures still present in society and schools. In the words of Bourdieu (2000), our task is not "a simple 'conversion of minds' . . . produced by rational preaching and education" (p. 180). Beyond conducting a simple rational reevaluation of one's worldview or acquiring an education in best pedagogical and curricular practices, teach educators and their preservice teachers need to interrogate and analyze their emotional investments in ideology and privilege if they are to move toward greater implementation of socially just education.

Drawing on the theory of critical emotional praxis (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008), we first need to question emotionally charged, cherished beliefs to expose how privileged positions and emotional comfort zones have shaped our ability to see/act (or not see/act) and empower different ways of being with or for the other. Second, we need to recognize how emotions in local contexts such as classrooms transactionally shape our responses. That is, the specific context produces emotional responses, and those emotions then shape the particulars of the context, challenging or sustaining just and unjust relations. Finally, we need use our emotional understandings to create relationships, pedagogical practices, and policies that benefit social justice education.

Preparing future teachers in the understanding and practice of socially just education occurs with varying degrees of success. The adoption of a struc-

tural orientation toward education and the active interrogation of accompanying emotions will move that preparation forward. ■■■

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