



Teacher education for social justice: Mapping identity spaces



Mark Boylan*, Ian Woolsey

Sheffield Hallam University, UK

HIGHLIGHTS

- The relationship of identity and teacher education for social justice is considered.
- Social justice teacher identity has both determinate and indeterminate aspects.
- The concept of striated and smooth identity space is proposed.
- A study of a group of social justice and beginning teachers in England.
- The need for pedagogies of discomfort, inquiry, compassion and respect.

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ABSTRACT

Teacher education requires an account of the complex ways that beginning teachers negotiate their relationships to social justice. A determinate view of identity successfully describes relationships to relatively stable social justice positions. This supports the adoption of pedagogies of discomfort and inquiry. However, socio-cultural accounts of identity emphasise indeterminate aspects of identity. The concept of striated and smooth identity space is proposed and illustrated by analysing the responses of four beginning mathematics teachers to the experience of a discomforting and inquiry based pedagogy. This challenges teacher educators to extend their pedagogies to embrace additional principles of respect and compassion.

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1. Introduction

Addressing issues of social justice in teacher education is a growing area of concern, enquiry and practice, this is particularly so in the US (Cochran-Smith, 2009; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Kapustka, Howell, Clayton, & Thomas, 2009; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; Zeichner, 2009), but also in the UK (Boylan, 2009; Farnsworth, 2010), Australia (Mills, 2012; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010), and Canada (Carson, 2005; Philpott & Dagenais, 2012).

Recent scholarship and research has identified the need to explicitly articulate theoretical frameworks that can guide teacher education for social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2009). We view social justice as having relational, distributive (Cochran-Smith, 2009; North, 2008) and participative (Fraser, 2008) aspects, across

micro and macro ethical dimensions, and as a form of action rather than a state to be achieved (Griffiths, 2009).

There has also been considerable interest in the role identity plays in teacher development from a range of theoretical perspectives (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Discussion of identity is not reflected to the same extent in literature on social justice informed teacher education. However, recently a number of writers have used identity as an analytical concept in relation to social justice and teacher education in different national settings, including Canada (Carson, 2005; Carson & Johnston, 2001), England (Farnsworth, 2010) and the US (for example, de Freitas, 2008; Ma & Singer-Gabella, 2011). This paper adds to these accounts with an empirically informed, theoretical and methodological contribution that examines the relationship between identity and engaging with issues of social justice in teacher preparation. In addition, the empirical study itself, located in England, complements the more extensive literature base on teacher education for social justice that is predominantly focused on the US context. The paper addresses two related questions: how

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: m.s.boylan@shu.ac.uk (M. Boylan).

can the identity positions of beginning teachers be theorised and what are the pedagogical implications of this?

We argue that adopting a complex understanding of identity is necessary to theorise teacher education for social justice and to inform pedagogy. We consider literature that implies a relatively stable, determinate understanding of identity in relation to social justice. This is useful and can guide practice. Indeed, it has supported effective social justice teacher education pedagogies, principally focused on discomforting taken for granted beliefs and dispositions through challenge and inquiry. However, a determinate view of identity needs to be augmented by more complex understandings. This is in keeping with the broad agreement in the literature on teacher identity that it is dynamic as well as stable (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Day & Kington, 2008) contextual, relational, emotional, multiple and storied (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). The central concept we introduce to picture this complexity is that of striated and smooth (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) identity space, the psychosocial arena in which multiple identities are shaped and interrelate.

Research on teacher education beliefs and identity in relation to social justice has supported the development of two important pedagogical approaches: that of inquiry and of discomfort. A further argument we make is that when the indeterminate, more fluid aspects of identity are also considered, two other pedagogical stances are suggested, those of compassion and respect; compassion because the identity work needed to negotiate changing identity is uncomfortable and challenging, and respect because identity is rooted in personal histories and given that some of the underlying fixed positions are deeply held ethical positions. By engaging with these ethical stances a deeper dialogue about social justice may be enacted.

We present the argument as a discussion of literature and theory leading to a reconceptualization of social justice teacher identity, and then the illustration of this with a discussion of empirical data. However, the origins of this paper lie in practitioner research. The starting point was a desire by one of the authors – a mathematics teacher educator – to evaluate and understand the effects of his practice in relation to social justice, a practice informed by a pedagogy of discomfort and inquiry (Boylan, 2009). The initial outcomes of the research indicated that the fixed or determinate typologies that informed both the learning experience and the research design were inadequate for analysing the positions adopted by the participants.

We continue, below, by briefly discussing social justice in education to make explicit the understanding of social justice that informs both our analysis and the experience of the participants in the study. We then consider literature that implicitly or explicitly adopts a determinate view of identity in relation to social justice. We illustrate the meaning of a pedagogy of inquiry and discomfort through discussion of the research participants' course. Following this, a socio-cultural view of identity is outlined and the concept of striated and smooth identity space is introduced. To illustrate the application of this approach, we present outcomes of a study of beginning mathematics teachers' responses to the inclusion of issues of social justice in their programme. After outlining the methodology of the study, we focus on the positioning of four of these beginning teachers. This leads to arguing that it is important to balance discomfort and inquiry with a pedagogy of compassion and respect.

2. Social justice and social justice teacher identity

'Social justice' is an ambiguous and contested term and one that is often not defined or articulated clearly, particularly in relation to discussions of social justice in education (Cochran-Smith, 2009;

Gewirtz, 1998; Kapustka et al., 2009; North, 2006, 2008). When used in the context of teacher education it is particularly malleable with multiple meanings (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Kapustka et al., 2009). Moreover, much research and literature that is relevant to a broader concern with social justice focuses on or uses other descriptive terms. For example, in the US research may focus on 'teaching for diversity' or culturally responsive pedagogies, reflecting important issues in that country.

Our understanding of social justice is rooted in the importance of adopting both a distributive and relational perspective (Cochran-Smith, 2009; North, 2008) as well as recognising a participative dimension (Fraser, 2008). The distributive aspect points to the importance of equitable distribution of access to educational goods and to outcomes. Socially just relationality includes the recognition of, and respect for, social and cultural difference (Cochran-Smith, 2009), indeed other authors refer to this as recognitive justice (Mills, 2012). The participative dimension is concerned with the capacity and opportunity to actively participate in decision making (Fraser, 2008). Given that social justice (and injustice) is enacted in and through embodied relationships, attention must be given not only to the social and the macro issues – such as school organisation and societal outcomes – but also to the personal and the micro and the interplay between them (North, 2008). For beginning teachers, the focus may often be on the micro and the ways in which their own classrooms are sites in which more socially-just relationships and practices can be enacted (Boylan, 2009).

Writing in the context of the UK, Griffiths (2009) offers a philosophically rooted yet practical definition that emphasises social justice as action towards "mutual recognition and also on a right distribution of benefits and responsibilities", because recognition is related to changing identities, social justice "could never be achieved once and for all" as "any solutions are provisional" (p. 89).

Attention must be paid to 'social justice in education' – how principles are enacted in education, including the democratisation of classroom relationships – and to 'social justice from education', meaning the effects of education in the wider society such as how it can counter or ameliorate the reproduction of social and economic disadvantage and disconnection (Griffiths, 1998). Priorities for socially just actions will vary according to local context; for example, attainment grouping is an important issue for social justice in mathematics education in the UK but not in other contexts where existing practices are more equitable.

We use the term 'social justice identity' to discuss teachers' relationships to social justice beliefs and principles and their interrelationship with a range of issues. An important initial distinction to make is between identification and identity. One way of understanding a teacher's relationship to social justice is as an identification – an affinity identity (Gee, 2001) – a conscious and expressed commitment to social justice in teaching. This implies alignment with a particular set of beliefs and practice and also identification with other teachers for social justice. However, here we are concerned with a much broader meaning of social justice teacher identity, one that supposes all teachers and beginning teachers have a relationship to issues of social justice. This being so even if, for example, the main features of this are lack of awareness, a refusal to engage with, or dis-identification from, issues of social justice.

3. Beginning teachers, social justice and determinate identity

Research on social justice in teacher education has often focused on beginning teachers who have one of two polarised positions: committed or resistant. Some enter teacher education with, or subsequently develop, a strong commitment to social justice. We might describe these as social justice teachers whose identity

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