



## Review

Equity and social justice in teaching and teacher education<sup>☆</sup>

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## A B S T R A C T

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This essay presents a review on the theme of equity and social justice in teaching and teacher education based on articles published in TATE since its inception. It is a part of an initiative started by the current editors of TATE to “encourage us all to look backward to deepen our understandings of how earlier research has shaped our current research and the ways we can see the reverberations across the temporal span” (Clandinin & Hamilton, 2011, P. 2).

The selected articles (1) represent the work of researchers from several countries and different backgrounds across the years; (2) reflect the range of “differences” that constitute the “minorities, margins and misfits” in the educational “mainstream” (Currie, 2006); and (3) extend the inquiry beyond the extant work along some dimension, and grapple with the complexity of issues related to in/equity and social justice. The main themes that the authors have focused on include: understanding the nature and significance of educational inequities and the systemic practices and individual beliefs that, historically and currently, sustain these within and across different contexts. Their overarching concern is with preparing teachers and creating contexts to effect real change towards attaining a vision of a more just education and society.

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One of the many difficulties with ensuring educational equity in the creation of ‘schools for all’ relates to the preparation of teachers to meet the challenges of teaching in schools that are increasingly diverse.

Florian, 2009, P. 533

Becoming an effective teacher requires more than developing socio-political awareness and teaching skills, and understanding how children learn and develop. Moving from theory to practice also requires the courage to create schools that look very different from those we have now.

Kugelmass, 2000, P. 193

Much is being written about arguably the biggest challenge facing today’s teachers and teacher educators: how could schools be made to work effectively and equitably for *all* learners in ever more diverse classrooms. The long cherished promise of a better, more free and more just society through increasingly inclusive public education, albeit largely elusive, engaged educational imagination through much of the twentieth century. This vision, however, has

been eroded of late with the rise of neo-liberal ideologies that now dominate the educational discourse the world over (Apple, 2001; Freeman-Moir & Scott, 2007). The attendant ascendancy of standardized performance measures in schools, increased surveillance, control of curricula, and emphasis on efficiency, outcomes and skills in teacher education has profound effects on defining what counts as responsive or effective teaching, seriously undermining the educational responses to issues of equity and social justice (Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 2010).

These concerns are discernible in the articles published in *Teaching and Teacher Education* (TATE). The number of articles that explicitly deal with issues of equity and/or social justice has been on the increase in the last five to ten years. Thus a Scopus search yields over 300 articles relevant to these themes. However, meanings and categories are historically and contextually constructed. The terminology often undergoes nominal change with time even when the substantive content might be relatively stable. Therefore I decided to ‘leaf through’ the content pages of all the issues of TATE. Online access allowed me to browse through the abstracts at the same time. For days and weeks, I engaged in this wondrous task, imagining myself stationed in a library’s well-stocked journal section with light streaming through tall windows, not unlike the fantastic library at Northwestern University overlooking Lake Michigan where I spent innumerable joyous hours several decades ago.

<sup>☆</sup> This review also serves as the Editorial for the Teaching and Teacher Education Virtual Special Issue on Equity and Social Justice, available online at: <http://www.journals.elsevier.com/teaching-and-teacher-education/virtual-special-issues/virtual-special-issue-on-equity-and-social-justice/>.

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The result was, first, a reassurance to myself that I had searched as carefully as possible for all related articles before beginning the rather arduous task of selection. I started by making a long list of over 130 articles that seemed relevant. The list was then parsed into seven partially overlapping categories: Culturally responsive pedagogy, multicultural education in practice, anti-racist education/differential treatment, inclusive education, teacher beliefs/attitudes/conceptions, overarching/macro perspectives, and articles with explicit emphasis on social justice and/or equity in their titles and/or key terms. The number was whittled down through reading and re-reading of the articles to twenty, with additional 8 that could provide the broader context. This 'short list' was almost triple the size of the expected list. Further reading and re-reading, highlighting of main points, and attending to the location and time of the research undertaken helped in curtailing it to a manageable size. Still, many of the articles from the short list not included in the review below will get mentioned where appropriate.

Second, this exercise reminded me that TATE has a wealth of information, significant lacunas notwithstanding, on the pressing issues that bedevil teaching and teacher education currently, and that there is much to learn from its contents from years gone by, well beyond the review that I have crafted below. I hope that this review will entice the readers to explore further the treasure-trove of provocative ideas that is TATE.

The articles that I have decided to include in this review (1) represent the work of researchers from several countries and different backgrounds across the years (although the bulk of content for TATE continues to emanate from the USA); (2) reflect the range of "differences" that constitute the "minorities, margins and misfits" in the educational "mainstream" (Currie, 2006); (3) extend the inquiry beyond the extant work along some dimension, and grapple with the complexity of issues related to inequity and social justice.

Teaching and teacher education for social justice and equity is a moral and political undertaking. In addition to a fundamental concern for creating rich learning opportunities for all children, it entails engaging learners in critical thinking, caring about them and fostering relationships with them and their families and communities, getting to know their lives inside and outside the classroom, valuing and building on the experiences they bring with them into the classroom by making learning meaningful to their lives, noticing and challenging inequities and injustices that prevail in education and society, understanding and interrogating teachers' own positioning, beliefs and attitudes and their role in sustaining the status quo, and at individual and/or collective levels working with and for diverse learners to advocate for a more just and more equitable life chances for all students, to imagine and work for a more just society. This is not an exhaustive list by any count, but for me it captures the essence of what it means to teach for social justice and equity. It also signifies that all attempts at 'meeting the needs of diverse learners' are not necessarily informed by similar ideological positions, and further, that it is not an easy or simple task to effect the far-reaching changes at individual or systemic levels that are needed for such a transformative agenda of teacher education.

The articles in TATE mirror the on-going struggles for a better understanding of why and how does the extant situation vis-à-vis diverse learner populations prevail and sustain at various levels in teaching and teacher education, and what, if anything, can be done about it? The articles are arranged in a chronological order, without any claim to a linear progression, to indicate the subtly changing nature of the language used and the concerns that have occupied researchers across time. Often a review is followed by additional comments about other article/s that might be substantively related to the reviewed article. These comments are not chronological. I hope that the logic of such an arrangement will aid the reading of the review instead of detracting from it. The following questions

exemplify the kinds of issues addressed in this review, though it may be noted that most articles are usually concerned with more than one set of questions.

- *What is the nature of the problem and why is it significant? What systemic factors, historically and currently, sustain the inequities within and across different contexts?*
- *What beliefs/attitudes/perceptions do experienced and prospective teachers (teacher educators and supervision mentors, as well) bring to their work? How do these reflect and shape their own identities and working lives? How can teacher beliefs be assessed/ accessed? How stable are such beliefs?*
- *How can teacher educators go about preparing teachers who might be able and confident to effect real change towards attaining a vision of a more just education, and eventually, society?*

### 1. Cazden, C. B. Differential treatment in New Zealand: reflections on research in minority education, 1990, 6(4), 291–303

"Differential treatment" refers to unequal opportunities for participation in schools, of Māori children in this case, due to structural issues such as tracking or subtle differences in responses to children's participation by teachers.<sup>1</sup> For Cazden, it is not a neutral term, since it "suggests the special responsibility of educators – teachers, and those above them who shape the contexts within which children and teachers work" (P. 292). She makes the case that classroom talk or teacher student interactions is an "important site of inequalities". Cazden, draws on observational studies done by Marie Clay, a Pākehā researcher and one of her Māori students, Alice Kerin, in New Entrant classrooms to document the subtle differences in teacher–student interactions.<sup>2</sup> Teachers, particularly Pākehā teachers, invited non-Māori children more frequently to elaborate their thoughts or answers than Māori children. The finding was confirmed in different classrooms and different semesters, despite within teacher and among teacher variation.

In the wake of this research, Cazden undertook short-term in-service work with teachers in collaboration with a Māori colleague, Marie-Anne Selkirk and in consultation with local Māori, despite concerns about her 'outsider status' among many Māori. This seems to have coloured how she worked and reported her work with teachers. The largely Pākehā teachers were encouraged to become aware of their own responses to some topics that might be more familiar to or have different meanings for Māori children, and to bear in mind that Māori valued collaboration more than individualization and respectful silence more than fast paced replies to adult questioning. Further, in line with what I consider the 'cautious tone' of her work and the article, they were to be mindful of "the additional influences – at a higher level of nested contexts – of the composition of the school staff" (P. 299). This last point was meant to reflect the vociferous Māori concern about the necessity of acknowledging the significance of the historic injustices suffered by Māori for over a century at the hands of the Pākehā settlers. The caution is also apparent in her statement that although the "default position" for differential treatment is "institutional or structural racism", these terms were not used while working with the teachers.

However, there was little uptake of her suggestions among teachers or Māori educators as noticed by her on a subsequent visit

<sup>1</sup> Māori are the indigenous peoples of New Zealand/Aotearoa.

<sup>2</sup> Pākehā is the Māori term for New Zealanders of European descent. They came to New Zealand as immigrants, mostly from the UK, and now constitute the majority and the economically and politically dominant group in New Zealand. New Entrants refers to five year olds beginning school, on or immediately after their fifth birthdays.

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