Chapter 11
Bringing the Margins to the Forefront:
Exploring Social Justice and Identity With Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on content, pedagogy, and dispositions, individually and collectively, with preservice teachers contributes to understanding the intersectionality of identities and structural inequities. In this chapter, the authors describe their backgrounds as an entry point to teaching about social justice and identity in their courses. They share guiding theoretical perspectives used to ground their practice and build classroom communities with preservice teachers. The authors emphasize content, applied assignments, and activities to build an understanding of social justice and equity and bring students closer to understanding their life experiences and their impact when working with students and families. This chapter offers a means to bring the margins to the forefront in preservice teacher education to affect lasting change in how preparation can better address educational inequities in schools and communities.

INTRODUCTION

In our work with preservice teachers, we, Deborah and Heidi, have noticed a reticence to engage with topics of social justice and identities. These topics often raise a range of feelings and perspectives. They are familiar and easily observed. Students make their feelings and opinions known during class discussions, in online forums, and through course artifacts. Students' beliefs tend to be strongly held and surface

when reading about or discussing working class and marginalized students and families. Despite the challenges of engaging with these topics, they are important to consider, unpack, discuss, and analyze when preparing teachers to work with children and families.

The historical impact of marginalization calls for meaningful change to challenge the status quo. Despite the demographic shift in U.S. schools, the preponderance of teachers including those in urban schools are typically white, female, and often ill-prepared to work with diverse learners (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Sleeter, 2017). Zeichner (2019) explains that teacher preparation 1.0 focused on clinical practice, while 2.0 emphasized instructional strategies and classroom management with the aim of raising test scores. Although strategies, curricula, and materials are important, they must reflect a critical orientation and practice within a social justice framework (Nieto, 2011; Zeichner, 2019). Moreover, Zeichner and Nieto (2011) argue, and we agree, that teacher educators must prepare teachers to work with students' families, draw on community resources and expertise, and commit to practicing the values consistent with equity and social justice.

Preparing socially just minded teachers is inclusive and centered on the collective (see Milner, 2008; Sleeter 2017). Being inclusive is a matter of access that promotes community and belonging while honoring individuals' lived experiences (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019). As actions are socially, culturally, and historically mediated, inclusion as a means of social justice entails awareness of intersectional identities (Artiles et al., 2006). But defining inclusion and what it means for students, with and without disabilities, can be complicated especially in relation to social justice. To this end, Pugach et al. (2021) advance the following definition of social justice:

[It] embraces the complex, intersectional identities of individuals, and the rich histories of communities, in the redistribution of resources and educational opportunities for all students, through a transformative process that disrupts the marginalization of non-dominant social groups [emphasis in original]. (p. 238)

We situate Pugach et al.'s definition of social justice within Cochran-Smith's (2010) framework of social justice as a theory of practice, which "characterizes the relationship of teaching and learning, the nature of teachers' work, and the knowledge, strategies, and values that inform teachers' efforts for social justice" (p. 446). It is the *how* and *why* of developing a social justice mindset with the potential to impact both the present and the future.

To effect meaningful change, Zeichner (2019) calls for teacher educators and teacher education programs to demonstrate a commitment to social justice that elevates the voices of marginalized leaners and students with disabilities. Although these ideas are not new, they have not generated a continuous dialogue or solidarity among teacher educators who focus on diversity, disability, multi-cultural education, and social justice (Pugach et al., 2021). Creating a conversation that focuses on content, pedagogy, and dispositions, individually and collectively, can contribute to understanding the intersectionality of identities and structural inequities, overrepresentation in special education, and the persistence of deficit discourses and tropes (Artiles, 2022). Thus, to bring about transformative and *lasting* change, we approach instruction intentionality to provide the necessary depth and breadth and to raise awareness and build and deepen understanding about equity and justice (Arao, & Clemens, 2013; Francis et al., 2017; Kavanagh, & Danielson, 2020; Kinloch et al., 2021; McDonald, & Zeichner, 2009).

Transformational change in teacher education is rooted in discussion and reflection and includes taking action through purposeful practice (see Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). It involves curiosity and desire and grows over time through experience. Like O'Connor and Daniello (2019), we explicitly name

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