

11-22-2022

Preservice Teachers and Curricular Matters: A Reflection on Field Sites as Transformative Spaces

AnnMarie Dull
St. John's University, annmarie.dull19@stjohns.edu

Elizabeth Chase
St. John's University, chasee@stjohns.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/nwjte>



Part of the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Dull, AnnMarie and Chase, Elizabeth (2022) "Preservice Teachers and Curricular Matters: A Reflection on Field Sites as Transformative Spaces," *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 3 , Article 28.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15760/nwjte.2022.17.3.28>

This open access Article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). All documents in PDXScholar should meet [accessibility standards](#). If we can make this document more accessible to you, [contact our team](#).

Preservice Teachers and Curricular Matters: A Reflection on Field Sites as Transformative Spaces

Abstract

Field experiences are essential to teacher preparation and education, and they are enriched by strong community partnerships where preservice teachers build knowledge from mentor teachers, families, students, and other stakeholders. The influence that the neoliberal agenda has on education forces preservice teachers and the preparation programs they attend to make difficult decisions about creating and sustaining these field experiences. In this paper, we call attention to the difficulties preservice teachers—and the preparation programs they attend—face when seeking to challenge social injustice and curriculum epistemicide. In so doing, we end with ideas for future consideration and scholarly inquiry.

Keywords

Teacher education, Teacher preparation, Field experiences, Culturally relevant pedagogy, Culturally sustaining education

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Public education is not neutral (Popkowitz, 2018), neither is the decision about what knowledge is exchanged or developed in schools (González & Moll, 2002). Preservice teachers who are in the process of developing their identities as educators (Hammerness et al., 2005) are frequently caught between the expectations of the programs they attend and the systems, cultures, and expectations of the sites where they engage in fieldwork (Cochran-Smith, 2003). In growing numbers, teacher preparation programs are embracing critical and social justice pedagogies that honor various types of knowledge held by all members of the school community (Ladson-Billings, 2005), yet many public schools are still shaped by a neoliberal agenda that defines and values knowledge based on standardized exams and one-size-fits-all curricula (Giroux, 2012). So then, what are preservice teachers—and the preparation programs they attend—to do when their educational ideologies are in direct conflict with the practices at their field sites?

Reform and accountability movements that have dominated public school systems in recent decades have resulted in schools being subsumed by a neoliberal agenda, which brings with it standardized testing and curricula that deprofessionalize teachers while privileging knowledge and skills that further the neoliberal agenda (Giroux, 2017; Navarro, 2018). Curriculum is consequently narrowed (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Smith & Kovacs, 2011), resulting in “master scripts” that illuminate hegemonic conceptions of knowledge (Swartz, 1992) while silencing the voices of “the Othered” (Kumashiro, 2000). Evidence of this narrowing is visible in the current debates (which can also be described as vicious arguments) regarding the exploration of race, culture, bias, privilege, and positionality in our nation’s classrooms (Goldstein, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Schuessler, 2021).

A restricted agenda directly challenges critical pedagogical and anti-oppressive efforts to establish education as the “practice of freedom” (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994), where schools are situated as transformative sites that disrupt hegemonic systems (Freire, 1970; Kumashiro, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014). When fighting for education as the practice of freedom, members of the school community work together to overcome oppressive ideas, systems, and structures, and develop more equitable alternatives that are relevant and appropriate to the students and the school community (Freire, 1970; Kumashiro, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014). Further, members of the school community bring with them funds of knowledge (González & Moll, 2002; Moll et al., 1992) that are important to a person’s understanding of the world. Oftentimes, this knowledge is not accounted for or included in the majoritarian curriculum (Banks, 1993; Moll et al., 1992).

Many in-service teachers and school administrators grapple with this, finding creative solutions to navigate the restrictive standards and curricula and finding innovative ways to build on whatever existing curricular resources support the inclusion and foregrounding of diverse voices (Crocco & Costigan, 2007). However, this can be even more challenging for preservice teachers who must navigate their own values alongside those of their preparation programs and field sites. Many preservice teachers cite a desire to help students and make a positive contribution to society as reasons for entering the profession (Watt et al., 2012; Zeichner, 2017). Further, teacher preparation programs are showing an increased focus on social justice, culturally responsive and

sustaining education, and other critical pedagogical practices (Taylor, 2010). When those values are in contrast to what is in practice at the field site, how can teacher preparation programs help preservice teachers see opportunity and possibility for change within school systems when they have been socialized and educated to buy into the majoritarian narrative all along?

While field experience requirements differ across teacher preparation programs in the United States, the time spent accruing practicum hours is a common requirement (Ronfeldt et al., 2014). In several studies, preservice teachers have reported that the quality of those field experiences made them feel more prepared and increased their sense of self-efficacy (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2014). Those quality field experiences included opportunities for the preservice teachers to teach with autonomy, have guidance from their mentor teachers, and bridge theory and practice by employing teaching techniques they were learning in their preparation programs (Crocco & Costigan, 2007). In fact, some studies have shown that field sites can be transformative spaces for preservice teachers, their mentor teachers, and their students, when preservice teachers are welcomed as part of the school community (Zygmunt et al., 2018); when they are not, they have the potential to harm preservice teachers and potentially push them to leave the profession just as they are about to start (Watt et al., 2012).

We call attention to these difficulties, as they not only perpetuate the epistemicide supported by the neoliberal agenda in schools, but they also influence how preservice and new teachers enter the profession. We stand with others in affirming that schools can be sites for struggle or transformation (Giroux, 2020), where members of the school community—including preservice teachers—collaboratively examine the curriculum and find ways to include counter-hegemonic knowledge from multiple historical perspectives, including knowledge that students and their communities contribute (Paraskeva, 2016). We believe that further research is required in this area, such as examining ways to align teacher preparation programs to field sites that embody similar transformative values. We posit that there is great possibility when preservice teachers, their preparation programs, and their field sites all believe that classrooms can be spaces where “all voices can be heard because all students are free to speak, knowing their presence will be recognized and valued” (hooks, 1994, p. 186). In this vision, all members of the school community are better equipped to disrupt hegemonic knowledge and affirm that all members of its community contribute to the development of knowledge.

References

- Banks, J. A. (1993). The canon debate, knowledge construction, and multicultural education. *Educational Researcher*, 22(5), 4-14. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X022005004>
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2003). Learning and unlearning: The education of teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(1), 5-28. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(02\)00091-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00091-4)

- Crocco, M. S., & Costigan, A. T. (2007). The narrowing of curriculum and pedagogy in the age of accountability: Urban educators speak out. *Urban Education*, 42, 542–535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085907304964>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury.
- Giroux, H. A. (2012). *Education and the crisis of public values: Challenging the assault on teachers, students, and public education*. Peter Lang.
- Giroux, H. A. (2017). Critical theory and educational practice. In A. Darder, R. D. Torres, & M. P. Baltodano (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (3rd ed.) (pp. 31–55). Routledge.
- Giroux, H. A. (2020). *On critical pedagogy*. Bloomsbury.
- Goldstein, D. (18 March, 2022). Opponents call it the ‘Don’t Say Gay’ bill. Here’s what it says. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/18/us/dont-say-gay-bill-florida.html>
- González, N., & Moll, L. C. (2002). Cruzando el puente: Building bridges to funds of knowledge. *Educational Policy*, 16(4), 623–641. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904802016004009>
- Hammerness, K., Darling-Hammond, L., & Bransford, J. (2005). How teachers learn and develop. In L. Darling-Hammond, J. Bransford, P. LePage, K. Hammerness, & H. Duffy (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 358–389). Jossey-Bass.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Kumashiro, K. K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 25–53. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1170593>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095183998236863>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). Is the team all right? Diversity and teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 56(3), 229–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105275917>
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104>
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849209543534>
- Navarro, O. (2018). We can’t do this alone: Validating and inspiring social justice teaching through a community of transformative praxis. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 48(3), 335–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2018.1468212>
- Paraskeva, J. M. (2016). Epistemicides: Toward an itinerant curriculum theory. In J. M. Paraskeva & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Curriculum: Decanonizing the field* (pp. 261–289). Peter Lang AG.

- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 85-10. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.9821873k2ht16m77>
- Popkewitz, T. S. (Ed.). (2018). *The formation of school subjects: The struggle for creating an American institution*. Routledge.
- Ronfeldt M. & Reininger, M. (2012). More or better student teaching? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, 1091-1106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.06.003>
- Ronfeldt, M., Schwartz, N., & Jacob, B.A. (2014). Does preservice preparation matter? Examining an old question in new ways. *Teachers College Record*, 116(10), 1-46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811411601002>
- Schuessler, J. (9 November, 2021). Bans on critical race theory threaten free speech, advocacy group says. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/08/arts/critical-race-theory-bans.html>
- Smith, J. M., and Kovacs, P. E. (2011). The impact of standards-based reform on teachers: The case of “No Child Left Behind.” *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 17(2), 201-225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.539802>
- Swartz, E. (1992). Emancipatory narratives: Rewriting the master script in the school curriculum. *Journal of Negro Education*, 61, 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2295252>
- Taylor, R. W. (2010). The role of teacher education programs in creating culturally competent teachers: A moral imperative for ensuring the academic success of diverse student populations. *Multicultural Education*, 17(3), 24-28.
- Watt, H. M. G., Richardson, P. W., Klusman, U., Kunter, M., Beyer, B., Trautwein, U., & Baumert, J. (2012). Motivations for choosing teaching as a career: An international comparison using the FIT-Choice scale. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(6), 791-805. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.03.003>
- Zeichner, K. (2017). *Competition, economic rationalization, increased surveillance, and attacks on diversity: Neo-liberalism and the transformation of teacher education in the US*. Routledge.
- Zygmunt, E., Cipollone, K., Tancock, S., Clausen, J., Clark, P., Mucherach, W. (2018). Loving out loud: Community mentors, teacher candidates, and transformational learning through a pedagogy of care and connection. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 69(2), 127-139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487117751640>