

# **Teacher Education and Practice**

**The Journal of the Texas Association  
of Colleges of Teacher Education**

## EDITORIAL POLICY

*Teacher Education and Practice*, a peer-refereed journal, is dedicated to the encouragement and the dissemination of research and scholarship related to professional education. The journal is concerned, in the broadest sense, with teacher preparation, practice and policy issues related to the teaching profession, and learning in the school setting. The journal also serves as a forum for the exchange of diverse ideas and points of view within these purposes. As a forum, the journal offers a public space in which to critically examine current discourse and practice and engage in generative dialogue. Alternative forms of inquiry and representation are invited, and authors from a variety of backgrounds and diverse perspectives are encouraged to contribute.

The journal spans the boundaries of professional education in conventional and unconventional ways to offer multiple perspectives of teacher education and practice that seek to move beyond more traditional views of professional education. The journal is interested in manuscripts that explore the relationship between professional education and

- social justice, equity, caring, and democracy;
- challenges of teaching in preK–12 schools—public and private;
- state and federal policy;
- growing diversity—racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural;
- sociohistorical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical contexts of teaching;
- changing role of professional education in the larger context of a changing society;
- innovative and compelling ideas related to preparation and practice; and
- alternative approaches to the inquiry and understanding of how teachers learn.

Relatedly, manuscript submissions that *Teacher Education and Practice* accepts may include

- expositions;
- research reports—applied and basic research studies;
- policy position statements as well as analyses of the implications of existing policy;
- conversations or interviews—solicited and invited;
- creative writings that illuminate important innovative issues through alternative approaches; and
- book reviews and review essays—single-book reviews and multiple-book review essays.

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# Civic Engagement: A Tool for Building Democracy

JOSE ZAPATA CALDERON

 More than ever, there is a need to build a society that is inclusive of many voices, that allows for democratic decision making, and that opens the doors for our diverse communities to be involved in and knowledgeable about the issues they are facing. Teacher education can serve such a role, but presently, there is the reality of a top-down authoritarian trend that is being forced on our school systems. To turn this trend around will take the courage and energy of educators to promote and create prototypes of a type of learning based on creating democratic spaces of engagement in the classroom, in the community, and in the larger society.

With the growth of a global economy, there is the need for a type of educational system that promotes civic engagement as a means of building new models toward a democratic society. Our present educational system, unfortunately, is going back to the days of reproducing individuals to fit a more authoritarian philosophy. The norm is to move toward a managerial “banking” system, where the power of disseminating knowledge is being transferred to the needs of the business and political establishments. This shift fits into the early 20th-century industrial model of schools where students were socialized in assembly-like rows to be taught the status quo and not to be heard from. With the promotion of standardized tests and quantitative methods that evaluate the performances of teachers and students, there is a diminishing of the space for the creation of democratic bridges between the classroom (and what is being learned therein) and the challenges of democratic decision making in our communities. This trend is characterized by the growth of charter schools and for-profit companies who are redefining the meaning of education. Rather than tapping the passionate reason why so many college graduates become teachers, this trend vilifies teachers and forces many to turn away from the educational world as a career. Instead of an educational system where the teachers are students and the students are teachers, the trend is to position the teachers as the “experts and subjects” and the students as mere “objects” whose minds are to be filled with the wisdom of authors chosen by

others and by teachers approved or ratified by top-down bureaucratic administrators, politicians, and so-called choice corporate interests.


With so many problems being faced by our society, there is the opportunity for our schools and colleges to play a role in advancing new forms of research, learning, and practice that can help engage our teachers, faculty, and students in critical thinking and problem solving to find solutions to those problems. This type of learning will help develop a citizenry and a leadership in the future that is more engaged and excited about participating in making the future society. There are all types of studies that show how much students benefit from connecting their learning in the classroom to community engagement: Not only do their grades improve, but they develop principles of collectivity that go against the grain of individualism. Such engagement also enhances their skills in working with diverse populations, taking leadership, creating new knowledge, and formulating solutions to real-world problems.

There is a tendency in our schools to focus on a type of service engagement that is separated from having students learn about the foundations of the social issues and problems they are working on. If this aspect is dominant, a type of civic engagement can be advanced that serves merely to perpetuate the inequalities that are already prevalent. Without an education that looks at the systemic and structural foundations of social problems, students are taught the symptoms of the problems, instead of understanding the character of the structure that is placing individuals in those conditions. Involving students only in charity work may have the reverse effect of creating a form of what is incorrectly called “community engagement” work that results in creating spaces that are the opposite of creating a more democratic and just society.

The type of teaching that is needed in this contemporary period is one where there is a passion for creating spaces of equity; where students are exposed to a curriculum that not just deals with the problems in the society but looks at the systemic and structural aspects of inequity; that brings to center stage the contributions of communities who have historically been excluded from our textbooks (because of poverty, racism, sexism, classism, or homophobia); and that involves students working alongside excluded communities on common projects to implement transformative social change.

Rather than a traditional monocultural education where the students learn very little about the contributions of the diverse mosaic that comprises the people of this country, our educational system needs to support a multicultural learning environment in which differences are embraced (not just tolerated). In this context, our institutions do need to appreciate our historical pluralism. But there is no getting around the reality that U.S. pluralism had its origins in laws and ideologies that were used to justify the stratification of different groups through conquest, slavery, and exploitation. If we do not absorb and appreciate this aspect of history in all its manifestations, there is the danger that we will maintain a society that blames the victim for his or her lack of social mobility.

Rather than frontally assaulting the national dilemma of restructuring the economy with policies that invest in education and development, energy has been diverted toward seeking someone to blame. In the debate over the state of our educational system, many taxpayers have been led to believe that the issue is only about the quality of our teachers and not about the structural inequities that many of our underrepresented students and their families confront everyday in their communities.

As we seek to develop models of civic engagement in teacher education, it is important for us to look toward new ways of carrying out democratic forms of learning and curriculum building in our classrooms that connect to new models of building democratic participation in our communities. Our beginning to dialogue on these new models may help us to understand how the engagement of our school/campus and community partnerships can move beyond top-down bureaucratic structures of volunteerism (or charity) to a level of civic engagement that advances a more democratic and socially just culture in civil society. 



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