

Critical Teacher Education and the Politics of Teacher Accreditation: Are We Practicing What We Preach?

Brittany Aronson and Ashlee Anderson

The University of Tennessee, USA

Abstract

With this article, we challenge the successful implementation of critical perspectives in an increasingly neoliberal and neoconservative educational climate. Although many teacher education programs challenge teachers to be critical and to empower students, current top-down accountability practices and policy mandates do not allow teachers the freedom to do so. Are we just setting teachers up to fail? Through our analyses of teacher accreditation practices in the United States, we highlight examples of the contradictory measures set through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to prepare teachers for diverse populations. We question why social foundations of education and multicultural education, both disciplines that we believe capable of forming critically conscious teachers, are not more prevalent in teacher education programs. In a climate where critique becomes insubordination, we argue for spaces of resistance in both teacher preparation programs and in the classroom.

Keywords: teacher education, critically conscious teachers, social foundations of education, multicultural education, NCATE

The U.S. has witnessed dramatic changes in the ways in which its teachers are educated and initiated into our increasingly diverse classrooms. Currently, the educational climate is largely informed by neoliberal reform trends that seek to introduce “market forces” into the education sector. In theory, the market would act as the ultimate arbiter of success largely through the provision of school choice, wherein consumers, such as parents are given the freedom to choose the schools where they will enroll their children. This provision would effectively open the public sector to the kind of competition that will presumably yield the commonsensical benefits of accountability, academic excellence, a rationally organized system of schooling, and innovation befitting the unique needs of different student populations who are being under-served by the current system (Ellison, 2012). In addition to

fundamentally altering the institution of public schooling, the concept of the “educational marketplace” is having a significant impact on teacher education. Traditional preparation programs are being forced to compete with alternative certification routes and private-sector training organizations, like Teach For America,¹ that are having a good deal of success in creating new definitions of what it means to be an “effective” teacher. The success of these alternatives is due in no small part to the narratives of educational under-performance that so permeate popular discourse (Ellison, 2012). Because our students are perceived as being ill equipped to compete in the global economy, our teachers, and ultimately our teacher education programs, must be doing something wrong (Cohen, 2010).

Within this discursive landscape, however, also exist narratives of equity that detail the belief that not all students are being adequately served by our educational institutions. The accountability systems called for by current reform trends reveal an achievement gap (or is it just a gap in standardized test performance?) between white, predominantly middle-class students and their poor and/or non-white peers (Anyon, 1981; Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Public schooling, therefore, being the “great equalizer,” has an obligation to provide all students with access to a quality education, regardless of their individual backgrounds (Schrag, 2010, p. 355). However, colleges of education do not always provide our future teachers with the coursework needed to address the realities of our country’s increasingly diverse classrooms.² Although the benefits of culturally responsive pedagogies, curricula, and interpersonal relationships for targeted students have been extensively documented (Delpit, 1996; Gay, 2010; Goodwin, 2002; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Meiners, 2007; Michie, 1999; Mihsuah, 2003; Olson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999), current teacher education programs are losing the very social foundations of education³ (hereafter, SFE) programs that expose future teachers to the kinds of critical perspectives that have the power to transform both teaching practice and student outcomes (Butin, 2005). Are we just setting teachers up to fail?

With this article, we challenge the successful implementation of critical perspectives⁴ in an increasingly neoliberal and neoconservative educational climate. Through our analysis of teacher education as it is defined in the policy mandates of The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), we highlight examples of the impossible expectations set for teachers. Although we consistently argue for the benefits of critically conscious educators who engage in reflective practice, our accreditation policies, as well as

the policies that inform classroom praxis, disallow the successful implementation of a critical pedagogy. The reality is that those who speak up are at risk of losing their jobs.⁵ In a climate where critique becomes insubordination, educators must be very careful with the ways in which they challenge their students to question the status quo. As such, the underlying goal of this article is to locate those spaces of resistance where teachers do have opportunities to engage in the kind of critical praxis that has the capacity to create more excellent and equitable schools.

We begin our discussions with a brief description of our commitments to postcritical ethnography, a framework that seeks to critique the status quo while still problematizing the demands of objectivity (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004), after which we outline the “synthetic mode of philosophic inquiry” that has informed our analyses of current teacher education trends (Ellison, 2012). These perspectives allow us the space with which to engage the contradictions that we identified in our research, all the while recognizing the limitations of our positional, and so ultimately partial, interpretations. Next, we describe the educational climate in the U.S. in an attempt to trace the development of neoliberal and neoconservative reform trends that have informed teacher education practices, paying particular attention to the demands of external accrediting bodies and how those define “good teaching.” Here, we consider the ways in which current reforms are dramatically altering the institution of public schooling, as well as the teacher preparation programs whose graduates will soon work within this landscape. Although these particular trends represent the dominant discourse concerning education policy, these discussions are not intended to present a monolithic standard of reform. Rather, we aim to provide our readers with a contextual framework with which to engage in the larger debates surrounding teacher education. We then examine popular and policy documents that outline the specifics of teacher certification requirements, highlighting the ways in which our discursive representation of the normative goals of teacher education contradicts the concrete materiality of teacher training programs. We then consider the implications of this dynamic and often conflicting movement to police our teachers, concluding with a discussion of the transformative potential of professional development programs with social justice initiatives. We do so in an attempt to provide both policymakers and practitioners alike with an accessible platform with which to engage in conversations about the dangers of these contradictions so that they may, as we have tried to do, work to bridge the gap between what is and what should be in U.S. classrooms.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The arguments presented in this paper are largely informed by our commitments to postcritical ethnography. This framework seeks to “couple a critical perspective about the ways power constructs our social life through structures, discourses, and practices with a poststructural perspective that critiques claims of objectivity” (Anders, 2011, p. 531). This commitment demands that we: 1) acknowledge and investigate the ways in which our positionalities inform and construct our interpretations; 2) embrace the practice of recursive reflexivity, wherein we continuously critique both circuits of power and ourselves as critics; 3) recognize the risks and limitations of objectivity claims; and 4) problematize our representations, which are ultimately partial and positional (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). As such, we work to write against ourselves, all the while acknowledging the impossibility of this task (Noblit, 1999). While one of us has experienced a traditional teacher training program, the other was an alternatively certified classroom teacher. We are both raced white and so privileged, gendered female and so targeted, classed with limited material wealth despite status through education, and committed to progressive politics. We work at the intersection of various identities, all of which inform the analyses that we include here. We worry about the implications of current reform trends and the restrictions often placed on pedagogy. As a result, we seek to critique and re-envision the rhetoric surrounding teacher education.

The analyses included herein have largely been informed by our use of Ellison’s “synthetic mode of philosophic inquiry” that embraces a critical discourse analysis (Ellison, 2012, p. 120). To highlight the contradictions manifested in what we say about effective teaching and what we allow in practice through teacher preparation, our analyses aim to treat the concept of teacher education from three related standpoints (definition, division, and synthesis). We begin with an examination of teacher education as a whole and normalized concept that has been defined in national policy debates. To do so, we examine the evolution of NCATE, the major accrediting agency in the U.S, and its various policy stipulations related to the specifics of effective teaching. Next, we seek to explore through our collection of empirical research the efficacy of policies and legal mandates designed to meet the criteria outlined by NCATE. We do so in order to establish the extent to which current reforms are consistent with the goals and commitments of this national accrediting body. We then seek to assess the concept of teacher education as it is currently defined in light of the empirical research that we discussed in the second stage. This third stage allows us the space to “present the subject of

inquiry as mediated moments in dynamic relations; inter-dependent and mutually constituted” (Ellison, 2010, p. 60). According to Ellison (2012):

A synthetic mode of analysis provides theorists with a tool for positioning themselves within the contradictions and disjunctures of a dynamic social reality ‘as an element of the contradiction and raises this element to a principle of politics and action’ (Gramsci 1996, 195). It is a philosophical perspective that takes as its principle task a critical engagement with the normative ideals and issues animating contemporary society so as to establish the necessary preconditions for the reconciliation of societal practices to their normative grounding. A synthetic mode of analysis provides researchers with a tool for engaging the *nomos* animating contemporary debates over education policy to establish the contradictions and disjunctures immanent in their conceptual frameworks and to establish the necessary preconditions for their transformative negation. (p. 121)

We are hopeful that this mode of inquiry will help us to establish a new discourse regarding critical perspectives in the classroom, to highlight the contradictions manifested in what we say about effective teaching and what we allow in practice, and to redefine what is possible in teacher education.

The Educational Climate

Neoliberal and Neoconservative Reform

The U.S. has witnessed countless reform movements since its establishment of public education. Today, market-based reforms that can be traced to the publication of *A Nation at Risk* and the Reagan revolution animate the politics of education and schooling. A bi-partisan alliance has emerged in American politics that seeks to introduce “market forces” into the education sector with a healthy supply of charter schools, vouchers, standards, and high-stakes assessment (Chubb, 2003; Hess, 2002, 2006; Hess and Finn, 2007; NCEE, 2006; Smith and Peterson, 2007; Walberg and Bast, 2003; Wilson, 2007). Current reformers have been rather successful in their push to implement these reforms largely by connecting globalization and economic competition with educational under-performance and, subsequently, ideas associated with the achievement gap and narratives of equity (Ellison, 2012). Although a growing body of literature that seeks to challenge the quasi-privatization of public schooling has detailed the destructive outcomes of current trends (Boyles, 2011; Ellison, 2012), policymakers have yet to concede that these market-based reforms are having an overwhelmingly negative impact on our ability to create more equitable schools. It would appear as if the common sense normativity of these reforms is eclipsing their practical materiality.

In a similar vein, current policy initiatives have largely embraced the neoconservative ideals of the New Right, which, according to Gillborn (1997), emphasize “a culturalist construction of the nation as a (threatened) haven for white (Christian) traditions and values” (as cited in Apple, 2004, p. 16). Beginning with the publication of *A Nation At Risk*, reformers began to discursively construct a utopic and, at least partially, mythologized national past that was at one time “safe, domesticated, and progressive” (that is, leading toward social and personal improvement as opposed to a political philosophy) but has since become “threatening, estranged, and regressive” (McCulloch, 1997, p. 80). In so doing, reformers created the very reimaged ideal, against which they were able to judge, and ultimately condemn, the perceived inadequacies of the present system and because of which reform was necessary (Apple, 2004). What’s more, this utopic vision of our educational past has provided the space for many reformers to villainize the commitments of progressivism, a pedagogical movement that was perceived as guiding policy debates at the time (Hirsch, 1996). Because our system of schooling was discursively labeled as ineffective, reformers were able to legitimize their belief that “only by tightening control over curriculum and teaching (and students, of course), restoring ‘our’ lost traditions, and making education more disciplined and competitive, as they are certain it was in the past, can we have effective schools” (Apple, 2004, p. 17). In effect, reformers discursively constructed the very “problem” that they aimed to solve in a process that successfully redefined the educational realm in ways that have had a lasting impact on the institutional framework of schooling and the interpersonal dynamics of students and teachers.

Content Knowledge vs. Pedagogy

Within this dynamic and often contested educational terrain, future teachers are being initiated into our increasingly diverse classrooms. Despite a growing consensus that teachers matter, questions concerning the extent to which teacher preparation makes a difference and, more importantly, what type of knowledge should be favored, such as knowing *how* to teach versus knowing *what* to teach, continue to enjoy prominent positions in the education debate in America. Today, the establishment of *quantifiable*, data-driven results that *prove* student achievement is the eminent concern of policymakers. Because content knowledge is more easily measured than the specific pedagogical techniques that impact student outcomes, an increased emphasis on content knowledge over pedagogy permeates policy decisions. However, we assert there is much more to teaching and learning than the numerical data we attach to children. On this point, we agree with Biesta (2007): “We need to expand our views

about the interrelations among research, policy, and practice in order to keep in view the fact that education is a thoroughly moral and political practice, one that needs to be subject to continuous democratic contestation and deliberation” (p. 6). A teacher’s critical consciousness is not easy to “measure,” nor is it easy to determine its effect on student achievement, but this does not mean that it has no merit. Credible research detailing the importance of pedagogy on student success, especially in the instruction of diverse student populations, *does* exist, but it is not as commonly linked to standardized tests scores (Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2011). Unfortunately, policymakers and educators do not always see eye to eye on this point, and the research on teacher quality is often ambiguous (Kaplan & Owings, 2003). In order to address these realities, we need to expand our perceptions of effective teaching to include pedagogy, as well as content knowledge, starting with our teacher preparation programs.

A Broken Record: The Age Old Debate in Teacher Education

Throughout the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (hereafter, NCLB), the link between teacher quality and student achievement became a hot-topic of research and debate. Rodney Paige, the Secretary of Education at the time, expressed his view that teacher preparation was of little value to the task of *leaving no child behind*. Critiquing the fact that 62% of teachers held a degree in the *inferior* field of education rather than subject-specific areas, he argued in the first report to Congress on teacher quality that “our system allows too many poorly qualified individuals into the classroom while creating barriers for the most talented candidates” (p. 12). For Paige, this was especially problematic because *his research*⁶ suggested that students with education degrees were not as “academically accomplished” as graduates from other University programs (United States Department of Education, 2002, p. 13). If “academically accomplished” meant gaining a degree in a subject area over a degree in educational theory, then, according to Paige’s assertions, only 38% of our teaching force was adequate at that time. Therefore, NCLB was needed to correct the *problem* of under-performing teachers. Paige’s solution was simple: less teacher preparation and more business-like models that would attract desirable candidates. He states:

Alternate routes to certification, as opposed to the traditional routes offered by colleges of education, streamline the process of certification to move qualified candidates into the classroom on a fast-track basis. Interested individuals must pass the same certification or licensure exams as their traditionally certified peers, but many of the other requirements—

coursework in education philosophy or methods, pedagogy, practice teaching, etc.—are often shortened or waived entirely. (pp. 14-15)

With NCLB's focus on standardization and accountability, content area became the source of teacher quality assessments. As a result, the perceived under-performance of teachers in content area preparation meant that teacher education programs must have been doing something wrong. So, accreditation standards began to change from a focus on teaching and pedagogy to a focus on content and mastery.

The Path to Certification

The late 1960s and 70s represent a defining moment in America's educational evolution. The passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 demonstrated a more acute focus on equity and access in schools. Several SFE scholars formed the Council for Learned Societies in Education (CLSE), an organization committed to the historical, philosophical, and sociological foundations of schooling directly related to equity. When NCATE revised its accreditation standards in the early 1980s, CLSE representatives were asked to give input regarding SFE. In 2004, however, the CLSE was unable to raise adequate funds to pay dues and, therefore, was dropped from NCATE membership entirely (Dottin, Jones, & Simpson, 2005, p. 245). In its absence, NCATE continued to set standards for accreditation.

Although NCATE was established in 1954, it was not until 1995 that schools of education hastily began to seek NCATE certifications due to growing accountability demands. At that time, the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education recognized NCATE as the leading accrediting organization in higher education. To date, NCATE accredits 632 colleges of education, while another 78 are seeking accreditation (The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2012). In order to achieve accreditation, institutions must meet national professional standards and provide evidence of competent teacher candidate performance. NCATE's mission statement reads:

NCATE is the teaching professional's organization to help establish high quality teacher, specialist, and administrator preparation. Through the process of professional accreditation of schools, colleges and departments of education, NCATE works to make a difference in the quality of teaching, teachers, school specialists and administrators. NCATE believes every student deserves a caring, competent, and highly qualified teacher. (The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2012, para. 1)

Although many institutions do not pursue NCATE accreditation, opting instead to seek accreditation through the state, the *prestige* attached to the organization often leaves other institutions no choice but to model similar accreditation practices (Kumashiro, 2008, p. 54). Ultimately, NCATE enjoys a monopoly on teacher education accreditation, making it rather difficult to train future teachers in a manner inconsistent with NCATE standards of performance.

In the 2008 Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Institutes, NCATE revised its goals and objectives to align with the belief that all children can and should learn. The rhetoric of “high-quality” teaching was widely adopted in popular and political discourse, and so became the driving goal for students graduating from NCATE accredited colleges. Acknowledging America’s ever-changing society and inherent need for “highly-qualified” teachers, NCATE states:

Today’s society needs a workforce that can apply knowledge, reason analytically, and solve problems. At the same time, American society is becoming more diverse, with students in classrooms drawn from many cultures and ethnic groups. Preparing teachers to teach all students to meet society’s demands for high performance has created a new agenda for educators and policymakers. (p. 3)

In addition, NCATE claims to accredit institutions that:

1. Ensure that new teachers attain the necessary content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge and skills to teach both independently and collaboratively
2. Ensure that all new administrators and other professional specialists attain the knowledge and skills to create a supportive environment for student learning
3. Administer multiple assessments in a variety of forms, engage in follow-up studies, and use the results to determine whether candidates meet professional standards and whether graduates can teach so that students learn
4. Commit to preparing teachers for a diverse community of students
5. Prepare candidates who can integrate technology into instruction to enhance student learning
6. Encourage collegiality, reflective practice, continuous improvement, and collaboration among educators, learners, and families; and

7. View teacher preparation and development as a continuum, moving from pre-service preparation to supervised beginning practice to continuing professional development (pp. 3-4)

What's more, teachers just graduating from accredited institutions should be able to:

1. Help all pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade (P-12) students learn
2. Teach to P-12 student standards set by specialized professional associations and the states
3. Explain instructional choices based on research-derived knowledge and best practice
4. Apply effective methods of teaching students who are at different developmental stages, have different learning styles, and come from diverse backgrounds
5. Reflect on practice and act on feedback; and
6. Be able to integrate technology into instruction effectively (p. 4).

In addition to these responsibilities, NCATE sets professional standards for P-12 (pre-school through grade 12) preparation programs and determines who meets them. The organization asserts that by holding schools of education accountable, teacher candidates will exhibit the characteristics of a "highly qualified" teacher, and so will be well prepared to enter the classroom.

Practicing What We Preach?

The "Dangerous" Phrase: Social Justice

Prior to the 2008 revision of NCATE's Professional Standards, the 2005 version⁷ described ideal educator dispositions as, "guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice" (as cited in Heybach, 2009, p. 235). With this amended version, however, the new standards redefined professional dispositions to read: "Professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development" (Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Institutes, 2008, pp. 89-90). As a result, the definition of accepted professional dispositions changed from reflective and deliberative ideals to something more observable, something that could be *calculated*. Of course, many teachers and teacher educators were unhappy with the new stipulations. NCATE responded to the push back, stating that it "does not expect or require institutions to inculcate candidates with any particular social or political ideology" (Kumashiro, 2008, p. 54). Apparently, promoting social justice interfered with NCATE's mission to "to make a

difference in the quality of teaching, teachers, school specialists and administrators” (Mission Statement, 2012). But really, we ask, what is so *dangerous* about social justice? Why did NCATE react so drastically?

In 2006, when NCATE met with the U.S. Department of Education’s National Advisory Committee (known as NACIQI or Paige’s Administration), it sought to reauthorize its standing as the primary accrediting agency. NCATE had previously received word that the term “social justice” would be challenged by other organizations in attendance.⁸ Several of these organizations had released statements linking the language of social justice to the promotion of “political ideology” (Heybach, 2009, p. 235). So, when Sally L. Stroup, Assistant Secretary for Post-Secondary Education, agreed that the use of the term social justice warranted explanation, NCATE worried about losing its position as the main accrediting agency if it did not act accordingly. As a result, the term was removed from the document (National Association of Scholars, 2006). In an online post on October 15, 2010, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) *bragged* about this “escape” from “ideological indoctrination”:

Readers of this page may recall that NAS has also sparred with such ideologically skewed teacher certification standards. While these criteria may have been enforced locally by schools of education, they ultimately emanated from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the principal national accreditor of teacher education programs in the United States. In November of 2005, we wrote to then Assistant Secretary for Post Secondary Education Sally Stroup to argue that enforcement of “social justice”—among the “dispositions” NCATE required its client schools to select—effectively imposed a specific ideological viewpoint on education school students. This, we contended, unavoidably implicated the U.S. Department of Education in potentially major violations of these students’ First Amendment rights, in view of NCATE’s status as a federally-authorized accrediting body. (Rickets, 2010, para. 2)

Concerned over the negative media NCATE might receive from social justice advocates (Therese Quinn, Adienne Dixon, Bill Ayers to name a few), a press release explained the organization’s view on the issue:

We recognize the existence of an unacceptable achievement gap based on race, ethnicity, disability/exceptionality and socioeconomic status. The gap is exacerbated by some children being assigned well-prepared teachers and other children being assigned unprepared and under-prepared teachers. Closing the achievement gap requires that all children be educated by teachers and other professional personnel who meet rigorous professional standards. We

renew our commitment to social justice in schooling for all children by demanding well-prepared educators for all children. (para.7)

In an attempt to avoid confrontation with social justice advocates, NCATE was able to pay lip service to the cause, while at the same time limiting requirements for coursework related to such stipulations. Additionally, it has placed the blame on teachers rather than taking responsibility for not requiring preparation to work with diverse student populations in teacher education programs. Without a commitment to social justice in our preparation programs, how will we ever encourage teachers to be the *change agents* we hear so much about? Do we even want teachers to be *change agents*?⁹ Do we want our students to think critically, question the status quo, challenge dominant ideologies? According to our teacher education coursework, the answer is a resounding “NO.”

Social Foundations of Education and Multicultural Learning

The classrooms into which teachers are being initiated often represent diversities largely unaccounted for by the candidates who populate our teaching force. According to Maxine Greene (1992), “there have always been newcomers in this country; there have always been strangers. There have always been young persons in our classrooms we did not, could not see or hear” (p. 13). Greene, here, speaks of a pluralism that has produced “unimaginable diversities” in our country (p. 13). In order to reconcile these diversities with the expanded sense of community that they make possible, we must heed the multiplicity of voices, once silenced, through “concrete engagements” (p. 13). For educators whose classrooms more often than not reflect such “unimaginable diversities,” these points become particularly salient. They are charged with the task of motivating and inspiring students in a manner that is inclusive of their individual backgrounds, learning styles, or interests. However, as mentioned above, many teacher education programs do not always provide adequate training in the implementation of this type of culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Butin (2005), who looks at how, and why SFE matters in teacher education programs, “SFE matters because it provides teachers with the opportunity to understand such cultural mismatches and their attendant implications for students’ academic engagement, acceptance of the achievement ideology, social and cultural capital, and home-school relations,” (p. 220). In order for teacher candidates to develop the kind of critical consciousness necessary to engage a diverse population of students, they need exposure to historical, social, philosophical, and political foundations of education.

But how much SFE coursework is really present in today's teacher education programs?

Heybach (2009) states:

Recent trends in education which value technocratic and quantifiable aspects of education has led to the marginalization of philosophy of education, social justice education, critical pedagogy, and any other project that does not explicitly stay within the paradigm of NCLB. Assessment, accountability, standards, and the production of teachers and students that can meet the prescribed adequate yearly progress has significantly shifted the conversation away from education and instead rests firmly on notions of schooling. (pp. 237-238)

The closest SFE institutional goal endorsed by NCATE is to *commit to preparing teachers for a diverse community of students*. The Professional Standards (2008) state, "This goal requires educators who can reflect multicultural and global perspectives that draw on the histories, experiences, and representations of students and families from diverse populations" (p. 36). However, there is no mention of the use of culturally relevant pedagogies, cultural competence, or critical thinking in its standards. In fact, social justice, social foundations, or even multicultural education coursework is in no way *required* of teacher education programs. Although intended to be infused throughout the curriculum, many teacher educators do not have the opportunity to engage with this coursework as a result of the many mandated standards required of them (Neumann, 2010).¹⁰ Furthermore, with the loss of CLSE from NCATE, foundational studies have been overlooked and undocumented (Dottin et al, 2005). Although NCATE acknowledges the changing demographics of our country and consistently addresses what is commonly referred to as the achievement gap in its rhetoric, it provides no clear structure for the implementation of social justice and critical perspectives in its accreditation practices. This responsibility falls, instead, to the teacher educators, who may be overwhelmed by the requirements of an already demanding teacher education curriculum. How can teachers be expected to "reflect" upon different perspectives if they have never been exposed to courses or experiences beyond their typically white, female, middle-class backgrounds? If they receive no meaningful training in pedagogies and epistemologies different from what they have experienced, how can they expect to reach the students whose "unimaginable diversities" make up our classrooms? We know that targeted students benefit from culturally responsive pedagogies, curricula, and relationships (Delpit, 1996; Gay, 2010; Goodwin, 2002; Howard, 1999; Meiners, 2007; Michie, 1999; Mihesuah, 2003; Olson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). So, why are we not actively committing to providing our future teachers with the coursework needed to implement such practices in their

preparation programs? If teaching a diverse student population in a manner that works is really important, then we must implement more active opportunities for our teachers to do so. NCATE must acknowledge that if its mission is to produce high-quality teachers, then more must be done to ensure that these teachers are prepared to work with diverse student populations. As it is, we are only setting our teachers, and ultimately our students, up to fail.

Discussion and Implications

Our investigation of NCATE accreditation/standards and the rhetoric surrounding teacher education programs in the last decade has led us to believe that most colleges of education will not produce critically conscious teachers. What's more, we contend that the ones that do will only initiate teachers into a landscape where their voices may be silenced and/or policed. We argue that supporters of NCLB and the accountability movement do not want *rebel* teachers who question the extent to which business models of schooling are having an overwhelmingly negative impact on students and teachers.¹¹ Although reformers suggest that standardization will inevitably produce more equitable schools, we wonder whose interests' current accountability practices really serve.

When NAS wrote to the Assistant Secretary regarding its concern over the “ideologically skewed teacher certification standards,” it questioned the unpacking of social justice. The organization did not want teachers exposed to *dangerous* social justice ideas like the “curtailing of anti-LGBTQ bias, as something outside the realm of professional responsibility, as an ‘ideology,’ and thus as something that conflicts with NCATE’s and, by extension, the teacher education profession’s, presumption of political neutrality” (Kumashiro, 2008, p. 54). As Kumashiro (2008) notes, the problem is that NCATE’s silence is by no means neutral; rather, it makes a political statement inferring that social justice might not follow the dominant ideology, and so should not be a part of teacher education programs. For NAS, the capacity of ideology to alter future teachers’ conceptions was unconstitutional, yet this organization failed to acknowledge that ideology already permeates the institution of public schooling. It just happens to engage the dominant perspective. Despite the fact that white students are barely the majority in American schools, a Eurocentric method of teaching is forced upon educators. According to Sleeter and McLaren (1995):

Mainstream schooling reinforces the dominant cultures’ way of producing subjectivities by rationalizing and accommodating agency into existing regimes of truth. In other words,

dominant forms of pedagogy accommodate existing modes or forms of intelligibility and their distributive effects which are part of the ritualized conversation of becoming a citizen (p. 6).

Despite the increasingly diverse classrooms into which teachers are being initiated, despite calls for multicultural and global perspectives in the classroom, teaching and learning are currently positioned along the same continuum that has been adopted since the establishment of public education. Do we really want more of the same? Social justice may not be safe, in that it challenges the status quo, but organizations like NAS and NCATE have a responsibility to practice what they preach. Otherwise, they are only setting teachers up to fail.

To address these issues, we advocate for a *grassroots movement* to engage local citizens, community groups, teachers, administrators, and school districts. History tells us that such movements have produced change over time. As such, we agree with Myles Horton's call to trust individuals to control their own lives. He says "Your job as a gardener or as an educator is to know that the potential is there and that it will unfold. Your job is to plant good seeds and nurture them until they get big enough to grow up, and not to smother them while they are growing" (Horton, 1997, p. 133). We do not advocate for a version of meritocracy where individuals are empowered to rise up against the odds, but instead envision a group of individuals who can plant seeds to create change for the future. We also charge teacher educators (ourselves included) to find spaces of resistance while still teaching students to "play the game" (Urietta, 2005).¹² Like the future classroom teachers whom we instruct, we, too, are cautious and sometimes fear the loss of our jobs. Yet, we consistently attempt to creatively re-imagine how we might include social justice conversations throughout our courses, and we challenge teacher educators to assume this responsibility as well. In fact, we beg teacher educators to grapple with the future of our children and how important it is that the teachers we send into *their classrooms* be equipped with critically conscious pedagogies.

¹ Teach For America (TFA) recruits top-performing new college graduates into two-year teaching commitments in low-income urban and rural public school districts (Teach For America, 2011a). Corps members experience a five-week pre-service training seminar, as well as ongoing support and professional development throughout their two-year commitments (Teach For America, 2011b). These activities are designed to provide corps members with the skills necessary to "create the systemic changes that will help end educational inequity" (Teach For America, 2011a, p. 1).

² See later section on NCATE accreditation.

³ The American Educational Studies Association defines social foundations of education as a "broadly-conceived field of study that derives its character and fundamental theories from a number of academic disciplines, combinations of disciplines, and area studies: history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, religion, political science, economics, psychology, comparative and international education, educational studies, and educational policy studies." (American Educational Studies Association, 2012).

⁴ The purpose of this paper is not to debate the various forms of “criticalness,” nor to prescribe a particular form to teacher education. Rather, we argue that the creation of conditions in teacher education programs for critical conversations is a pertinent part of the reflexive process, which Wheatley (2002) describes as a *willingness to be disturbed*. We believe that teacher preparation programs should allow future teachers the space to both question their assumptions, beliefs, and the ways in which they view the world and to reflect on their subjectivities, as well as the societal and political forces that impact schooling practices.

⁵ Examples from our community (conservative southern state) include: a local teacher attempted to show a controversial documentary relating to the 2012 Romney/Obama election in her classroom in order to elicit a political discussion, but she was denied and later reprimanded; a teacher sought to engage her students in a compare/contrast exercise of political speeches from each candidate and was told she was not allowed (personal communication, September 20, 2012). This trend is not limited to our experiences in the *Bible belt*: I (Brittany) attempted to have a Holocaust survivor speak to my fifth grade class (non-Bible belt southern state) and was denied despite having the support of both students and parents. I was told that the curriculum did not allow for this subject matter at that age.

⁶ We believe that research outcomes have as much to do with the researcher as with the subjects of inquiry. Although research on teacher effectiveness and quality is often ambiguous, Paige chose to focus his efforts on results consistent with his agenda. Biesta (2007) writes, “It is important to note that ‘effectiveness’ is an instrumental value: it refers to the quality of processes but does not say anything about what an intervention is supposed to bring about. This means, among other things, that it is meaningless to talk about effective teaching or effective schooling; the question that always needs to be asked is, effective for what?” (pp. 7-8).

⁷ We were unable to locate a copy of the 2005 version of the Professional Standards.

⁸ Other groups in attendance were the National Association of Scholars (NAS), the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) (Heybach, 2009, p. 235).

⁹ On September 10, 2012, 30,000 Chicago Public School teachers went on strike to boycott additional pay-freezes and oppose merit-pay tied to standardized test scores. Some media portrayed teachers as greedy and lazy individuals who demanded more pay and did not want to be connected to student data (<http://usactionnews.com/2012/09/chicago-teachers-personification-of-greedy-lazy-utterly-unreasonable-teachers-unions/>). We believe this is one example of how when teachers do try to stand up for what they believe in, but are often given little support from the public.

¹⁰ Of course, there are exceptions, such as the University of Tennessee’s Urban Multicultural and English Education programs in which students are exposed to a vast body of social justice topics. However, Neumann (2010) reports that of 302 universities examined, 69% of elementary programs require at least one course in SFE, and 45% require at least one course in multicultural education (ME). In secondary programs, 68% require a course in SFE, and 45% require a course in ME. We believe this demonstrates that not all colleges of education are infusing SFE/ME within their required curricula.

¹¹ For example, a teacher who is cognizant of culturally relevant pedagogy might question Common Core Standards and its *one size fits all* approach. If teachers do not *buy in* to the standards, current methods of accountability could be at risk.

¹² An example we share is in a required Educational Psychology class taught for teacher certification. During units on intelligence, we not only follow the curriculum discussing Gardner’s multiple intelligences, Spearman’s triarchic theory of intelligence and the Cattell-Horn-Carroll theory of cognitive abilities, but we add readings about stereotype-threat, tracking, and the historical evolution of intelligence tests.

References

- Anyon J. “Social Class and School Knowledge”, *Curriculum Inquiry*, (11.1), 1981, pp. 3-42.
- About NCATE. (2012). Retrieved June 4, 2012, from <http://www.ncate.org/Public/AboutNCATE/tabid/179/Default.aspx>
- American Educational Studies Association. (2012). Retrieved June 4, 2012 from <http://www.educationalstudies.org>
- Anders, A. “Circuits of Dominance in Education and Poverty: Control Logic and Counter Narrative”, *Urban Review*, (43.4), 2011, 528-546.
- Apple, M. “Creating difference: Neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and the politics of educational reform”, *Educational Policy*, (18.1), 2004, 12-44.
- Biesta, G. “Why “What Works” won’t work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research”, *Educational Theory*, (57.1), 2007, 1-22.

- Boyles, D. "The Privatized Public: Antagonism for a Radical Democratic Politics in Schools?", *Educational Theory*, (61), 2011, 433-450.
- Butin, D., "Guest editor's introduction: How social foundations of education matters to teacher preparation: A policy brief", *Educational Studies*, (38.3), 2005, 214-229.
- Cohen, J. L. "Teachers in the News: A Critical Analysis of one US Newspaper's Discourse on Education, 2006-2007", *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, (31.1), 2010, 105-119.
- Chubb, J. E. "Real Choice", In P. E. Peterson (Ed.), *Our Schools and Our Future: Are We Still at Risk?* Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, CA, 2003, 329-362.
- Delpit, L., *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. The New Press, New York, 1996.
- Dottin, E, Jones, A., Simpson, D., "Representing the Social Foundations of Education in NCATE: A Chronicle of Twenty-Five Years of Effort", *Educational Studies*, (38.3), 2005, 241-254.
- Ellison, S., "From Within the Belly of the Beast: Rethinking the Concept of the "educational marketplace" in the Popular Discourse of Education Reform", *Educational Studies*, (48), 2012, 119-136.
- Gay, G., *Culturally Responsive Teaching Theory, Research, and Practice*. Teachers College Press, New York, 2010.
- Goodwin, A. L., "Teacher Preparation and the Education of Immigrant Children", *Education and Urban Society*, (34.22), 2002, 156-172.
- Greene, M., "The Passions of Pluralism: Multiculturalism and the Expanding Community", *Educational Researcher*, (22), 1993, 13-18.
- Hess, F., & Finn, C. E., "Can this Law be Fixed? A Hard Look at the NCLB Remedies", In F. Hess & C. E. Finn (Eds.) *No Remedy Left Behind: Lessons From a Half-Decade of NCLB*, AEI Press, Washington, DC, 2007, 309-330.
- Hess, F. M., *Revolution at the Margins: The Impact of Competition on Urban School Systems*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 2002.
- Hess, F. M., *Common Sense School Reform*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006.
- Heybach, J. "Rescuing Social Justice in Education: A Critique of the NCATE Controversy", *Philosophical Studies in Education*, (40), 2009, 234-245.
- Hirsch, E. D., Jr., *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*. Doubleday, New York, 1996.
- Howard, G. R., *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White teachers, Multiracial schools*. Teachers College Press, New York, 2006.
- Horton, M. *The Long Haul: An Autobiography*. Teachers College Press, New York, 2006.
- Jencks, C. , & Phillips, M. (Eds), *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., 1998.
- Kaplan, L. S., & Owings, W. A., "No Child Left Behind: The Politics of Teacher Quality", *Phi Delta Kappan*, (84.9), 2003, 687-692.
- Kumashiro, K., K., *The Seduction of Common Sense: How the Right Has Framed the Debate on America's Schools*, Teachers College Press, New York, 2008.
- Ladson-Billings, G., "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy", *American Educational Research Journal*, (32.3), 1995, 465-491.
- McCulloch, G., "Privatising the Past", *British Journal of Educational Studies*, (45), 1997, 69-82.
- Meiners, E., *Right to be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies*. Routledge, New York, 2007.

- Michie, G., *Holler if You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students*, Teachers College Press, New York, 1999.
- Mihesuah, D. A., *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NA, 2003.
- National Association of Scholars. (2006). *NAS Challenges NCATE and ABA Accreditation Authority*. Retrieved from http://www.nas.org/images/documents/how_to_join.pdf
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2008). *Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Institutes*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncate.org/Public/Publications/ProfessionalStandards/tabid/508/Default.aspx>
- National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2008.
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2012). <http://www.ncate.org/Public/AboutNCATE/tabid/179/Default.aspx>
- Neumann, R., “Social Foundations and Multicultural Education Course Requirements in Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States”, *Educational Foundations*, (24.3/4), 2010, 3-17.
- Noblit, G. W. (1999). *Particularities: Collected essays on ethnography and education*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Noblit, G. W., Flores, S. Y., & Murillo, E. G. (2004). Postcritical ethnography: an introduction. In G. W. Noblit, S. Y. Flores, & E. G. Murillo (Eds.), *Postcritical ethnography: Reinscribing critique* (pp. 1–52). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Olson, L., *Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools*. New Press, New York, 1998.
- Rickets, G. (October 15, 2010). *Social Justice and Censorship*. Retrieved from http://www.nas.org/articles/Social_Justice_and_Censorship
- Sleeter, C. E. & McLaren, P. “Introduction: Exploring Connections to Build a Critical Multiculturalism”, In C. E. Sleeter & P. McLaren (Eds), *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference*, State University of New York, Albany, NY, 1995, 5-32.
- Sleeter, C. E. & Owuor, J., “Research on the Impact of Teacher Preparation to Teach Diverse Students: The Research We Have and the Research We Need”, *Action in Teacher Education*, (33.1), 2011, 524-536.
- Smith, K., & Peterson, J. L., “What is Educational Entrepreneurship?”, In F. M. Hess (Ed.), *Educational Entrepreneurship: Realities, Challenges, Possibilities*, Harvard Education Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007, 21–44.
- Teach for America (2011a). *About Teach for America*. Retrieved October 10, 2011 from http://www.teachforamerica.org/sites/default/files/2010-11_Press_Kit_Updated_10.5.11.pdf.
- Teach for America (2011b). *Teach for America—Training and support*. Retrieved October 10, 2011 from <http://www.teachforamerica.org/why-teach-for-america/training-and-support>.
- Urrieta L. Jr., “Playing the Game” Versus “Selling Out”: Chicanas and Chicanos Relationship to Whitestream Schools”, In Alexander, B. K, Anderson, G., Gallegos, B. (Eds.), *Performance Theories in Education: Power, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Identity*, Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, New Jersey, 2005.
- Valenzuela, A., *Subtractive Schooling: US-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1999.

- Walberg, H. J., & Bast, J. L., *Education and Capitalism: How Overcoming Our Fear of Markets and Economics Can Improve America's Schools*. Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, CA, 2003.
- Wheatley, M. J., *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 2002.
- Wilson, S. F., "Opportunities, but a Resistant Culture:," In F. M. Hess (Ed.) *Educational Entrepreneurship: Realities, Challenges, Possibilities*, Harvard Education Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007, 183–202.

Authors Details

Brittany Aronson is a third year doctoral student at the University of Tennessee. She is receiving her doctorate in Cultural Studies in Education with a specialization in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. She is a former elementary school teacher having taught in Florida, Georgia, and Virginia. Her research interests include social justice in education, social foundations of education, teacher education, and educational policy.

Ashlee Anderson is a third year doctoral student at the University of Tennessee. She is receiving her doctorate in Cultural Studies in Education with a specialization in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. She is a former Latin high school teacher and has worked with community outreach program Upward Bound. Her research interests include critical service learning, social and economic justice, qualitative research methodologies, and teacher education.

Correspondence

Brittany Aronson
1- (954) 629-6557
baronson@utk.edu
1122 Volunteer Blvd.
416 Claxton
Knoxville, TN 37996

Ashlee Anderson
1- (865) 604-1462
abanders@utk.edu
1122 Volunteer Blvd.
416 Claxton
Knoxville, TN 37996