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Advocacy in Academia and the Role of Teacher Preparation Programs



Ursula Thomas

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Advocacy in Academia and the Role of Teacher Preparation Programs

Due to changes in funding and legislation, educating as a career has become unstable. It is imperative to establish a culture that values education in order to encourage pursuing and preserving the profession of teaching.

Advocacy in Academia and the Role of Teacher Preparation Programs is an essential reference source for the latest scholarly research on the need of support for students and faculty by examining policy, student engagement, professorial activism, and integrated allied services. Featuring extensive coverage on a broad range of topics such as student success, specialty programs, and service learning, this publication is ideally designed for academicians, researchers, and practitioners seeking current research on issues of advocacy in education.

Topics Covered:

- Cultural Sensitivity
- Experiential Learning
- Informal Learning
- Professional Organizations
- Racial Inclusion
- Service Learning
- Specialty Programs
- Student Success



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Thomas

*Advocacy in Academia and the Role
of Teacher Preparation Programs*



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A volume in the Advances in Higher
Education and Professional Development
(AHEPD) Book Series



Published in the United States of America by

IGI Global
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey PA, USA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: <http://www.igi-global.com>

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Thomas, Ursula, 1972- editor.

Title: Advocacy in academia and the role of teacher preparation programs /
Ursula Thomas, editor.

Description: Hershey, PA : Information Science Reference, 2018.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017011950 | ISBN 9781522529064 (hardcover) | ISBN
9781522529071 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Teachers--Training of. | Teachers--Training of--Social
aspects. | Education--Study and teaching (Higher) | Education--Social
aspects. | Teachers--Professional relationships.

Classification: LCC LB1707 .A38 2018 | DDC 370.71/1--dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017011950>

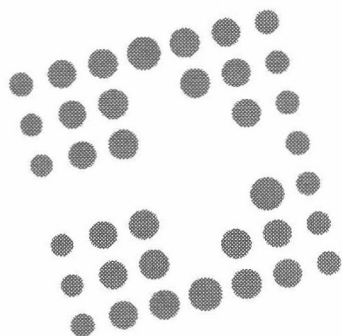
This book is published in the IGI Global book series Advances in Higher Education and Professional Development (AHEPD) (ISSN: 2327-6983; eISSN: 2327-6991)

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

For electronic access to this publication, please contact: eresources@igi-global.com.



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ISSN:2327-6983
EISSN:2327-6991

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Foreword

Many educators are cognizant of the range of the societal injustices that affect the lives of students and want to help remove any barriers that limit equal educational opportunity. However, in order for schools to become more equitable and transform society, educators' inclinations must be translated into actions through advocacy for those they serve. This questioning, critique and subsequent action advocacy. Yet, teacher and leader preparation programs have, for the most part, a long way to go in preparing students for advocacy. The timing could not be more crucial for preparation programs to reassess how they prepare preservice teachers leaders to become advocates for social justice as pressure to raise test scores takes more and more of the teachers' time.

Educational policy discourse is rife with the words "standards and accountability." This is an opportunity for teacher preparation to reframe this discourse to ensure that educators add social justice as a core job task and to keep issues of advocacy at the forefront of their work priorities. Therefore, if education reforms are to be grounded in principles and discourses that challenge, yet are responsive to, the audit culture of education, preparation programs must re-examine how their students learn to define advocacy within these programs and how standards for the profession convey teachers' obligations to advocate for all PK-12 students.

The macro and micro levels of these issues often include advocacy work, and many teachers are engaged in everyday acts of advocacy in schools. Programs that already orient students toward social justice and critical dispositions could be even more explicit in helping students translate dispositions such as these into action. With more explicitness and intentionality given to advocacy, the likelihood that once preservice teachers step in the classroom, they are prepared and willing to advocate.

Advocacy in education is controversial. Some view advocacy as a political process by which groups attempt to change policy through protesting or other political action (Young & Everitt, 2004). Others view advocacy as simply ignoring certain procedures that cause injustice and behaving counter to them (Giles, Nance, & Witherspoon, 2008). In other fields, such as counseling and social work, there are professional standards, and in some cases, training in advocacy. We have not made this leap to teacher preparation yet.

Education should transform society and promote democratic principles and recognize and respond to the marginalization of those who differ from the majority (Marshall & Oliva, 2009) on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, physical or mental abilities, or some other social factor. In the US, deep societal inequities continue to affect the communities educators serve. All levels of education show differences in achievement, graduation rates and grades between social groups (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). The poverty rate is at an all-time high, and a sharp line divides certain areas of the country and peoples in terms of economic benefits (Morris & Monroe, 2009).

To grow in critical consciousness and the dispositions needed for advocacy, teachers and school leaders are faced with the important task of noticing and then mediating the ‘contradictions and inequities that exist in the local community and the larger world’ (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382). With a critical consciousness of the processes and systems that perpetuate marginalization, teachers can become more aware of the areas they might focus on to help mitigate rather than perpetuate inequities in their schools and districts. They then have a basis from which to advocate.

Competing theories of pedagogies complicate understandings of and expectations for what being a teacher entails (Apple, 2009). Educators’ roles are being redefined based on corporate principles of accountability, management, data-based decision-making and competition. Apple (2009) wrote that ‘Bureaucratic leadership and control still exist in too many school systems throughout the nation and others. There are many models that now circulate within educational circles and in the government and corporate sectors. Indeed, it is nearly impossible to keep up with these multiple theories (p. vii).

Certain foundations are investing millions of dollars into producing teachers from nontraditional or business backgrounds, eschewing or undermining university-based preparation programs. However, market-based reforms assume this will lead to more equitable schools; however, this connection is not guaranteed. ‘At the persistent academic achievement gap between Anglo students and students of color. High-quality teachers are more likely through their knowledge, teaching strategies and care to raise student test scores (Darling-Hammond, 1999; McKenzie et al., 2008; Rockoff, 2004). The macro-policy level of these market-based reforms are at odds with equity-based school reform strategies

Advocacy must be a core job component for teachers. How might credentialing and accreditation for educational leaders explicitly focus more on advocacy and justice competencies? How might these standards then be communicated in a way that foregrounds the saliency of advocacy for society? Preparation and professional development might include instruction in the systemic structures and factors that impede student educational equality, collaboration among faculty and other experiences in the designing, delivering, and evaluating advocacy projects (Goodman et al., 2004). The costs of advocacy work include emotional fatigue, being considered a troublemaker and/or suffering backlash from colleagues or others (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Teachers will need to know that advocacy work entails sustained commitment, patience and support.

Programs can help prepare students to overcome obstacles to advocacy and maintain the standards of the profession in their particular districts. Macro-system changes such as desegregation, population shifts and community structures have added to the complexity and pluralistic nature of society, resulting in a greater diversity in today’s school systems (Curry & Hayes, 2009). Though schools have historically reflected the demographic composition of a primarily White, Protestant majority, it is estimated that by 2050 nearly 60% of children in the USA will be of ethnic minority group status (Yeh & Arora, 2003). To meet the needs of students in schools, educators must be aware of the inequities that exist.

While advocacy may be a desirable and ideal practice for addressing inequity, there is little practical, specific knowledge on how to be an effective advocate in the education literature. Our main point here is the need for advocacy in education, and that one possible way to train and develop such educators is to have explicit standards as guides to help influence educational practice.

Classes in preparation programs can serve as safe spaces for students get experience engaging in these critical conversations and learn what factors influence policy-making processes, political agendas and discourse. By guiding teachers in programs toward a strong conceptualization of advocacy and the myriad ways practitioners can make a difference in the lives of their students and communities, real change can occur. These programs can help preservice teachers develop a mindset where advocacy seems possible, and teachers can claim being an advocate as part of their professional identity.

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Preface

INTRODUCTION

Reflections

As the academic year comes to a close I find myself participating in the intentional practice of reflection. It is always very important that I review where I was successful and where there may have been some challenges in terms of the instruction provided to my students. But this year I found that I am focused on best practices being employed. I am also focused on technological innovations that would enhance my classroom whether it is online or face-to-face. I am also very involved in reflecting on performance and student learning outcomes. And in that review of all these components I feel comfortable that my students have met the goals set for them in the coursework and I also feel that they have developed critical thinking skills to help improve their life long learning. But at the same time I am also looking at the future of the teaching profession in this nation, public education from kindergarten to college through a very critical lens. Due to the changes in funding and changes in our national and local administration we are in a constant state of disequilibrium and I am concerned about the sustainability of the profession and its overall condition which directly affects every opportunity to learn in this country. Because of these things advocacy is at the top of my list.

Needs

We are all aware that public education in our country needs to undergo a very critical and significant change. State by state we continue to try to assert our stance on core new learning or performance standards. We are implementing a vast number of tests and assessments to measure student learning outcomes. We also await the implementation of ESSA and rally against the rollback of policies for higher education and teacher education from the previous administration (at the same time each state is engaged in the work of equity plans and working to close the achievement gap between the dominant culture and those students who are marginalized) (O'Hare, 2016; Noguera, Pierce, & Ahram, 2015). As professional educators we must embrace a strength-based approach along with a growth mindset and reform must be a top priority across the education spectrum. We have to work together to continuously develop a culture that truly values education, not just as a tagline or as political bait but to truly invest in what is equity not necessarily equality. At the same time, we cannot ignore the changing of the landscape in education. The decline of enrollment in educator preparation programs across the nation is not surprising (Sawchuck, 2014). Changes in legislation and certification support have taken what used

to be viewed as a stable career and changed it into a highly problematic career that lacks satisfaction and results in burn out. We are losing teachers at an alarming rate between years 3 to 5 in the field. We have our seasoned teachers who are overwhelmed by the policy changes and have chosen to leave prior to their state retirement date and frankly we have a shortage of high quality teachers that are prepared to go into high need schools around the nation be it urban or rural. Parents are no longer encouraging their children to become teachers and districts struggle as they look to find highly qualified candidates. The role of teacher and the process of teacher education clearly need a makeover. Teacher education programs along with support from our local state and national government entities and policymakers are also part of creating this makeover for the education profession (SPARK, 2011).

CHALLENGES

The work of teacher education is very complex and involves the vision of not only educator preparation programs but a shared vision that is often misinterpreted by the public and policymakers. But we know that advocacy is a responsibility that we share in order for us to advance the cause of great public education and improve student learning outcomes. We are going to have to align our voices in order to have a more powerful impact as we re-create the vision of what is an educator. All teachers and educators across the spectrum college to kindergarten must be very aware of opportunities to speak up and speak out in order to be heard about the importance of public education for all children especially those who are disenfranchised. The energy and the commitment that is required for the teaching profession is often immeasurable. The work and the attempt of trying to reach every student is all-consuming, often underappreciated and it truly can take the emotional energy out of many of us. In private and corporate America, it is not required to attend to so many emotional needs but in the field of education we are attending the ever-changing emotional needs and intelligences along with the different academic performance levels of children. The same children are struggling to identify themselves within the current school community in a larger world especially those that have special needs or who are part of a disenfranchised underprivileged population. In the field of education and as professional teachers we have to be responsive to these needs by engaging ourselves in professional development or professional learning opportunities, or participating in a leadership model that includes a shared vision for administration and staff in a school building (Sawchuck, 2014). The public struggles with understanding all that for which we are responsible. Many times they only think that we go there and teach in a silo, not realizing that we have challenges like building leadership teams, school improvement plans, district representation, curriculum committees, textbook adoption committees, and also being engaged with our local parent teacher organization along with the mandates from the central office or the district office of local school boards.

For the most part these issues can be arranged in clusters or categorical entities:

1. Having to establish practices of good stewardship or managerial practices in a specific area and to be able to control local operations within a school community.
2. Having to establish policies of safety and security that reflect the organizational policies of the local education agency responsible for the school as well as any new business processes to be aligned with the policies of a district or central office.
3. Having to establish proper structures of responsibility given the complex or multilevel structures from the administrative offices of a local education agency.

4. Having to create appropriate information technology plans in the event that there is a natural or technological disaster so that information can be properly stored and recovered.

Regardless of what goes on around us we must continue to engage students in learning. We must encourage them to take a risk that will result in their personal and academic growth. This also means that we must serve as role models and let our students actually witness us taking a risk and growing from the results of that risk. This is often a very transparent yet scary experience for those of us who see ourselves as sages. We've got to be transparent enough to share our personal narratives as well. This includes engaging in a conversation with our state representatives, our school boards, writing letters to editors and participating in forums and rallies and expressing our concern and our compassion for the field. I personally have written many letters to senators and state representatives and to which I've gotten very curt or disingenuous responses. I've also entertained audiences with state senators or representatives. My voice was heard as that of a champion and I was called upon to speak as a witness to those who are part of the public education conceptual framework. We must also not be afraid to utilize the tools of the digital age to include social media and its outlets. And of course it's important that we continue to nurture our partnerships with community organizations policymakers and our teacher education programs. We've got to align ourselves so that we can support learning and teaching fully.

SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION

It is of the utmost importance that we speak intentionally as we advocate. When we engage others in our personal and professional narratives and we share all of our failures and successes as well, people will feel compelled to hear us. What we have to say is essential because it directly involves the students we serve and the students are the future of this country. We are engaging in the process of helping students to find their own personal path to learning and making the world a better place. When I entered my 10th year of teaching I actually sat down and looked at all the class pictures that I had taken I counted the number of students that I taught including summers as well as in our local public schools. I've seen them pass from grade school to adulthood at our local university. I was amazed by the number of students that I've touched, taught, and built relationships with. I thought of their families as extended versions of my own. There are not many other careers or professions that can stake that type of claim or exhibit that type of reach. It is important that we continually search for ways to further engage conversation with the public so that confidence in us will be increased and we can also count on support of teachers, not maligning, blaming or bashing teachers and teacher education programs for failed policies that frankly we were never contracted to help create. I find it interesting that policymakers and those in the government have rarely been teachers or talked with teachers, but yet they make unilateral decisions for entire local education agencies and state boards of education without having the knowledge of ever having been a teacher or principal. If you do not believe me look at your current body of legislators, state representatives and state senators and see how many of them have degrees in education and where they last taught. These are the people that are making decisions that will affect even how we provide support services for our students within our own school buildings and we know what those students need. They don't.

I recommend three steps that are critical for a successful advocacy campaign (Magee, 2015):

Preface

1. Make sure your goals are clear. You may win the campaign but if your policies are not laid out as you intended then you have not helped to solve a problem that is critical to the community you serve.
2. Be sure to align your environment to your strategy. When people come to a community advocate and they are not members of the community they usually do not understand where the resources are located or whether best help is actually available. You know where the best resources are for your goals.
3. Choose tactics or strategies that are winnable. Make sure that the tactics that will be used are grounded in a specific strategy and used to serve a particular goal or means to an end.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is organized into 17 chapters. A brief description of each of the chapters follows:

Chapter 1

This chapter addresses how the program utilized intentional assignments and group and individual scaffolding as preservice teachers moved from experiencing service learning to pure advocacy. Through a mixed methods study, preservice teachers begin to see themselves as agents of change with increased confidence and a sense of power. These transformations continued as graduates of the program reported they were still engaging in advocacy.

Chapter 2

The chapter examined perceptions, experience and knowledge of ELs and the effectiveness of a teacher preparation program in changing teacher candidates' beliefs about ELs. This exploratory study builds on previous research from a four-phase elementary teacher preparation program at a research institution.

Chapter 3

The purpose of this chapter is to examine whether students in an undergraduate teacher preparation course at a major university in a metropolitan region of the Southeast demonstrated critical race consciousness with reflective writing assignments by analyzing the counterstories of Elizabeth Jennings and Rosa Parks.

Chapter 4

This chapter discusses the interconnection of advocacy with teacher mentoring programs, so that teachers may develop the relevant advocacy skills in order to act as defenders of equality and social justice. Moreover, specific aspects which are developed are the investigation of the concept of advocacy and social justice, the need for teachers to develop advocacy skills, the role of the mentor and the presentation of basic counseling models.

Chapter 5

This chapter describes a structured advocacy project in an undergraduate teacher preparation program. The project was broken down into component parts across the students final semester and served as the capstone seminar for the teacher preparation program.

Chapter 6

Teacher preparation programs often do not develop teacher candidates' advocacy skills effectively, and this chapter begins with an outline of the need for developing the advocacy skills of teacher candidates. Activities to promote the development of teacher candidates' skills to advocate for policy change for ELs are described both at scaffolded levels of preparation and within the context of an undergraduate teacher education program.

Chapter 7

This case is centered on the term advocacy, the act of speaking on behalf of someone else. In this particular case, the author has chosen to highlight how an advocate is chosen based on perceived characteristics. The author has chosen to unpack the term positionality, which is defined as "The creation of the opposites by an arbitrary point of view". However, it is the author's goal in this unpacking of positionality to surface shards of what a preservice teacher and professor perceive themselves to be to each other in terms of needs and wants.

Chapter 8

This chapter focuses on the notion of managing bias implies employing strategies that foster inclusivity and multicultural education. This chapter focuses on five areas of the importance on managing bias in teacher preparation.

Chapter 9

The purpose of this chapter is to show how exposing teacher candidates, especially undergraduate pre-service teachers to self-reflection through observation and teaching in an international study abroad program, can enhance the knowledge base of preservice teachers' perceptions about another culture and thus show new ways of thinking, questioning and possibly changing their attitudes towards those with backgrounds that are different from their own.

Chapter 10

This chapter is the call for teacher preparation programs to actively incorporate an emphasis on social justice education and the development of teachers committed to creating equitable schools. Education in today's multicultural, pluralistic society must be actively concentrated on and successful at creating more just and unbiased schools for underserved students.