

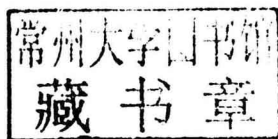
TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Kenneth M. Zeichner

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Teacher Education and the Struggle for Social Justice

“... Clear, articulate, and cogent.... [Zeichner] exhibits a commitment to a vision of social justice that rightly demands the very best both from society and from those of us who work in schools, communities, and teacher education institutions.... *Teacher Education and the Struggle for Social Justice* is a testament to the life and work of someone who deserves to be listened to by all of us who share his belief in an education that is worthy of its name.”

—Michael W. Apple, From the Foreword

Kenneth M. Zeichner examines the relationships between various aspects of teacher education, teacher development, and their contributions to the achievement of greater justice in schooling and in the broader society in this selection of his work from 1991–2008. The focus is on issues of equity and social justice in teacher education and teacher professional development.

One major theme that comes up in different ways across the chapters is Zeichner’s belief that the mission of teacher education programs is to prepare teachers in ways that enable them to successfully educate everyone’s children. He cautions against uncritical acceptance of concepts and practices in teacher education, such as social justice, reflection, action research, and professional development schools, without closer examination of the purposes toward which they are directed in practice and the actual consequences associated with their use. A second theme is an argument for a view of democratic deliberation in schooling, teacher education, and educational research where members of various constituent groups have genuine input into the educational process.

Teacher Education and the Struggle for Social Justice is directed to teacher educators and to policy makers who see teacher education as a critical element in maintaining a strong public education system in a democratic society.

Kenneth M. Zeichner is Hoefs-Bascom Professor of Teacher Education and Associate Dean, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

For my granddaughter, Elana Lee Zeichner

Foreword

Like Ken Zeichner, I began my teaching in the schools of the urban areas where I too had grown up. And like him as well, I was deeply distressed by the lack of resources, the conditions of the schools, the out-of-touch curriculum, and the ways teachers and community members were treated. But these are not the only things that bind us together. Zeichner is correct when he says that many of these things have not gotten better. Indeed, they may have gotten significantly worse. As he reminds us, we live in a society where growing inequalities have been exacerbated to such a degree that they can only be described as disgraceful. His honesty in confronting these conditions and in grounding his work as a teacher educator in movements to alter them is to be applauded.

The importance of Ken Zeichner's work and the commitments and perspectives that underpin it were made very clear to me recently. At this past year's meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New York, there was a seven-storey billboard near Times Square that advertised a contest to find the "ten worst union-protected teachers in America." The competition was supported by a conservative foundation that had given over \$1,000,000 to the campaign for the billboard and for advertisements in major national newspapers. It asked children to nominate teachers for the contest. The teachers who "won" would be given \$10,000 if they quit the profession.

Thus, the problems of schooling are not poverty, underfunding, disrespect, increasingly difficult working conditions, being asked to compensate for a society that is markedly disrespectful in terms of income distribution, health care, nutrition, etc. Economic policies that are racialized and racializing have nothing to do with it; nor does the redistribution upwards of the wealth of the nation and the world (Davis, 2005). Rather, the problems are largely the fault of teachers. Schools and children will be saved if we hold teachers' feet to the fire of competition, undercut their organizations, and make certain that they are teaching what we all supposedly know is "real knowledge" that is measured on standardized tests. It seems that attacking teachers is now something of a national sport. Teacher education institutions have been a consistent object of such criticism as well.

The fact that teachers and teacher education are currently being attacked so vociferously needs to be seen as part of a larger ideological and political project that in *Educating the “Right” Way* (Apple, 2006) I call conservative modernization. We are told that “private” is necessarily good and “public” is necessarily bad. We are told to standardize the curriculum along lines that simply ignore the long and intense debates over what and whose knowledge should be counted as official (Buras, 2008). We are told that the best way to make certain that we get good achievement is through ensuring that teachers teach for the test, thus also guaranteeing that they only give their students what is on these tests. There is powerful empirical evidence that these policies do not necessarily do what their proponents say they do (e.g. Valenzuela, 2005; Lipman, 2004), and there is a good deal of public conflict over these policies. But this has not seemed to make the combination of neoliberals and neoconservatives pause in their almost religious fervor to remake schooling. All of this has had a predictable impact on teacher education, where the contradictory combination of deregulation, marketization, and further centralization and standardization have arisen as powerful forces as well.

The effects of these attacks on public schools and on teachers and teacher education are increasingly visible. For example, the rapid growth of home schooling speaks to the growing mistrust of teachers (Apple, 2006; Apple & Buras, 2006). Conservative think tanks have become factories for the production of reports that are scathing in their condemnations of teachers and teacher education institutions, often in the absence of robust empirical evidence to support their claims. The effects are also apparent when one speaks to both teachers who work so very hard in our often under-resourced schools and communities and to teacher educators who strive to build and defend programs that are responsive to the realities that these teachers face. For many of these committed educators, the situation they face can be best seen as “management by stress.”

Ken Zeichner is not an apologist for all of the current teacher education practices. Far from it. While he supports some practices that are in place now, he wants to transform other policies and practices. But he wants them to change them in much more socially critical and democratic directions than those envisioned by the neoliberal and neoconservative critics who both seek to shift the blame from larger structures of inequality and change the very meaning of democracy from a collective sensibility to that of the possessive individual (Liston & Zeichner, 1991; Apple, 2006).

The problems with which we need to be concerned do not end there, however. No matter how smart or articulate they may be, many people who think about teacher education and educational policy in general in the United States have a bit of arrogance. As Zeichner argues, they do not think critically enough about the kinds of democratic relationships that can and must be built between schools and universities, and between researchers and teachers. The book you are about to read shows why we need to think more critically and democratically about both of these things.

But there is another kind of tacit arrogance that sometimes characterizes educators here in the United States. Too many people assume that the experiences of other nations have little to teach us about the limits and possibilities of educational reforms. This is not true in all cases, of course, since many of us may know of examples from other nations that have influenced us. The work of the great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire may be a case in point. Other examples of educational reforms could be noted as well.

There are, of course, very real problems with what has been called “policy borrowing.” Reforms are taken out of their context of both the debates and the often serious conflicts over their meanings and differential results. Take No Child Left Behind Act as a prime instance. When I am lecturing internationally, I sometimes hear educational officials in nations with histories of strong state control say very positive things about it. They all too often mistake rhetoric for reality and have insufficient insight into how controversial these policies are, their hidden effects, their underlying ideological and political meanings, and who benefits the most from them (Valenzuela, 2005; Apple, 2006).

As someone who is truly an international educator, Ken Zeichner is clearly cognizant of the dilemmas associated with learning from other nations. He fully understands what is wrong with current policies here and elsewhere; and he just as fully understands that we have much to learn from programs of teacher education that are being built in places not only inside but also outside the borders of the United States. I have been fortunate enough to listen to him when he has spoken in these other nations about what is deeply problematic in educational policies and programs here, and I have also listened to him when he has discussed what we might learn from what is being built in other places. He is a model of doing this.

What sets Zeichner’s work apart from so many others is not only his understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of what is happening in multiple nations (Zeichner & Dahlstrom, 1999) or his very evident and powerful grounding in issues of social justice, although I can think of few educators who take the issues of social justice as seriously. Something else characterizes his work: an equally compelling commitment to not leave these issues to the level of theory or mere talk. Speaking honestly, rather too much of critical educational literature remains rhetorical (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009). As this book demonstrates, Zeichner is not satisfied with that. He justifiably wants to take these commitments and put them into practice, both in teacher education and in the kinds of critically democratic research that connects the university with schools, teachers, and communities in powerful ways. As a colleague of his for three decades, I can attest that he is exemplary in this regard.

All too often, we are told that the only appropriate response to dominant policies in education and the larger society is a recognition of TINA—that is, “there is no alternative.” Yet as Zeichner’s articulate analyses and examples demonstrate, and as publications such as *Rethinking Schools* and the volume

Democratic Schools (Apple & Beane, 2007) so clearly show, there are workable alternatives if we but listen and learn. Zeichner is committed to creating teacher education programs that respond to these more critically democratic ways of educating.

I am not alone in having the highest respect for Ken Zeichner. As I noted earlier, his work has proven to be influential throughout Latin America and in China, Australia, many European nations, and elsewhere. The reasons for his influence will be more than a little visible in the chapters of this book. They are clear, articulate, and cogent. And like their author, they exhibit a commitment to a vision of social justice that rightly demands the very best from both society and those of us who work in schools, communities, and teacher education institutions. Taken as a whole, *Teacher Education and the Struggle for Social Justice* is a testament to the life and work of someone who deserves to be listened to by all of us who share his belief in an education that is worthy of its name.

Michael W. Apple

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Preface

It is a violation of the most basic principles of social justice that a country as wealthy as ours denies the opportunities that come with a high-quality education to a substantial portion of our young people (Bold Approach, 2008).

When I entered the Urban Teacher Preparation program at Syracuse University in 1969 to become an elementary school teacher I, and many others who entered teaching at that time, saw teaching as a way to broadly contribute to building a more just society in addition to the contributions that we hoped to make to our students through our classroom teaching. Then, and today, large numbers of young people in the U.S. are denied access to high quality public education.

My decision to become a teacher was an alternative form of service to my country instead of going to fight in what I and many others thought was an unnecessary and unjustified war in Vietnam. The 1960s and early 1970s were times of great unrest in the U.S. Many major cities were erupting in violence and progressive social leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated. There was also great frustration about the failure of the society to provide all of its citizens with the economic and social supports that are needed to give everyone access to the opportunity to live a decent and productive life, such as access to decent housing, quality and affordable food, transportation, jobs that pay a living wage, health care, and quality education (including early childhood education). It was a time of great struggle for civil rights and against the war in Vietnam. There was much activity across the nation to eliminate poverty and racial inequality, and many of us who went into public school teaching during these times saw ourselves as part of a broad movement for social justice. While some progress has clearly been made in achieving the hopes that were widespread during these turbulent times, obviously much work remains to be done.

Poverty in the U.S. is more prevalent now than in the 1960s and early 1970s having escalated rapidly since 2000. For every 5 children who

have fallen into poverty since 2000, more than 3 fell into extreme poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2005, p.1).

In 2006, approximately 17.4 percent or 13 million children in the U.S. lived in families with incomes below the poverty level; over 9 million of these children did not have health insurance. Breaking this 13 million down by ethnicity and race, 35.3 percent of African-American children, 28 percent of Latino children, and 10.8 percent of white non-Latino children were living in poverty. This same disparity of ethnicity, race, and social class also exists for every other measure of wellbeing, such as access to health care, access to high quality and affordable transportation and food, freedom from violence, chance of being put in jail or prison, etc. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008; Children's Defense Fund, 2007).

I began my career as a teacher educator in the federally-funded Teacher Corps.¹ I supervised Teacher Corps interns in an urban elementary school in Syracuse, New York that was attended primarily by African-American students who lived in poverty. This school, the same one in which I had taught, was a public community school where parents participated in decisions about teacher hiring and evaluation, the school curriculum, and the allocation of school resources. My own experiences of working in a school that shared governance with the community have influenced my views on the benefits of democratic deliberation in schools and teacher education institutions, which are articulated throughout this book. Throughout my teaching career and career as a teacher educator, I have focused my energy on the preparation of teachers for urban schools like the one in which I taught and those that I attended as a youth in Philadelphia. Over the years, I have become more familiar with the issues of poverty and educational inequality in rural areas and I have studied exemplary teacher education programs that focus on social justice issues in both urban and rural settings (e.g. Zeichner & Melnick, 1996; Zeichner, 2000).

The educational inequalities that existed when I went into teaching still exist and may even have gotten larger in the last 40 years. By almost every measure that exists, there continues to be a crisis of inequality in our public schools that denies many poor children and children of color a high quality education, despite the good work of many dedicated and talented teachers. A number of gaps in educational outcomes has persisted despite all of the reform efforts that have taken place in schools. These include inequalities in: achievement, as measured by standardized tests in reading and mathematics (Rothstein & Wilder, 2005); high school graduation rates (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007); increased segregation of students according to their race, ethnicity, and social class backgrounds (Orfield & Lee, 2005); school funding (Carey, 2004); access to fully prepared and experienced teachers (Peske & Haycock, 2006); access to advanced mathematics courses that provide the gateway to scientific careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2003); and access to a broad and rich curriculum that educates students to think critically

and develop their aesthetic and civic capabilities (Dillon, 2006; Kozol, 2005). There has also been documentation of the disproportionate assignment of children of color to special education classes (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002).

Despite the picture often painted in the dominant corporate-funded media that the causes of these and other gaps lie primarily in bad schools and teacher education institutions (e.g. Dillon, 2006; Will, 2006), there is substantial evidence that the primary roots of school inequalities lie in the failure of our society to address the social and economic preconditions for student learning (Berliner, 2006; Rothstein, 2004). Further, efforts aimed at education-related social and economic disadvantages can, with continued school reform, improve school performance and student learning (Rothstein, 2004). Clearly, there is much to be done to improve both public schooling and teacher education, but these institutions need the resources and the support to do their work.

Critics of public schools and public universities, where the majority of U.S. teachers are still prepared, often neglect to discuss the persistent underfunding and forced budget cuts that P–12 school districts and public higher education institutions have faced for some years now. For example, according to recent data compiled by the National School Boards Association (2008), the cumulative shortfall in federal funding for Title I, which is the main source of federal funding for the Elementary and Secondary Education or No Child Left Behind Act (2002), between 2002 and 2007 was 43 billion dollars. Similarly, when Congress passed a law in 1975 to provide extra support for students who were classified as needing special education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA), it promised to pay an amount equal to 40 percent of the average per pupil expenditure rate. According to National School Boards Association (2008) compiled data, the current federal funding level is at about 18 percent, which is less than one half of the amount that Congress promised to fund.

One consequence of the lack of full federal funding of these mandates for public schools has been a continual reduction in the level of state support for public universities. This is because states need to make up the gaps between what the federal mandates require of schools and what federal money has been provided to meet these mandates (Lyll & Sell, 2006). When we discuss accountability as is the fashion today, in addition to the accountability of schools and teacher education institutions, we need to also address how accountable our government is in providing the resources that both public schools and public universities need to do their work well (Sirotnik, 2004).

A Brief Note on the Concept of Social Justice

Throughout this book, I continually examine the relationships between various aspects of teacher education and teacher development, and their contribution to the achievement of greater justice in schooling and the broader

society. A substantial literature has evolved in philosophy and social theory that has analyzed the concept of justice, and a number of distinct positions on the meaning of justice have been identified (e.g. Gewirtz, 1998; Sturman, 1997; North, 2006, 2008). Recently, these discussions of the meaning of justice have begun to appear in the literature on social justice teacher education (e.g. McDonald, 2007), although most teacher education programs that claim to have a social justice orientation say very little about what they mean by the idea of social justice (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). There are basically three broad categories of theories about the concept of justice: (a) distributive theories that focus on the distribution of material goods and services (e.g. Rawls, 2001); (b) recognition theories that focus on social relations among individuals and groups within the institutions in which they live and work (e.g. Young, 1990); and (c) theories that attempt to pay attention both to distributive and relational justice (e.g. Fraser, 1997). My own view of the concept of justice that has guided my work in teacher education comes the closest to those theories that seek to address both recognition (caring and respectful social relations where all individuals and groups are treated with dignity) and redistribution (where there is a fairer distribution of material resources).

About This Book

Throughout my 30-plus-year career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I have maintained close involvement with our teacher education programs, Wisconsin public schools, and the important job of preparing doctoral students to be teacher educators. This book includes a selection of my writing over these years that have focused on issues of equity and social justice in teacher education and teacher professional development. The work represented in this book ranges from papers that I wrote between 1991 and 2008. Although at times I refer to teacher education on an international scale, the bulk of the work represented in this book focuses on teacher education in the United States.

There are a number of themes that are present in this book and that come up in different ways in the various chapters. One theme is a belief that the mission of teacher education programs is to prepare teachers in ways that enable them to successfully educate everyone's children. Throughout the book, I caution against accepting concepts and practices in teacher education, including social justice, reflection, action research, and professional development schools, without closer examination of the purposes toward which they are directed in practice and the actual consequences associated with their use. I repeatedly argue that these practices and concepts are interpreted and used in various ways that do not necessarily contribute to building greater equity and justice in schooling.

A second theme present in this book is an argument for a view of democratic deliberation in schooling, teacher education, and educational research

where members of various constituent groups have genuine input into the educational process. In schooling, this democratic deliberation would involve teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and, in some cases, students in negotiating school affairs (see Chapter 9). In teacher education, it would involve more closely connecting the preparation of teachers done by colleges and universities to both schools and communities (see Chapters 2 and 3). In educational research, it would involve a stronger interaction and exchange of knowledge produced in schools by education practitioners and knowledge produced by academics who are situated in colleges, universities, research centers, and think tanks (see Chapter 7).

In Chapter 1, I discuss and critique what I think represents the three major strands of contemporary teacher education reform: professionalization, deregulation, and social justice agendas.² When one examines the process of teacher education reform at individual teacher education institutions, aspects of all three of these perspectives can be found to be present. Although, different programs interpret the agendas in somewhat different ways and emphasize different elements. In this chapter, I point out that these reform agendas are not new, but they are an outgrowth of proposals for teacher education reform that have existed since the beginning of the twentieth century. I also argue that each of these agendas has strengths and weaknesses, and none is sufficient by itself for solving the problems of educational inequity that continue to plague our public schools.

In Chapter 2, Ryan Flessner and I examine the reform tradition of social justice teacher education in more depth. Although most teacher education institutions in the U.S. now claim to be preparing teachers to work for social justice, it is not always clear from the literature what these programs are like or what they are preparing teachers to do. Just as was the case with the concept of reflective practice in the 1990s (Zeichner & Liston, 1996), there is a danger that social justice teacher education will come to describe every reform initiative in teacher education and lose a specific meaning. Our analysis looks at the variety of perspectives and practices that have come to be associated with teacher education for social justice, including program admission and curriculum and instructional practices. We then illustrate these practices with brief portraits of three programs in the U.S., Canada, and Brazil. In the final part of this chapter, we elaborate on the critique of social justice teacher education in Chapter 1 and discuss ways in which we think the power of social justice-oriented work in teacher education can be strengthened with a particular focus on research universities.

In Chapter 3, I articulate my own sense of one of the key elements of the social justice agenda in teacher education: forming closer partnerships between schools and universities. In this chapter, I discuss how professional development schools offer the potential of both representing a clear break from traditional models of school and university relationships in teacher education and strengthening the preparation of teachers. I also share my concerns about what I have viewed as an uncritical glorification of partnerships

in teacher education without sufficient attention to the core values that are associated with high quality partnerships.

Chapters 4 through 7 focus on different aspects of the practice of action research in social justice teacher education. In Chapter 4, I reflect upon the evolution of my use of action research with the education students in our elementary teacher education program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In this work, we have attempted to prepare teachers to develop habits and skills during their initial preparation for teaching that will help them continue to learn from and improve their teaching throughout their careers.

Chapters 5 and 6 are revised versions of keynote talks that I presented in 1992 and 2007 at the annual meetings of the Collaborative Action Research Network, an international network of individuals in education, health care, and social services that focuses on issues related to action research. In Chapter 5, I explore the tensions between action research as an enabler of individual teacher development, school change, and social change, and discuss ways in which action research can support social change within teachers' classrooms. In doing so, I criticize both an uncritical glorification of action research because of the alleged personal and social benefits that are often implied to be inevitably associated with it, and criticisms of teachers by academics for not directly seeking to change the structures of schooling.

In Chapter 6, I explore how action research in initial teacher education can serve to promote greater social justice in a climate in which there are efforts to privatize teacher education and impose harsh accountability requirements that I argue go beyond the bounds of reasonableness and divert teacher educators' energies away from the achievement of their goals. I examine how action research by both student teachers and teacher educators can serve to promote social justice even in the hostile environment in which teacher education exists.

In Chapter 7, I discuss the democratization of knowledge production in education—a quality of social relations that I think is consistent with the core values of social justice education and teacher education. Although there has been some progress in this direction since 1994 when I first made these remarks at a meeting of the Australian Association of Research in Education, the worlds of teacher research and academic research are still largely separate. There has been too little attention paid to utilizing the research that thousands of teachers all over the world are doing in their classrooms and schools in both teacher education programs and school reform and education policy making. In this chapter, I discuss ways in which academic and practitioner researchers can come together and take advantage of the strengths that each genre of research provides.

In Chapter 8, I discuss two issues that continue to undermine the authenticity and social value of efforts to promote teacher development. First, I argue that underlying the rhetoric of many efforts to “empower” teachers to take control of their own professional development is a reality in which teachers remain extremely limited in their power to influence the scope and

conditions of their work. I also assert, using the concept of teachers as reflective practitioners as an example, that even when efforts to promote teacher development are not illusory, teacher development often becomes an end unto itself, unconnected to broader questions about education and equity in a democratic society. I conclude by arguing for efforts to promote forms of teacher development which are both genuine and connected to the promotion of equity and social justice.

In Chapter 9, I analyze several tensions and contradictions associated with efforts to restructure schools and give teachers more control over their work and professional development, including two potential pitfalls: (a) the potential to intensify teachers' work to a point where it begins to interfere with them accomplishing their goals with students and (b) the potential of deepening divisions between schools and communities. I then discuss ways in which I think teaching can be professionalized to a greater extent while avoiding these pitfalls. My argument is based on a belief in a broad view of school democracy that involves teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and, in some cases, students in deliberating school affairs. It is my view that this process of democratic deliberation is necessary for the achievement of greater equity in schooling processes and outcomes.

Chapter 10 includes a discussion of many of the issues raised in the preceding chapters and represents a retrospective and prospective analysis based on my thirty-plus years as a teacher educator of college- and university-based teacher education in the U.S. In this chapter I make four recommendations for the future direction of college- and university-based teacher education that I think are needed to ensure that teacher education programs based in these institutions will make a contribution to preparing teachers who will contribute to weakening the link between social and economic disadvantage and student learning. These recommendations are: (a) to accept the need for multiple pathways into teaching and focus on the quality of a teacher education program rather than on who sponsors it; (b) to work to redefine policies related to the goals of schooling and teacher education beyond the raising of standardized test scores to include other important purposes of public schooling; (c) to connect teacher education programs more closely to schools and communities; and (d) to either take the education of teachers seriously or stop doing it.

This book is directed toward teacher educators who are associated with programs sponsored by colleges, universities, and other providers, and to policy makers who see teacher education as a critical element in maintaining a strong public education system in a democratic society.

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