



A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON TEACHER PREPARATION PIE

Dr. B. K. Gupta

Associate Professor, Department of Education

Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Post-Graduate College, Barabanki (U.P.)

Abstract

It tackles the complexities of the teacher preparation environment by giving a selected picture of the terrain. As the writers of these papers demonstrate, this landscape is varied, consisting of observations, practises, assessment methods, and certain types of interactions among its "resident" players. While all of these factors influence a candidate's successful transition into teaching, arguably none is more essential than the role of the mentor teacher (MT) and that mentor's connection with the teacher candidate (TC), whom she or he has committed to supporting. This study focuses on this aspect of the complicated "teacher preparation pie."

Keywords: Mentor teacher (MT), Teacher candidate (TC)

Introduction

Those of us involved in the job of assisting in the preparation of starting teachers have gained a better grasp of the important components of mentor–mentee relationships over the years. We've learned, for example, that MTs can help to shape the professional identity of those they mentor; that TCs teach more effectively when they collaborate with MTs who are instructionally effective themselves. Five of the papers in this issue contribute to our knowledge of mentors' roles and impacts. There are considerable problems facing the profession of teacher education in terms of assisting MTs in this critical task. One continuing difficulty is identifying MTs who can serve as role models for contemporary best practises for TCs, particularly those that promote fairness and justice. It is not that teachers practising culturally sustaining pedagogies cannot be found or that pedagogies for equity and justice are unavailable; rather, the pool from which a sufficient number of classroom educators engaged in such practises can be drawn to serve as MTs is insufficient. One

cause of this problem is a lack of opportunities for teachers to learn and develop such practises, either because these practises continue to be marginalised in many teacher preparation programmes or because the integration of this focus in many teacher preparation programmes has been more recent, and the numbers of recent graduates far outnumber those who have been teaching for a long time. Consider mathematics teacher education as an example. Researchers have long highlighted concerns of race and racism in mathematics education and the field's understanding of best practises in this area continues to expand and evolve. At the same time, the majority of practising teachers (and therefore MTs) have color blind viewpoints and/or have unconscious racial prejudices (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004) that function in their classrooms. Recent research

in mathematics education, building on decades of research on implicit attitudes and teachers' expectations for students who are different from them in some way, such as race, identifies how teachers' implicit racial bias affects specific practises in mathematics education, namely prospective teachers' noticing of and responses to students' written work (Jacobson, Willey, & Smith). This latest study has important implications for mathematics teacher preparation. Most current mathematics teachers have not had the opportunity to learn about research on implicit racial bias and how it manifests itself in mathematics classrooms, and as a result, they are unable to adjust and advance their practise in order to interrupt the effect of such bias, nor model such interrupting as mentors for TCs.

A similar difficulty may be seen in MTs' experiences with developing assessment technologies. Cohen and colleagues (current issue) offer a good illustration of the kind of implementation problems that arise when assessment techniques such as edTPA become more prominent in teacher training and evaluation. Measurement experts regularly warn that researchers and practitioners must consider not just the constructs assessed by assessments, but also how these tools will be used. Whether scores are used to promote TC development, as part of initial licensure, or to assess programmes, they have repercussions and are likely to affect how MTs generate and utilise scores. It's simple to picture MTs adjusting how they assess candidates based on the stakes linked to these ratings. In the K-12 literature, for example, when high stakes are linked to them, most instructors earn high evaluation scores. Similarly, we must consider how MTs understand the actions and practises that comprise evaluation instruments. In the absence of rigorous training and monitoring, MTs are likely to rely on their own perceptions of instructional constructs assessed by instruments such as edTPA. This may or may not be a concern depending on how ratings are used. The fundamental issue, however, is that MTs, like any other evaluator, are not blank slates, and their notions of successful teaching are very likely to influence how they assess TCs and, as a result, how they convey the findings of the evaluations to candidates. In short, these technologies have the potential to provide MTs and TCs with a shared lexicon

for engaging in teaching-related interactions. However, further research like that done by Cohen and colleagues is required to better understand how evaluation tools affect the connection between MTs and TCs.

Conclusion

Both current curriculum standards and research on situated cognition stress the importance of learners' role in constructing new understandings. A challenge for those playing the role of teacher is to break the habit of keeping tight control of the pedagogical space, sticking to a teacher-written script. To support learners' work in constructing understanding, the teacher must listen to the students' voices, seeing unexpected comments as windows into emerging understanding. International comparative studies of mathematics pedagogy have found that teachers in Japan saw a place for substantial periods of productive struggle, as students work their way through challenging problems. Teachers in the United States, however, often directed students quickly toward a solution that the teacher had in mind (Stein, Engle, Smith, & Hughes, 2008; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Articles in this issue describe the persistent problem that those in a teaching role slip into didactic instructional routines, rather than giving the learners the time and space needed for sense-making. Haverly and colleagues (this issue), for example, describe the challenge novice science teachers face in developing practices where their pupils have the space to make sense of the phenomena they are observing. For these novice teachers, learning such practices entails taking on a role different from what they often experienced when they were students themselves. MTs face a parallel challenge as they learn a new role as teacher educator. Canipe and Gunckel (this issue) describe a promising approach to working with mentors, documenting how interrupting the initial hierarchy between mentor and novice can prompt mentors to take up novice ideas. In taking up novice ideas rather than simply telling novices what they should do, the mentors make space for the novices to make sense of what they are experiencing in the field. As long as we are committed to the preparation of teachers through practice-grounded programs with significant school based experiences, we depend upon experienced teachers to be our partners in these efforts. Mentors must help lead candidates through the school world in which they work; they must provide candidates with scaffolded opportunities to engage with effective pedagogy and with learners; they must model effective instruction; and they must show candidates how to manage the myriad other responsibilities a classroom educator is expected to take on. In addition, the mentor must also shoulder some of the burden of evaluating the individual learning to teach. As a consequence, those doing the work of teacher education must be committed and prepared to support not only those preparing for teaching careers but those who are already in the classroom and who are positioned so critically to help others become well-started beginners.

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