



Time for Critical Reimagining and Breaking of Silos in Teacher Education

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Abstract

This article is a response to the four articles presented in this issue. It considers the need for teacher educators to reimagine structures, practices, and priorities that have dominated the field of education and highlights the ways in which these authors can push our thinking. The work calls us to break down silos, promote interdisciplinary work, and resource what we know to be beneficial to learners. The research implies that educators' time, a scarce resource, is a barrier that encumbers progress.

Introduction

*I am a lover of words, left heartbroken by every spelling test.
In school, my desk was in a classroom at the end of the hall,
so this poem is for me too.
Within me is the meeting of two movements. I am black and blue.
My disability is hidden and I am the descendant of those who could not hide.
I am your neighbor, your countryman, one of the poets our nation has produced,*

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*and here is what I know to be true: this world is not enough.
And if this here is what we call normal, I say, let's be different.
On this day, let us celebrate every shape, every color, every way.
Let our actions commemorate the array of our being.
Build a future in service of the multitude,
and let this century be the wilderness from which our better selves are born.*

—Excerpt from “Until Every Barrier Falls” by LeDerick Horne (2020)

Spoken word poet, LeDerick Horne, offers insight from his intersectional experience as a student, let down by assessments, segregated, finding the world lacking. His critique of oppressive structures in schools is also a call for creating anew. “Let’s be different,” he says. The title, “Until Every Barrier Falls,” calls us to remove barriers. How can we assess without demoralizing students? How can we build support in and eliminate segregated structures? Teacher educators working on issues of equity and social justice know the importance of reimagining (Ferri, 2009), looking for new structures, new practices, new ways to conceptualize humanity. In fact, some have moved from K-12 teaching into teacher education with commitment to reimagine, to make changes that carry back to classrooms, schools, and communities (Navarro et al., 2020). Within this issue of TEQ, scholars provide fodder for this reimagining with ideas about breaking silos within the field, for promoting interdisciplinary work, and for resourcing what matters most.

Breaking Silos of Expertise

As educators have historically specialized in various disciplines or in working with specific populations, the formation of silos has not always been beneficial. In recent years, there have been aims to break silos that keep professionals from communicating, sharing information, and learning from each other. These efforts, with successful outcomes, have been slow to take hold on a large scale as they require substantial investment.

Scholars have long critiqued the separation between special education and general education for its resegregation of students of color (Ferri & Connor, 2005), for its isolation of disabled students (Baglieri et al., 2011) and teachers (Schlichte et al., 2005), and for its deficit-based conceptions of disabled students (Connor, 2020). The practice of co-teaching has been one of the most promising and still underutilized practices for breaking the silos that exacerbate these problems. Over the years, *Teacher Education Quarterly* has featured work that illustrates collaboration between faculty in special education and general education (Zimmer et al, 2018) and merging of the two programs (Fullerton et al., 2011). In this issue, the research by Cannaday, Bautista, Najarro, Kula, and Guta continues the line of inquiry about co-teaching. They confirm findings that show the experience to yield constructive feedback and growth in faculty’s practice. They also find that special education faculty still fear that their colleagues do not regard them as equals and that faculty view co-teaching as costly in terms of resources and effort.

Another movement to break down silos and reimagine, interdisciplinarity, has also been evident in issues of *Teacher Education Quarterly*. Noting the complexities of problems in the modern world, advocates understand the power of multiple perspectives. Scholars have studied interdisciplinary team teaching (Sandholtz, 2000), integrated humanities classes (Carter, 1997), and teachers' experience with content integration (Barry, 2013). In support of shifting the status quo, the research of Anderson, Ruef, Reigh, Chavez, Williamson, and Villa presented in this issue challenges siloed structures that tend to keep teacher candidates within discipline-specific trajectories. Examining an elective mathematics methods course, they demonstrate how interdisciplinary experience can expand knowledge of pedagogical tools.

Resource What Is Beneficial to Learners

With decades of research supporting practices that improve collaboration and break down silos, scholars are faced with the reality that meaningful, and much-needed change often moves at a snail's pace. Re-imaginings become reality when they are backed with resources.

The recent popularity of books like *Grading for Equity* that promote standards-based and proficiency-based learning indicates that educators are interested in improving assessment practices as they now understand it as an equity issue. While critics again point to all the ways that this change is difficult and requires so much time, some schools and districts are investing resources and adopting these paradigm-shifting practices (Taketa, 2020). The research of DeMink-Carthew, Smith, Tinkler, and Tinkler in this issue examines how experiencing proficiency-based learning can shift preservice teachers' thinking about assessment and grading practices. The recommendations for teacher education programs that surfaced include the need to engage teacher candidates in examining norms, assumptions, and problems the dominant grading system creates, particularly for marginalized groups. They wisely suggest that modeling is not enough, that explicit instruction about purpose and practice is crucial.

The study undertaken by English in this issue also highlights the need for teacher educators to "neutralize the impact of the apprenticeship of observation" which is crucial in reform and reimagining. Examining teachers' exposure to Learning Styles Theory and their attachment to it, researchers found that teachers are commonly taught and encouraged to implement it despite the lack of empirical evidence to support the theory. The need for professional development programs and teacher educators to be up-to-date on academic literature and research-based strategies is paramount. And yet, the vital resource of time for learning is scarce. Throughout this issue, the studies reveal the tension between what scholars and practitioners reimagine and the barriers that slow their progress. Demands on teachers and teacher educators continue to rise; acknowledgment of this is needed. How can we alleviate the demands, a real and persistent barrier, implied within

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each of the studies' findings and implications? Though many are exhausted by pandemic-related protocols and public scrutiny, there remains a will for more equitable practice, for better collaboration and knowledge sharing, and for making use of what research reveals. Using this will, we can critically examine how time works and does not work throughout the education system. This element will be key in finding sustainable ways to implement lasting change.

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