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DOI: [http://dx.doi.](http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v39.i2.24)

[org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v39.i2.24](http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v39.i2.24)

e-ISSN 2519-593X

Perspectives in Education

2021 39(2): 356-358

PUBLISHED:

11 June 2021

TEACHER EDUCATION FOR TRANSFORMATIVE AGENCY: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DESIGN, CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY

In this fascinating volume dedicated to illustrating transformative agency in teacher education by means of critical perspectives on design, content and pedagogy, editors Carina America, Nazeem Edwards and Maureen Robinson recognise the need to bring forward the voices of teacher educators in the field, giving agency to and highlighting successful practices in culture-rich classrooms. Reading the introduction, I was reminded of the repeated call by James Martin (2004:7) to not only look at what is wrong with the world but instead provide “a complementary focus on community, taking into account how people get together and make room for themselves...in ways that redistribute power without necessarily struggling against it”. Hence, the focus of this book is on educational practices that inspire, encourage and revive us. In doing so, the book foregrounds the role of auto-ethnography in the telling of transformative stories by teacher educators that possess the knowledge and vocabulary to articulate these experiences largely within a critical pedagogy frame.

Situated within the lingering legacies of inequalities of the apartheid era, teacher educators at a South African university share their “lived experiences” and teaching realities in a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme. Poised precariously between changing educational paradigms and statutory regulatory frameworks on the one hand and academic freedom on the other, the authors of this volume attempt to navigate the murky waters from the ravages of apartheid education to inclusive, democratic practices that address the developmental needs of the majority of South African citizens.

In addition to foregrounding teacher agency and successful practices, two powerful frames of reference are used in constructing the discourse. The first, is Productive Pedagogies (Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard, 2006) that emphasises four dimensions namely, intellectual quality, connectedness, supportive classroom environment and

working with valuing difference. The second frame is the distinction made between “knowledge *about* education and knowledge *for* educational practice” (Horden, 2018:787).

The structure of the book is artfully crafted to mimic the structure of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme and is divided into three sections. The first section comprises six chapters that focus on the generic and compulsory modules of the programme. The second section deals with subject-specific modules and the concluding section presents an agenda for reinventing teacher education in South Africa.

The chapters in this book arise from shared discussions across staff in the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme. Teacher educators of this programme have taken the important step of problematising the programmatic issues underpinning their respective subjects by engaging in shared deliberations on:

- how to navigate within teacher education from the ravages of apartheid education to inclusive, democratic practices that address the developmental needs of the majority of our citizens;
- the desire to move out of academic “silos” and to work across subjects and departments to build a shared understanding of the programme;
- how to ensure structural and conceptual coherence across the programme while allowing lecturers the academic freedom to engage students critically within their disciplines;
- how to engage with demands of knowledge-building in the twenty first century; and
- how to integrate different forms of knowledge across the curriculum.

The book represents a set of engagements with these questions that unearth a longer term set of issues that need to be addressed as the programme design unfolds and evolves in practice and in relation to policy guidelines. This opens up spaces for teacher educators to reflect on knowledge-in-practice by probing their own experiences and expertise as makers of wise judgements and designers of rich learning interactions in the classroom and knowledge-of-practice. Knowledge of practice emphasises the role of teacher educators in constructing knowledge and learning, and growing through that process. It also suggests the importance of ongoing inquiry by teacher educators in their own classrooms and into other practical sources of knowledge for addressing problems of practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

There is much thinking provoked by the different chapters. Maureen Robinson’s (Chapter 2) work considers how lectures and school observations impacted on students’ own sense of agency within diverse and unequal South African schooling contexts. Karlien Conradie (Chapter 3) highlights the human condition as one of connectedness and interdependence where people experience themselves in relation to others. Marie Louis Botha’s (Chapter 4) work attempts to align the curriculum with the demands and needs of the “new generation” student cohort so as to promote engaged and informed citizen teachers equipped for the unpredictable future. Jerome Joorst (Chapter 5) utilises the methodology of auto-ethnography to effectively provide a unique voice and window into his lived experiences and how some challenges he encountered influenced his pedagogy. Aslam Fataar and Jennifer Feldman (Chapter 6) highlight how students’ reflexive engagement with content in relation to their own biographies served to make the shift from how they think about themselves in relation to their emerging “teacherly” identities. Chapters 7 and 8 present research related to subject specific modules. Carina America reflects on the notion of business ethics that govern business or

organisational decision-making. Nazeem Edwards reflects on his role as a teacher educator in developing prospective science teachers as epistemic agents in the classroom.

A valuable contribution of the book is the concluding section written by Marie Brennan, a critical friend, who renders an excellent reflection on broader historical, political and pedagogical issues that emerge from the book. She provides direction and valuable recommendations for future research on transformative agency in teacher education that could be of significance to a variety of higher education contexts worldwide.

This book puts a spotlight on individual academic pedagogic practices but also implies questions about what is possible to do differently across individual modules. In summary *Teacher Education for Transformative Agency* is a well-written and revealing contribution to understanding how critical perspectives on design, content and pedagogy in a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme can promote transformative agency by contributing to deeper educational purpose, conception of knowledge for teaching and connect to the wider frame of educational transformation and social justice.

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