
Editorial: Setting an agenda for justice and partnerships

Editorial

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This special issue began as a collaboration – a partnership between all of us who are working to answer and address the specific call. Represented at the table are educators, researchers, leaders and community-based partners from a range of institutions – Hispanic Serving Institutions, Institutions with significant Middle Eastern and North African students, minority-serving institutions (MSI) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. We represent a range of contexts – from rural to urban. We hail from partnerships in Michigan, Missouri and North Carolina and multiple partnerships and contexts in Texas and Georgia. As we engaged together in this work and answered the call from the vantage points of our unique partnerships and communities, we met for collaborative conversations during each phase of the process, including Zoom conversations to discuss the possibilities for sharing our voices, perspectives and stories. These conversations reflect not only our commitment to ensuring needed voices are centered and included in theorizing MSI's partnerships, but resulted in a reciprocal reflective process reshaping and refining our perspectives and practice.

As we worked together on this journal, we became even more committed to collaboration across the places, spaces and boundaries of teacher education and partnerships. As collaborators, we feel that if faculty and programs at MSI learned from and worked with each other, we could critically address systemic and racialized barriers of minoritized students and help to improve equity in teacher preparation programs. As such, we felt compelled to reach out to authors again to ask them for their most significant hopes and implications that stemmed from their research and partnership initiatives. We wrote authors and asked them to respond to the following questions:

- (1) One noted finding throughout the articles was the ways in which race and equity were discussed. What thought processes did you use as you chose the language to discuss these issues?
- (2) What do you think might happen if MSI's teacher preparation programs learned from each other?
- (3) What can non-minority serving institution teacher preparation programs learn from us?
- (4) How might we all work together to disrupt power imbalances within teacher preparation through partnerships?

Notably, six authoring teams made an effort to grapple with these collective wonderings, even in the midst of one of the most challenging seasons of the academic year. This once again evidences not only their deep commitment to this work but also to the collective impact made

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possible when MSI connect and set a course and agenda for future partnerships and policies. Then we analyzed and compiled these insights, perspectives and visions of future partnerships and laid them out as implications for partnerships. These implications call for partnerships between MSI's teacher preparation programs that could (1) reshape our partnering practices, our processes and actions; (2) re-prioritize equity, access and representation within teacher preparation; (3) shift practices of professionalizing development toward equity and responsive practice, (4) help us reframe the language we use and the lenses and perspectives they engender and eventually, (5) support us in bringing about collective change at the structural levels.

Implications across contexts and communities

In analyzing author responses to the questions, we identified several implications and next steps as we work towards more mutually supportive partnerships that center language students. We understand partnership to be an action that is constantly taking shape and reshaping through recursive reflection. The collective insights from the authors of this journal offer an agenda for partnerships at all stages of development, from ones who are at the initial stages of navigating priorities and perspectives and fostering articulated agreements to those long-standing collaborations with decades of history and connection. As such, we first offer implications for different stages of partnership for recruitment, forging new partnerships and early development. Next, we reflect and look forward through implications for bolstering development within existing partnerships. Finally, we offer implications informing partnerships at any and all stages through a critical examination of our language and policies.

New and developing partnerships

First, we see in this work possibilities for building new partnerships and innovations centered on a shared vision and mission. When this work is truly actualized, it has the potential to go beyond the status quo. These partnerships should be predicated and uplifted through a clear understanding of the issues that contribute to and create conditions of inequity. We collectively feel that it is necessary to bring diverse voices to the table and to respect and account for the time and the contributions of all partners-in-innovation (including substitute teachers, paraprofessionals, teacher aides and others who are too infrequently marginalized through their role and contribution toward equity is transformative. Buy-in and deep investment by all stakeholders (teacher preparation programs and school/district personnel) are necessary if we are to implement research-based strategies – including and especially those that may be challenging or uncomfortable. Some challenges can be mitigated as we work together across collaborations and with a range of voices to illuminate and explore problematic practices and institutional and systemic barriers that span the boundaries of articulated partnership agreements. One example of beginning partnerships centering the stories and voices of those with the closest and most authentic experience of those barriers and challenges is to codify clear articulation agreements between institutions such as community colleges and four-year institutions so that students, faculty and advisors understand ways that courses from one institution can transfer into another and so unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles can be cleared even at the initiation of partnering.

Existing partnerships and innovations toward equity in preservice teacher preparation, in-service teacher professionalization and early childhood and K-12 education

MSI have much to offer and learn together through collaborative efforts and research aimed toward more equitable practices within partnerships, especially within preservice preparation,

in-service teacher development and the experiences of children, families and communities in early childhood and K-12 schooling contexts. Some spaces where these collaborations have occurred or are occurring include the American Association of Colleges For Teacher Education (AACTE), the HBCU Faculty Development Network (HBCUFDN) and the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE). We also believe that NAPDS and our regional spaces of partnerships would be natural and necessary spaces for these consortia to be fostered.

Collaborative research could transform recruitment practices of global-majority teacher candidates. Together we must learn more about the barriers that prevent the diversification of the teaching profession and work to find and implement solutions to create clearer pathways and systematic approaches for recruiting and retaining global-majority teacher candidates.

Existing partnerships should be recursively and responsively reframed beyond the articulation agreements to create more innovative pathways from secondary education to teacher certification. Through robust partnerships that promote equity through critical professional development, we should unite to disrupt power imbalances within teacher preparation. Working together to alleviate the shortages of highly qualified teachers from minoritized backgrounds in high-need schools and districts is an important step, but teacher preparation programs need to do more to challenge the status quo that is not meeting the needs of high-poverty and high-minoritized schools that have fewer certified teachers and higher rates of turnover. To resist this reality, we must forge partnerships that foster the development and support of educators reflecting the racial backgrounds of students, including African American male teachers. Their voices provide necessary insight to positively center the success of Black male students while positively contributing to the success of all students.

Collective impact work also transforms partnerships across contexts and communities by creating a network to support teacher preparation and development practices that would embrace professional development for preservice and in-service teachers centered on culturally responsive teaching practices and equity. Bolstering these networks across partnerships with shared visions toward justice would be useful for the entire discipline in creating a repository of knowledge, and practices and highlighting successes. Cross-collaborative partnerships could help us meet the needs of today's college students and practicing educators through responsive professional development opportunities. We could co-create and share repositories of shared syllabi, resources, teaching strategies and methods, lesson plan templates and teaching supports.

Collective efforts could help us, as university programs and teacher preparation faculty, better reflect the collaboration we wish teachers to practice and model to students. Partnerships could foster and facilitate cross-collaborative teaching between institutions through online collaborations and face-to-face visits. It could enable meaningful connections between MSI and Hispanic Serving Institutions and school districts that, due to location and geography, have fewer opportunities for connection with and collaboration alongside institutions expressly committed to equity and justice for all.

Collective efforts and collaborations across partnerships hold promise for fostering connection and collaboration, highlighting promising practices and innovations and also celebrating and uplifting place and partnerships specific and differentiated practices that benefit the uniqueness of each minority serving teacher preparation program. Critically, while there are many underpinning practices and opportunities that we share and can practice together, justice and equity require an underlying assumption that one size does not fit all. This is necessary if we are to authentically engage for equity in and alongside our school and community-based partners. Evidence-based practices for countering inequities must not only be recognized, but also must be adapted or even transformed for local application across urban, suburban and rural learning environments if justice is to be realized.

Within, across and beyond partnerships – deconstructing language and influencing policy

Authors and collaborators of this journal believe that there are a number of critical avenues for innovation that could disrupt power imbalances within teacher preparation if we were to collaborate across currently disparate partnerships. We call for building cross-institutional and partnership hubs for innovation, for developing and deepening existing partnerships and for pooled resources for advocacy through consortia to implement equitable practices and advocate for structural change.

While we are united in our commitment to partnerships centering MSI, our reflections revealed grapplings with the language that is used – and that we used to describe our institutions and our partnerships. For many of us, the term “minority” represents a historical label that perpetuates implicit biases by functioning as a coded term for race. As such, the thought processes related to race and equity such as “minoritized teachers” was to disrupt the language of “minority teachers” since teachers of color who have been traditionally marginalized are actually a majority around the world, but they have been minoritized in America. Some scholars have recently begun using global majority instead of minority or minoritized to accurately reflect the positionality of race in the world. One of our institutions has a significant number of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) candidates and early childhood and K-12 children who have only recently become recognized as a “minority group” at the institutional level. Language matters. It reveals, it conceals, it constructs, it reifies and it is never neutral. It is limited and also necessary and we need to describe our population, our context and our partners accurately – and also justly and thoughtfully. Relatedly, Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) language must also be critically considered. In reviewing the literature, DEI language often is too broad, whitewashed and insufficient. In contrast, the term “equity”, speaks to the leanings of justice in a truly democratic society – for entities that seek to engage and empower by “meeting people where they are”.

For those of us identifying as African American living in the USA, negotiating and thinking about race and equity is normal. This normalization of negotiating race is rooted in an understanding that race, as a Westernized (white supremacist) social (cultural) construct, dictates systemic advantages and disadvantages to people. There’s power in calling out racial inequities/transgression or at least naming it when it occurs.

Building on and reflecting our commitment to enacting culturally responsive practices at the post-secondary level, we call for leveraging linguistic and cultural diversity which could contribute to counter the additional inequity global-majority educators experience across their vocational trajectory. This approach has the potential to overcome systemic exclusion and inequity and is illustrated by the reality that Middle Eastern and North African students are racially accounted for in the US census as white, yet not afforded any of the associated privileges.

These reflections on language reveal messy contexts in which specific labels (ex. MSI, HSI) are useful in garnering resources through grants and funding, while simultaneously representing and potentially reifying structural inequity. We understand that due to the deeply problematic and violent impact of white supremacy, the language used to accurately capture the social identity of race is in flux. As such, we reject the tendency to avoid talking about race for fear of using the wrong term and instead call for a critical consciousness of self. This necessary perspective attends to a framework of critical awareness about whom existing educational preparation programs structures benefit and exclude, critical motivation to address social justice issues and critical action focusing on what can be and must be done.

Critically, authors argue that collaborations across partnerships can be powerful catalysts for broader change. Authors see the potentially transformative outcomes of advocating for systemic and collective impact and partnering for structural change through partnerships.

Legislation is key to these changes. States set the educator preparation program requirements that are often rife with structures and systems created historically to be

barriers. Partnerships across programs can help us advocate for funding even while exploring the unique nature of each minority-serving institution and the strengths and uniqueness of each context and community.

Funding structures and systems of supports are also critical inflection points for change and necessary work in the face of barriers emanating from poverty and problematic policies resulting in the school-to-prison pipeline.

Indeed the work of partnerships represented in this journal is fostered and undergirded by funding that enables meaningful and strategic partnerships toward equity. This journal represents several innovative grants, such as the Georgia Educators Networking to Revolutionize and Transform Education (GENERATE), the Teacher Quality Partnership grant through the US Department of Education and the Collaboration and Resources for Encouraging and Supporting Transformations in Education (CREST-Ed).

In many cases, it comes down to funding, and especially the significance of funding of colleges of education in HBCUs. Faculty and leaders at HBCUs wear many hats and hold multiple roles while having outstanding relationships with students and colleagues. These institutions of higher education have great success mitigating exclusionary barriers and supporting a more representative teaching profession and should receive extra funding commensurate with this contribution toward equity. There is so much promise when MSI teacher preparation programs learn from each other. In a new book by Ginsburg *et al.* (2023), titled *For the love of teaching: How minority-serving institutions are diversifying and transforming the profession*, the authors explain that commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is not a passing fancy but has been the work and wheelhouse of these institutions. They argue, as we do, that as our institutions form consortia or critical mass, we can move the needle in teacher preparation programs and in education more broadly.

Conclusion

While this collaboration has had significant implications for us and for our work in our programs, schools and communities, we also feel that our collective work offers critical lessons that extend beyond the contexts of MSI. Teacher educators and teacher preparation programs from predominantly white institutions often certify a significant number of educators. Faculty and candidates working in these institutions can benefit greatly by being part of critical conversations and partnerships with faculty and leadership of teacher preparation programs at MSI. Prioritizing the representation of the global-majority teachers and increasing the diversity of the teaching profession is a foundational and necessary shift and a critical component of success for our increasingly diverse early childhood and K-12 children. Therefore, all teacher preparation programs across the minority-serving and predominately white-serving continua must address the call for equitable representation in the teaching vocation. Taken together, we feel that collective partnership initiatives and potential consortia across partnership hubs can support each of us in working with individuals representing diverse institutions, contexts, roles and perspectives enabling us to pool expertise and maximize resources to build additional pathways whereby the global-majority teacher candidate has fewer barriers to entering and matriculating from colleges and specifically teacher preparation programs.

Clearly, prioritizing the recruitment of global-majority teachers is not enough. It matters what types of experiences and supports candidates experience within their preparation programs. If predominately white institutions partnered with teacher educators at MSI, they would find support and inspiration as they work to develop personal and institutional practices and approaches that have effectively recruited and supported historically and currently underrepresented global-majority teacher candidates toward certification. Teacher preparation programs at predominantly white institutions must systematically develop

approaches for embracing diversity as an asset to be developed rather than a source of deficit to be tackled. These programs must take up the call to enact and model culturally responsive and antiracist teaching as opposed to primarily talking about it or teaching it. Higher education faculty and early childhood and K-12 practitioners alike would benefit from central practices at MSI such as a developed capacity for ongoing engagement in meaningful formative assessment strategies, differentiated and engaging instruction at the college level and in early childhood and K-12 classrooms, and true incorporation, promotion and more authentic manifestation of justice and equity. Essentially, predominately white institutions and faculty and preservice and in-service teachers from these spaces must truly engage with schools and school communities in ways that cultivate legitimate respect and reverence for their value systems and knowledge.

No matter where you are with your own journey toward justice-in-partnerships, we believe you will find questions and ideas to grapple with and possibilities to take up across this special issue. We hope the questions in *A Disruptive Disposition: Attitudes for Justice-Seeking Partnerships* will help guide your perspective, priorities and actions as you use these reflections offered to act in ways that disrupt injustice. Essentially, we ask you, what are your next steps?

How will you work toward developing your disruptive dispositions and toward making justice more real in your life, your work, your partnerships and your community?

Dr Sean Warner, co-author and collaborator from Clark Atlanta has challenged us to think more about what we mean by disruptive partnerships, saying

Much of the reason why our society has difficulty dealing with issues of race and equity is because we haven't accepted that we live in environment that regularly legitimizes and normalizes the humanity of some and the inhumanity of others based on race, which as discussed previously, is a social construction. Our infantility of understanding shows up in how we think about solutions to address the problem. Whatever we do, we have to appreciate the depth of the problem- and appreciation doesn't come without knowledge and experience with knowledge and education. Being disruptive is generally framed as a short-lived experience. The system or systems of oppression in our society including racism are interlocking and complementary. In response to a short-term instance of disruption, these systems- protecting themselves- will bounce back like a rubber band.

The question we should be considering is what do we want things to look like after disruption?

Warner further challenges us to ask ourselves and each other what we truly mean by "partnerships" and how partnerships might work not only to disrupt inequities but more critically, to build more justice.

Our work to dismantle power imbalances hinges on how authentically we create space to engage in collective work – ensuring that we are not valuing our priorities over our partners. Truly, priorities should be shared, but you cannot share priorities if you do not feel like your partner is not on your level. That is not a partnership – it is something elsewhere that can never be any real sustained magic or synergy without true partnership.

We leave you with this challenge from Dr Val Hill-Jackson, our co-thinker, co-author and collaborator in Texas, who offers us the construct of community in ways that both challenge and compel us, saying:

Community as a noun implies the work that lays ahead for Teacher Preparation Programs that lays ahead in some random but constructed 'place'. But **community as a verb** is a proposal for hope and our call to action to engage with intentionality alongside all stakeholders. The disruption of power can only occur when we decide to enter community.

We look forward to working on and in community-as-a-verb with you as we effortfully transform our world and our partnerships, programs, schools and classrooms. May we enter

communities – ours and our collective – with the ongoing commitment toward justice-in-action and equity as our north and guiding star.

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