

BOOK REVIEW

Embedding Social Justice in Teacher Education and Development in South Africa

EDS. CARMEL McNAUGHT and SARAH GRAVETT

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This edited volume by Carmel Mc Naught and Sarah Gravett is part of a series titled *Perspectives on education in Africa*. The series seeks to “offer tools for analysing, for understanding, and for decision-making concerning contemporary issues of education in Africa” (p. xiii). Its underlying assumption is that such tools and analysis, while respectful of other perspectives should be grounded in indigenous knowledge and experience as a way of decolonising African education. The promotion of African scholarship about Africa is seen as a way of enhancing education in and for African people by celebrating it and theorising lessons for the future.

The book lives up to these expectations as it offers readers fourteen chapters by twenty-five authors from Africa, the UK, Europe, and Canada, situated in universities and development agencies. Together, they give robust, critical analyses of various aspects of teacher education and teacher development in Africa such as philosophical assumptions, professional development and learning principles, economic models, environmental concerns, and access to digital resources. Their aim is to confront issues of social injustice by envisioning ways of facilitating “socially just educational development” through improved teacher preparation curricula and practices. This aim is also met through the presentation of empirical research on “pragmatic strategies” and “forward-looking” initiatives in initial and in-service teacher education.

The book is organised into four sections. The first is titled “Overview Considerations.” It begins with Chapter 1, in which Gravett and McNaught pose broad questions about the readiness of teacher education to prepare teachers for a rapidly changing world. Invoking the concept of a “volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous” (VUCA) (p. 4) situation, to convey the difficult challenges teacher education in Africa faces, they suggest it must be reimagined. They propose teacher education must focus on making curricula relevant by curating them to be lifeworthy — ready to manage “the demands of a fast -changing world and uncertain future” (p. 8). Lifeworthy teacher education would be current and cutting edge, include literacies for a digital world, and would position teachers to be “lifeready” — able to use and transfer knowledge as and when needed. This perspective is supported in Chapter 2 as Habler, Bennett and Damani, propose and discuss eight culturally appropriate principles for designing effective teacher professional development and learning for Sub Saharan Africa. In Chapter 3, Ogange and Carr highlight the accomplishments of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) “Teacher Futures” programme in seven African countries, as examples of how Open Educational Resources can strengthen the role of teacher education in “increasing access to and



participation in education, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa" (p. 45). The section concludes with a chapter by Dembowski who explains how "social-justice policies" can impact "the prosperity and stability of nation state" (p. 63).

Chapters 5 and 6 in Section Two speak to initial teacher education initiatives that are transformative in helping student teachers develop agency as prospective change agents. Batchelor and Mahomed describe an education excursion project where students are helped to confront their personal experiences of oppression and social injustice. This facilitates critical understanding of social injustice and development of professional competencies and dispositions for social justice advocacy. Petersen, Maseko, Nthimbane and Cancelliere, advocate social justice-oriented service learning as a similar strategy for preparing student teachers to become "critical, caring and transformative actors in society" (p. 95).

Research on school and community-based teacher development activities is highlighted in Section Three. These include a successful participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) model described in Chapter 7, whereby in-service teachers learn to take individual and collective ownership of processes for addressing "personal and contextual psychosocial challenges" (p. 122). The author, Setlhare, contends this enables teachers to become more confident and prepared to support learners psychosocially in sustainable ways. In Chapter 8, Sinyolo, illustrates the value of teacher-development programmes that involve genuine participation of teachers and other key stakeholders in their conceptualisation. He argues this approach "ensures ownership and successful implementation" (p. 142). Drawing on lessons learned from examples such as the prize-winning Quality-Ed programme, he proposes a teacher-competence-based model for building the capacity of teachers for promoting social justice. Chapter 9 also subscribes to the idea that opportunities to facilitate "the co-construction of knowledge" (p. 148) by teachers and school communities are powerful strategies for developing culturally relevant and socially just pedagogy. Its authors, McAteer and Wood, share the results of a participatory action research where Teaching Assistants (TAs) were trained and mentored to strengthen communication between parents and teachers in low-income communities. This facilitated the role of the TAs in moderating epistemic injustice as they became conduits for bridging the languages and knowledge of the world of communities and teachers.

In Chapter 10, Gravett and Eadie, document the conceptualisation and framing of the Sandbox project – an "education-focused, design-based research project" (p. 163), This is intended to "advance theoretical insights" and develop "tested artefacts and practices" (p. xvii) through a series of interventions designed to develop teacher competencies for a "changing world" (p. 169). This objective is grounded in the researchers' belief that enabling teaching and learning that meets the demands of a rapidly changing world is a "social-justice imperative" (p. 175).

Section Four shifts attention to issues of curriculum in teacher education. All three chapters are underpinned by a critical theoretical view of curriculum as a "space of power, social justice, caring and debate" (p. 182). The authors see critical consideration of curriculum – exposing how it is complicit in reproducing social inequalities as key to redressing social injustice in education. In Chapter 11, Mdzanga and Moeng, argue for the recognition of the pedagogical value of all African languages in teaching and scholarship. They contend that language politics and policies in higher education institutions in South Africa must be reformed because their "epistemologies and knowledge systems. . . remain rooted in colonial, apartheid and Western worldviews and epistemological

traditions” (p. 186). English remains the dominant language for teaching. This serves to marginalise many students from non-English speaking backgrounds. This is a social justice issue. It is thus critical that teacher educators and teacher trainees be made aware of this challenge: teachers must be prepared to “understand language as a social-justice issue” (p. 191) and to advocate for revision of current language policies.

Mills and Perumal (Chapter 12) take a similar position as they discuss the potential of using “Music education as a pathway to social justice” in South African universities. They argue that higher education curricula should “decentre hegemonic, Western-centric, sociocultural accounts of knowledge production” (p. 197) and instead embrace African musicology. They also invite readers to consider the possibilities of using critical pedagogy for music education as a means of disrupting the ideologies of privileging Western music. In Chapter 13, Kennedy and Lautenbach suggest that assessment becomes a social-justice issue if it fails to consider fairness and equity. This has become more apparent because of the COVID-19 pandemic as universities have had to convert to online learning and assessment. The authors share how a pragmatic approach to designing assessment, motivated by concerns for fairness and equity in a time of unprecedented rapid change and uncertainty, precipitated more relevant and socially just pedagogical principles and thinking. They suggest sustaining such pragmatism has significant implications for addressing social injustice in the future.

In Chapter 14, the editors ask “Where to from here?” Because the book was in production during the pandemic, they chose to summarise how this new reality “shed additional light” (p. 230) on the themes addressed. They conclude that it has implications for principles of designing teacher education including that “teachers need to be versatile and adaptive; quick-fix technologies do not work; sound pedagogy and the public good [should] guide learning design; responsiveness in research and development projects is essential; and long-term relevance works with responsiveness to immediate needs” (pp. 230- 234). This summary is instructive and serves to position the conclusions drawn throughout the book in an even more forward-thinking way. At the same time however, it may have been useful to pay some attention to highlighting key takeaways in relation to the aims of the book outlined in the preface. This is particularly important as overall the book makes a powerful contribution in several ways.

First, it delivers in its mission to address the issue of embedding social justice in teacher education and teacher development in Africa. This is accomplished through the various philosophical discussions and critical theoretical discourses about the concept of social justice. Almost every chapter offers a sound, scholarly, theoretical consideration of its meaning and what it should look like in action. The editors state that their intention was not to give a textbook definition of the concept. Instead, they invited “readers to see the nuances in interpretation and action that each of the authors . . . has taken” (p. xv). The authors however have succeeded in doing more than offering various nuances. They give rich, intellectual discussions of social justice which could be collated and theorized in a chapter on its own. This is a missed opportunity for enhancing the scholarly contribution and impact of this volume.

Similarly, it is indicated in the front of the book that it will be of interest to a range of education stakeholders as it “considers the need for teacher education to be transformational and address conventional pedagogy as well as the rights and duties of all citizens.” This is achieved by offering both theoretical and empirical perspectives and examples which can be considered, adopted, and

adapted by stakeholders. As a reviewer, however, I was surprised that other lessons to be learned from reading this volume were not mentioned. For example, the chapters that highlight empirical research have included detailed accounts and justifications of their methodologies. These can be considered as exemplars for reporting research and may prove very useful to prospective teacher educator and student teacher researchers. The chapters also model critically reflective thought and writing with unapologetic critiques of current realities which are assertive but not aggressive in tone. They also promote a key element in making teacher education and teacher development transformational — the elevation of teacher Voice. The contribution made by this book in modeling teacher educator research and the power of teacher Voice for change, is significant.

A final critique is the absence of a chapter that conveys the context of the volume. For readers who are not African, it would have been helpful to include at least a brief introduction to the geography, history and geopolitics of the continent. This would help readers appreciate even more the magnitude of the challenges identified in the book and what the editors describe as “our narrative journey across Africa” (p. xv). Although some chapters, particularly the empirical ones, mention several African countries, references to South Africa seem dominant.

Despite these omissions, the editors should be highly commended for pulling together a group of contributors whose work is rich, deep, and rigorous in its scholarship. The volume is a very good read for both African and other international readers. It inspires readers to engage in critical reflection of what obtains, as a means of envisaging a better future — for the role of teacher education and teacher development in making the world a better and more socially just space.

Reviewed by:

Carol Hordatt Gentles, PhD, of the University of the West Indies, Mona. Email: carolgentles1@yahoo.com

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