Chapter 1

“If Not Me, Then Who?”: An Integrated Model of Advocacy for Early Childhood Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Research has indicated that teachers typically do not view themselves as advocates for many reasons such as fear of personal and professional risk (Peters & Reid, 2009). Participants include both preservice teachers and graduates of an early childhood teacher education program. This chapter addresses how the program utilized intentional assignments and group and individual scaffolding as preservice teachers moved from experiencing service learning to pure advocacy. Through a mixed methods study, preservice teachers began to see themselves as agents of change with increased confidence and sense of power. These transformations continued as graduates of the program reported they were still engaging in advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

Preservice teachers (PSTs) begin their teacher education programs immersed in and influenced by their culture(s). Throughout their lifetime, what Lortie (1975) calls the apprenticeship of observation, they have learned how schools are organized, what counts as knowledge, the various roles and responsibilities of students and teachers as they experience teaching, schooling, and education from a student’s perspective (Oyler, 2011). Most PSTs’ experiences have not sufficiently prepared them to meet the challenges inherent in education and being a teacher (Nespor, 1987; Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004), which

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leads to the issue addressed in this chapter. If PSTs are graduating from teacher education programs ill prepared for their future classrooms, how can they be expected to be or become advocates for their children and education?

Interestingly, in college PSTs often increase their civic responsibility (Sax, 2000). Yet, they remain politically inactive, and upon graduation, their willingness to engage in advocacy and enact societal change decreases. This decrease is a concerning trend for teacher educators since graduates of their programs bear the responsibility of educating others regarding advocacy and civic responsibility. Therefore, teacher education programs need to do more than just introduce advocacy in theory to PSTs. In an analysis of programs that had a stated emphasis on social justice, a form of advocacy, in their conceptual frameworks, Kapustka, Howell, Clayton, and Thomas (2009) and McInerney (2007) found a disconnect between the term and application of actual strategies in programs. In other words, most teacher education programs pay little more than lip service to advocacy. The authors propose in this chapter that teacher education programs must teach and scaffold advocacy strategies to their PSTs as well as model them. This chapter, addresses the multiple ways theory-to-practice advocacy can be provided throughout an early childhood education undergraduate program by including PSTs feedback and reflections while in the program, as well as describing how they are serving as advocates as teachers of young children once they graduate.

BACKGROUND

In the US, there are three widely used conceptions of teacher training pedagogues found in university educational programs: knowledge for practice (formal knowledge and theory), knowledge in practice (practical knowledge), and finally, knowledge of practice (use the classroom for intentional investigation) (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Knowledge for practice implies that knowing more leads to additional effective practice. For example, once PSTs have enough knowledge of theorists, methods, and subject matter they will be better prepared to enter a classroom and be good teachers. This construct identifies that the difference between novice and experienced teachers is based purely on the amount and depth of content or methods.

The second conception, knowledge in practice, focuses on practical knowledge stating that PSTs will learn while they are observing, collaborating, and reflecting on the practices of more experienced teachers. Lastly, knowledge of practice is unlike the first two, [because] “…this third conception cannot be understood in terms of a universe of knowledge that divides formal knowledge, on the one hand, from practical knowledge, on the other hand” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 251). It assumes that through inquiry, PSTs make their own epistemology and, through problematic practice, research ways of making pedagogy and implementation better for their school and community. We implement the conceptual framework of knowledge of practice to immerse faculty and PSTs in communities of advocacy and inquiry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service-Learning

Service-learning (SL) is both a philosophy and a methodology. As a methodology, SL is experiential education that occurs over a period and requires interaction between the student and the community