Chapter 10

Praxis of the Teaching Profession:
A Dialectic of Institutional Oppression and the Development of Pedagogy and Critical Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is an epic look at teachers’ paths through teacher education, public school teaching, and teacher educators’ work in a regional university. One teacher narrative intersects with the history of the teaching profession, on how this life is shaped and is also shaped by the social construction of an American education. Ideologies of patriarchy, economic development of human capital including the corporate culture in the university are examined. The discussion reveals the everlasting urgency for radicalization in the teaching profession through the illustration of a teacher development of critical consciousness, resistance, and the struggle against the institutionalized disciplined docility in the teaching profession. The examination of life in schools and in the university reveals a dialectic between contradictions of institutional oppression and a teacher’s development of pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will discuss the topic of oppression that involves the facets of classism and sexism based micro-aggressions in the institutional contexts of higher education in relation to the Department of Teacher Education. Two women faculties, one is an associate professor of origin from southeast Asia, the other a Caucasian full professor, through dialogues embark on critical examinations. These dialogues encompass the political, economic and cultural contexts that govern faculty labor, work conditions and relations in general, and specifically shape teacher education in alignment with the goals of the public school teaching from the past to the present.

The profession of teaching is under siege. According to Spring (2018), the profession of teaching in higher education, and in the public schools is “in a crisis.” Teachers and schools are under attack “from media criticism for school failure, increasing requirements for teacher certification, deskilling of the profession with more scripted lessons, attacks on teacher unions, and calls for teacher evaluations based on student test scores” (Spring, 2018, p. 272). Teacher firings are now being reported for low test performance of students. Closing or defunding are becoming common disciplinary measures to the underperforming schools, and the recent mandate of the Common Core standards, a morphed version of the centralized school curricular, is said to mark further stringent controls over teachers’ work.

Universities, guided by the political vision of a global economy, have precipitated a re-structural transition toward two fronts - profit conscious management and strategic budget reduction plans. The former includes raising student tuition, increasing class size, lowering admission requirements to boost student enrollment, practicing grade inflation, and establishing satellite campuses. A creation of profit calls for stipulations for budget saving by cutting academic programs, particularly those in arts and humanities, and hiring fewer tenure-track faculty professors, replacing them with more adjunct professors. Although textbook prices continue to skyrocket regardless of student protests, this is not considered into the factoring of budget savings.

Following in the same vein of teacher evaluation and school performance in public schools, universities are connecting more and more with service and manufacturing industries. This driving intellectual force of an industry context has been in direct relation to the globalizing movement which integrates economies into one global economy and accelerates in the aiding of technology and transnational corporates. Under this “new economy,” which is also termed “neo-liberalism,” “new capitalism,” or “fast capitalism” (Levin, 2006, p. 1), the university is electrified with an entrepreneurial spirit and corporate cultural discourse in accordance with the neoliberal vision of free enterprise, promising university education as “a pipe line” for industry work through skill training for a competitive work force for the globe.
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