

Mindful and relational approaches to social justice, equity, and diversity in teacher education

Enoch Leung

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Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Mindful and relational approaches to social justice, equity, and diversity in teacher education

by Julian Kitchen & Karen Ragoonaden
Lexington Books (2020). 188 pages
ISBN: 978-1-4985-9891-0

Reviewed by:

Enoch Leung
McGill University

In the book *Mindful and Relational Approaches to Social Justice, Equity, and Diversity in Teacher Education*, multiple contributing authors examine how mindfulness, a concept described by Jon Kabat-Zinn (p.1) as the awareness through paying purposeful attention in the present moment, can be understood and incorporated into Relational Teacher Education (RTE), coined by Julian Kitchen (2002, 2005) for social justice, equity, and diversity. The book invites teacher educators to pay attention and reflect on how their instructional approach can be responsive to diverse students' needs in their classrooms. Students in my teacher education classes often express their aversion to the idealism of theory and research and the ways in which it is disconnected from the realities of their real-world experiences, and I have found that RTE bridges that disconnect by listening to teachers and understanding and providing actionable solutions for real-life, real teachers' problems. Likewise, the contributing authors bridge the theory-practice gap through personal narratives that align their experiences with the book's foundation on mindful and relational teaching for social justice, equity, and diversity. Chapters such as Benedicta Egbo's *What Should Preservice Teachers Know about Race and Diversity? Exploring a Mindful and Critical Knowledge-Base* (Chapter 4), invite readers to examine our own curricular pedagogy through the author's lens and meaning making from their own mindful and relational practices.

“I love all my students...I do not see colour...I treat everyone equally...as far as I am concerned, everyone is the same” (p. 73). The quote in chapter 4 reflects a key distinction between equality and equity – that treating all students equally diminishes any differences of learning abilities and interests, culture and personality, is counter to acknowledging diversity and incorporating it into inclusive education and pedagogy. As a teacher educator and researcher in inclusive education and inclusive classroom management, I find that this book excels in cultivating and elucidating this journey of self-reflection of our personal and professional lives and of our pedagogical practices with respect to equity and diversity.

Kitchen identifies seven characteristics important to RTE: understanding one’s own personal practical knowledge; improving one’s practice in teacher education; understanding the landscape of teacher education; respecting and empathizing with teacher candidates; conveying respect and empathy; helping preservice teachers face problems; and receptivity to growing in relationship (p. 15). Reflecting on the seven characteristics of RTE as a teacher educator, I agree that the most effective pedagogy to foster meaningful learning opportunities to support teachers and teacher candidates to understand and change their teaching pedagogy and practices is through fostering ‘real’, authentic conversations and relationships with the teachers in as many different modalities as possible.

The book introduces the concept of relational knowing and RTE and how these concepts can be an approach to prepare teachers for equity and diversity issues. Relational knowing and RTE requires getting to know our teachers and fostering meaningful interactions and collaborations between the teacher educator and teachers to increase their commitment towards supporting their diverse student population. In my experience as a teacher educator, I find such relational concepts map accurately with aspects of inclusive education, such as authentic instruction and relatability (Kuhn, 2007; Martinez & Porter, 2020). Evidence has shown that authentic instruction and fostering positive relationships with students increased classroom engagement and minimized disruptive behaviors for diverse students (Kuhn, 2007; Soodak, 2003), akin to RTE literature on authenticity and relatability as key to increasing teacher participation and commitment to equity and diversity issues.

“Good teachers are centrally concerned with the creation of authentic relationships and a classroom environment in which students can make connections between the curriculum of the classroom and the central concerns of their own lives” (citing Beattie 2001, p. 16). Beyond the theoretical foundation of relational knowing and RTE, the book

presents evidence-based practices that align with mindful and relational teaching such as teacher education journaling, exit cards, summative portfolios, response journals to weekly readings, and temperature checks. Many of the evidence-based practices presented in the book align with inclusive education principles and how being a good teacher is more than simply teaching effectively but also fostering a positive classroom climate through relationship building. Beyond what and how to incorporate equity and diversity in our teacher education, most importantly, the book proposes that we as teacher educators look inward and reflect on how we are setting up the relational aspect of our classroom and how we are approaching our teachers in setting up a learning space where they feel supported.

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