
Experiences of Novice Teacher Educators Focused on Advancing Equity Literacy with Teacher Candidates in School-University Partnerships: A Collaborative Self-Study

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Abstract: This collaborative self-study examines the experiences of three novice teacher educators focused on advancing equity literacy in their work with teacher candidates within a school-university partnership. For one year, we sought to intentionally embed equity concepts into our work with teacher candidates. This article discusses our resulting reflections and wonderings, our uncertainties, and how we overcame challenges in our work. We concluded that collaborative self-study as a methodology supports and enhances the growth of novice teacher educators; the need for support networks for each other and our school-university partners; and that messiness and tensions are inevitable in equity work. Our study seeks to fill the void in the literature on how teacher educators learn about advancing equity work.

KEYWORDS: Collaboration, equity, reflective journal, school-university partnership, self-study, support network, teacher candidate, teacher educator

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;

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Novice teacher educators often face challenges as they move from educators to teacher educators in university contexts where mentoring and support systems for new teacher educators may be lacking. Cochran-Smith (2003) shares that,

Despite the many expectations that US and other teacher educators around the world are striving to meet, there has been little attention to the development of a curriculum for educating teacher educators, or to local and larger policies that might support the development of what teacher educators need to know and do... (p. 5).

The void in the knowledge of how to educate teacher educators is compounded by the call for deliberate engagement in equity work. Goodlad, a leader in education, published postulates for teacher education that remain seminal ideas in educator preparation (1994). As Goodlad (1994) asserts in his Thirteenth Postulate: “Programs for the education of educators must be infused with an understanding of and commitment to the moral obligation of teachers to ensure equitable access to and engagement in the best possible K-12 education for all children and youths.” (Goodlad, 1994. As cited in Polly et al., 2019, p.19) This emphasizes the need for teacher preparation programs to focus on equity within the K-12 setting. Further, Gorski and Swalwell (2015) introduced a framework called equity literacy positing, “its [equity literacy] central tenet is that any meaningful approach to diversity or multiculturalism relies more on teachers’ understandings of equity and inequity and of justice and injustice...” (p. 36). Equity literacy suggests four abilities for educators and students (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015):

1. Recognize even subtle forms of bias, discrimination, and inequity.
2. Respond to bias, discrimination, and inequity in a thoughtful and equitable manner.
3. Redress bias, discrimination, and inequity, not only by responding to interpersonal bias, but also by studying the ways in which bigger social change happens.
4. Cultivate and sustain bias-free and discrimination-free communities, which requires an understanding that doing so is a basic responsibility for everyone in a civil society. (p. 37)

This collaborative self-study examines our experiences as novice teacher educators focused on advancing equity literacy in our work with teacher candidates within a school-university partnership. The context of the school-university partnership is ideal for conceptualizing the work of teacher education focused on advancing equity-based teaching. As Foley and Rodger (2013) describe, “[Equity literacy] is a model that is not constrained, contained, or dominated by what is best for business, but is liberated by the principles of what is best for students and society” (p. 71). Collectively, we approached this study with the shared perspective that equity-literate teachers are essential for both students and society. We identified our school-university partnership as a unique and shared space where we could work together to advance equity literacy in our work with teacher candidates, and where we could engage in a collaborative self-study of this work.

Purpose

The purpose of this collaborative self-study is to describe our experiences as we sought to intentionally embed equity concepts into our work with teacher candidates. This brought

about the resulting reflections and wonderings, our uncertainties, and how we overcame challenges within our work. We explored the following research questions:

- What are our experiences as supervisors and teacher educators focused on advancing equity literacy with our teacher candidates?
- How do we, as novice teacher educators, navigate the role of equity-centered supervision?

Relevant Literature

Research has continuously shown the importance of preparing teachers to teach diverse student populations with a specific focus on social justice and equity (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Gay, 2000; Gorski et al., 2012; Taylor & Kitchen, 2008). However, for some teacher educators, it is a daunting task to consider how to prepare teacher candidates for this work, particularly when novice teacher educators have not had experience with teaching this content before.

In one of the largest and most comprehensive studies of teacher educator preparation, Goodwin et al. (2014) highlight the need for teacher educator preparation to include knowledge for practice, in practice, and of practice. Through analysis of 293 surveys and 20 follow-up interviews with new teacher educators, they revealed how graduates felt about their preparation in their doctoral programs. Highlights included, “(a) happenstance in becoming engaged in teacher education, (b) luck related to doctoral experiences, and (c) lack of explicit development of teaching skills or pedagogies related to teacher educating” (p. 291). These findings suggest the complexity of teacher educator preparation and lack of opportunities for structured learning related to becoming a teacher educator. This collaborative self-study builds on the work of Goodwin et al. (2014) by sharing our experiences as we sought to intentionally embed equity concepts into our work with teacher candidates for the first time. We are committed to advancing this work in our roles as teacher educators within school-university partnerships working toward the goals and structures of professional development schools.

In her recent study on graduate students committed to equity, Dunn (2016) analyzed data compiled from 9 doctoral students attending two different teacher preparation programs sharing a similar mission committed to equity and social justice. Through document analysis and semi-structured interviews, Dunn found that “(a) there is a disjuncture between the rhetoric and reality of social justice teacher educator preparation, (b) preparing to be a teacher educator for social justice is complicated by the neoliberalization of teacher preparation, and (c) social justice commitments are both challenging and powerful to uphold in this climate” (2016, p.12). Doctoral student participants expressed, “there was often a difference or gap between programs’ stated missions and the actual experiences they had as doctoral students and/or first-year professors” (p.12) and “they felt further challenged by the landscape of teacher education that reflected a turn toward neoliberal, accountability-focused measures” (p. 23). Unlike Dunn (2016), we find there is alignment between our college’s mission and our commitment to equity and social justice, which is one of the reasons we felt the need to study our own experiences.

In their recent qualitative study, Stillman et al. (2019) examined teacher educator professional learning through a monthly informal learning space. The goal was to determine how these meetings transformed teacher educator commitment to social justice. Over the course of a three-year period, doctoral students met monthly to engage in a dialogue about social justice and

teacher educator learning. Through written reflection, memos, video-recorded sessions, and interviews, they learned that “critical pedagogies have a powerful role to play – as tools/spaces for teacher educator development, and also for constructing situated knowledge for teacher educators that can cultivate transformation in the field and beyond” (Stillman et al., 2019, p. 282). Similarly, we used this meeting structure to organize our work in this study.

Overall, this literature guided the organization of our study and how we thought about our roles as teacher educators committed to social justice. Previous research demonstrates that while teacher preparation programs must emphasize equity and social justice issues in order to prepare candidates to work with diverse student populations, additional research is needed to understand how teacher educators can be adequately prepared and supported as they engage in this work. Previous studies have indicated that teacher educators experience challenges and complications in engaging in social justice work, but that informal learning spaces and collaborations offer potential structures that can support and strengthen this work. Our collaborative self-study aims to contribute to this conversation by sharing our experiences navigating the role of novice teacher educators seeking to develop socially just, equity literate teacher candidates.

Rationale

Teacher education literature has called for teacher preparation programs to promote the development of culturally responsive, equity-literate teachers for quite some time (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Gay, 2000; Gorski et al., 2012; Taylor & Kitchen, 2008). However, there is a need for research that examines how to prepare teacher educators to engage in this work-(Cochran-Smith, 2003; Han et al. 2014; Jacobs, 2015). The first of Nine Essentials shared by the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) calls for “A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community” (NAPDS, 2008). As novice teacher educators, we are committed to advancing this work in our roles within school-university partnerships working toward the goals and structures of professional development schools.

Methodology

This self- study examined the following research questions:

- What are our experiences as supervisors and teacher educators focused on advancing equity literacy with our teacher candidates?
- How do we, as novice teacher educators, navigate the role of equity-centered supervision?

Self-study can be defined as “intentional and systematic inquiry into one’s own practice” (Dinkelman, 2003, p. 8). Self-study has been described as an important and useful component in the work of teacher educators in helping them to develop their knowledge, to understand the complexities of their work, and to promote reflective teaching, among other aims (Berry, 2007; Dinkelman 2003; Kulkarni et al., 2019; Louie et al., 2003; Morettini et al., 2019). In this study, we used a collaborative self-study approach, which builds upon self-study principles to include both individual and collaborative processes around a shared question or topic. Collaborative self-

study merges social support, peer input, and collegial relationships with the self-study process around a shared research focus (Louie et al., 2003).

Since teaching itself involves “a relation between persons” (Coia & Taylor, 2009, p. 171), we selected this methodology because we believe that we, as teachers and teacher educators, can improve our practice by examining ourselves with others (Morettini et al., 2019). Morettini et al. explain, “self-study provides a method for exploration and reflection for faculty researchers who aim to better understand some aspect of the nature of their work” (2019, p. 354). Our methodology is grounded in the idea that teachers can problematize themselves as insiders looking in, but also as outsiders looking in and insiders looking out. Coia & Taylor (2009) explain in this type of research, the researcher’s role should be blurred, neither completely subjective (insider) nor completely objective (outsider). In addition, we are ever-changing and dynamic individuals; and the use of collaborative self-study approaches allows us to enhance not just our understandings of self, but of others as well (Coia & Taylor, 2009). Furthermore, as Kulkarni et al. (2019) adds, “validation of practices serves as one goal of self-study in which researchers test, share, and challenge teaching exemplars” (p. 4). Throughout the study, we shared ideas, challenged our assumptions, and validated one another’s teaching practices.

Researchers have found that collaborative self-study within learning communities is a structure that can be used to support conversations about equity and social justice (Han et al., 2014; Jacobs, 2006; Kulkarni et al., Morretini et al., 2019; Pithouse et al., 2009;). For example, Han et al. (2014) used a collaborative self-study methodology to explore how teacher educators define, enact, and navigate culturally responsive pedagogy in their respective roles in higher education. In this study, the researchers identified themes and shared tensions across their experiences, as well as opportunities that helped them evolve as culturally responsive educators, which included the support from one another as critical friends, and research engagement around their shared questions. Using a similar approach, we engaged in a collaborative self-study to explore our experiences as novice teacher educators working to develop equity-literate teacher candidates within our school-university partnership work as supervisors and instructors.

Context

Within the context of a large, research-intensive university, we, three novice teacher educators, work closely with many local K-12 schools to develop strong school-university partnerships that support both the development of our teacher candidates and the needs of partner schools. Teacher candidates in our elementary education program engage in four semesters of internship experiences in connection with these local schools. They are grouped using a cohort model, whereby they remain with the same group of peers (approximately 20-30 students) and in most cases, the same school placement, during these four semesters. During semesters one and two, which are named “Level 1” and “Level 2,” teacher candidates’ internship takes place one full day per week at their school site, while they also engage in coursework throughout the rest of the week. Teacher candidates remain with the same collaborating teacher (CT) through Levels 1 and 2. In the following semester, “Level 3,” interns move to a new classroom placement at the same school, and they continue to take coursework while engaging in their internship two full back-to-back days per week. During the “Final Internship” semester (Level 4), teacher candidates remain in their Level 3

classroom, but transition to a full-time (5 full days per week) experience. During each level of internship, teacher candidates attend weekly seminars that last approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes led by their university supervisor.

An expansion of our school-university partnership is an innovative Professional Development School (PDS) network that incorporates a teacher leadership graduate certificate program tailored directly to the teachers participating in the program. This PDS network features a clustering of elementary, middle, and high schools within a feeder pattern. One of the school sites in this study is an elementary school in the PDS network, following the same cohort model described above. Two CTs at the school site are part of this teacher leadership program that highlights a focus on equity literacy.

Working within school-university partnership contexts and in collaboration with one another allows us to gain a deep understanding of the schools where our teacher candidates were placed. Our deeply embedded work in these contexts enhances our abilities to make connections between the school contexts and the topics introduced in our classes and seminars, and in particular to equity issues, to the work our teacher candidates are experiencing in the field. For this study, our research takes place at the intersection of our shared goals, overlapping responsibilities in our work with teacher candidates, and desire to collaboratively study our practice and support our collective growth as teacher educators committed to advancing equity.

Participants

Teacher candidates' course instructors and supervisors aim to collaborate and engage with the school sites in a variety of ways in our program. In this study, we worked as both supervisors and instructors of teacher candidates as they engaged in their internship experiences and related coursework, and we continuously sought to make strong connections between coursework and internship experiences. For the year in which this research took place, the three of us shared some of the same students for different courses. For example, one of us taught coursework to a cohort that had another one of us as a field supervisor. Similarly, two of us taught the same course to different groups at the same time, allowing us to collaborate and co-plan within each context.

Each of the co-researchers in this study is a former elementary teacher and a current doctoral candidate in Teacher Education or Special Education. We approached this self-study with our shared interest in advancing equity literacy in our work with teacher candidates. For this study, all three of us engaged in the supervision of teacher candidates, including observation cycles and the facilitation of weekly seminars. As supervisors, we spent at least one full day a week at a school with our teacher candidates. Two of us also taught sections of a course on classroom management and how to create an effective and differentiated learning environment. Additionally, one of the researchers co-taught courses in the PDS network's teacher leadership program. Our multiple overlapping roles add to the fruitfulness of this study. In addition, we engaged with a larger group of equity-minded faculty advisors, mentors, and doctoral students from whom we could seek advice and support when needed.

Researcher 1: Amber.

Teaching Background. Prior to beginning my doctoral program, I taught elementary school (grades 3, 4, and 5) in a large, urban school district in Southwest Florida for 10 years. Both schools I taught at were considered high needs, serving socioeconomically disadvantaged students with a high rate of racial and ethnic diversity. The schools in which I completed my student teaching during my teacher preparation program were a stark contrast to the school I was hired at - serving a predominantly white student body coming from affluent families. I was ill prepared to navigate the challenges I would soon face, from students bringing weapons and drugs to class, to being assaulted by a student. In fact, the future of my educational career was defined by this pivotal incident of assault, by a 10-year old child who was previously diagnosed with Bipolar disorder. The school resource officer and the principal encouraged me to join them in their office so they could assist me with formally pressing charges against my student, only if I wished. Pressing charges on an otherwise loving child with special needs seemed unfathomable. All I could think about in that moment was the urgency in which I needed to equip myself with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach and support children, especially when their school has already given up on them. I began a journey of learning about equity and social justice as I proudly continued teaching at the same school for several more years, serving in a variety of roles which included being a Collaborating (Mentor) Teacher for student teachers enrolled in the same teacher preparation program at the same university where I graduated. These experiences sparked my passion for learning about social justice and equity, which ultimately brought my journey full circle--from being a teacher candidate, a teacher, a Collaborating Teacher, to being a supervisor of teacher candidates and working with Collaborating Teachers, all in the same university and school district.

Current Program. I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Teacher Education program focused on social justice and equity in education. Within this program, I have served as a graduate assistant and supervised elementary education teacher candidates throughout all levels of their development. I also served as a Co-Instructor for teachers earning a graduate certificate in Teacher Leadership. My main area of research interest includes preparing teacher educators for socially just teaching. My goal as a teacher educator is to support the development of equity literate teacher candidates through the experiences in their teacher preparation program. This study has enabled me to examine my practices and learning as a novice teacher educator.

Equity Experiences. In the first semester of this study, I supervised a cohort of level 1 teacher candidates who were concurrently enrolled in the course "Creating and Differentiating the Learning Environment" taught by Samantha. At that time, Nicholas was supervising a different cohort of teacher candidates at the same school site. Because we were at the same school site on the same days, Nicholas and I had the opportunity to collaborate on the needs of the teacher candidates specific to the school site as well as the integration of the course he and Samantha were both teaching at the time. In the second semester of this study, I continued supervising the same cohort of students in their Level 2 internship. In addition, Nicholas and I continued our collaboration as we both supervised a new cohort of Level 1 interns at a different school. During this time, Nicholas taught the course "Creating and Differentiating the Learning Environment" to our new cohort. Samantha and I continued our collaboration through our work as Level 2 supervisors. Adding a thread of connectivity, Samantha was previously a supervisor

at the same school site where Nicholas and I supervised during the first semester of this study. Our unique connectedness enabled us to approach this study and our work as supervisors with an understanding of all aspects of the teacher candidates' teacher preparation experiences. Further, my approach to supervising teacher candidates is influenced by my own teaching background and encounters with issues in equity and social justice and the support of equity-minded peers and mentors.

Researcher 2: Nicholas.

Teaching Background. Prior to beginning my doctoral program, I taught elementary school (primarily 3-5th grade) for eight years in a large, urban school district in Southwest Florida. The school was very much supported by the community. Family involvement was very common, and many students came from families of high socioeconomic status. The school's academic performance was recognized each year with multiple awards for student excellence. About three-quarters of the student population was white. Student success was a main priority and the school had a large gifted population, so it was important to differentiate for the high achieving students, while providing the small population of students with disabilities the individualized support they needed as well. This was also the school where I completed my final internship during my teacher preparation program. As such, these experiences shaped my limited understanding of social justice issues in education.

Current Program. I began this study as a doctoral candidate in the Special Education program focused on leadership for inclusive education. My main area of interest is how to be inclusive of LGBTQ youth in the classroom. Specifically, it is important to eliminate marginalization of LGBTQ youth and increase the visibility of LGBTQ topics in curriculum. Having supportive school personnel is also another important aspect to the inclusion of LGBTQ youth in schools. It is this focus that I keep at the forefront of my work with my teacher candidates. Throughout my coursework, I learned about issues of social justice and equity in schools and began to focus my learning on how to support teacher candidates in their future classrooms. When I began working in new school contexts as a doctoral student and supervisor, I realized I had a passion for learning more about these topics and made it my focus for my research agenda.

Equity Experiences. I have been supervising teacher candidates at all levels of internship for the past 4 years in the elementary and special education programs. I also teach coursework that is tied to the clinical experiences of my teacher candidates. During this study, I taught a section of the "Creating and Differentiating the Learning Environment" course which afforded me the opportunity to collaborate with Samantha on our lesson plans each week. I also supervised two groups of teacher candidates in their Final Internship field experience. One of the schools I supervised at was a site for a new group of Level 1 teacher candidates who were supervised by Amber during the same semester. This group of Level 1's was concurrently enrolled in Samantha's course (the same course I taught that semester). The overlapping contexts meant that there were many opportunities for collaboration between Amber and I related to the work her students were receiving in Samantha's course. This led to many fruitful discussions regarding course curriculum and expectations. At times, I would even sit in on their conferences and seminars and provide clarification on assignments and course expectations.

Researcher 3: Samantha.

Teaching Background. Prior to becoming a doctoral student, I taught elementary school (primarily third grade) for seven years in urban, rural, and suburban schools in the Chicagoland area, with experiences teaching in both public and charter schools. My early teaching experiences in high-poverty area schools (97-99% free/reduced lunch) serving primarily students of color were drastically different than my student teaching experiences, and I went through shifts in my beliefs and approaches as I began to explore equity and social justice pedagogies that contradicted the “no excuses,” almost militaristic policies of the early schools in which I taught. These shifts, prompted in part by what I perceived as the failure of such policies and in part by learning about culturally responsive teaching as I began my Master’s program, were life-altering for me as an educator. I had had almost no experience learning about issues of diversity, equity, or social justice in my undergraduate teacher preparation program. I wondered why I had not learned about these issues in my coursework, and I became interested in not only my learning in this area but also in how to facilitate others’ learning around these topics to enact change in schools. Ultimately, these experiences led me to pursue a full-time Teacher Education doctoral program.

Current Program. I approached this study as a doctoral student in the second year of my Ph.D. program in Teacher Education, with an emphasis in social justice education. My research interests include preservice and inservice teacher learning related to equity and social justice issues, teacher leadership, clinically-based teacher education, and elementary student voice. As a doctoral student and graduate assistant, I supervise elementary education teacher candidates across their program, and I teach related seminars and coursework. Throughout this study, I also worked with professors-in-residence at a local elementary school teaching on-site graduate level coursework related to teacher leadership and equity to a cohort of teacher leaders.

Equity Experiences. During one semester in this study, I supervised a cohort of teacher candidates completing their Final Internship at an elementary school. In the second semester of this study, I taught the course “Creating and Differentiating the Learning Environment” to a group of teacher candidates that were being supervised in their Level 1 internship (at a school one day per week) by Amber. Similar to my experiences the previous year supervising and teaching, this work allowed for various opportunities to explore equity issues with teacher candidates. As a novice teacher educator, I have appreciated the support I receive from faculty and other doctoral students as I make decisions about activities, readings, discussions, and approaches for effectively integrating an equity focus into my work with teachers. My work continues to be shaped by my past learning from doctoral courses related to equity, my ongoing learning and research both individually and with others, and mentorship from others who are also committed to this work.

Data Collection

To collect data for this self-study, we utilized co-journaling, self-reflections, in-person meetings, and interviews of one another to engage in discussion about our practice as teacher educators including challenges we faced, successes, and questions that came up. We collected our data on a biweekly basis for a year. Specifically, through each of these data sources, we

reflected upon how we embed equity into our teaching and supervision practice, and our experiences in doing so. We took notes and/or audio-recorded and transcribed our in-person meetings and interviews, and we reflected collaboratively in a shared journal space in addition to keeping our own reflective journals. These written reflections often took a narrative form as we recorded stories in our own journals and as we shared stories and responded to one another in our collaborative journal. According to Coia & Taylor (2009), the use of narrative writing can help individuals better understand their own struggles and decision making. Then, writings can be discussed in a collaborative group and audio recorded as an additional data source. We often followed this structure by engaging in discussions in our in-person meetings to share and reflect on our journaling.

Data Analysis

We analyzed our data for this self-study with an inductive approach (Miles et al., 2014). First, we individually completed an initial round of analysis of our co-journal, self-reflections, and transcripts of our in-person meetings looking for patterns in the data. In this initial round, we first each read through all of our data. Then, we individually open coded all of the data in order to describe and categorize it. After this round, we met to compare our codes and patterns, and we collaboratively began the second round of analysis. In this second round, we used axial coding to identify categories across our data. An axial code is “a category label ascribed to a group of open codes whose referents (the phenomena being described) are similar in meaning” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 671). We then used the categories we identified through this process to identify themes in the data (Saldaña, 2009). Openly sharing ideas, challenging our assumptions, and validating one another’s practices were key elements in achieving trustworthiness. Thus, equal weight was placed on each of our codes. Three key themes emerged from our data analysis, which are discussed in the following section.

Findings

In this collaborative self-study, we aimed to explore our experiences as novice teacher educators working within a school-university partnership by answering our two research questions. Our findings about our experiences as supervisors and teacher educators focused on advancing equity literacy in our teacher candidates and how we navigated these roles are presented in this section.

Research Question # 1

What are our experiences as supervisors and teacher educators focused on advancing equity literacy with our teacher candidates?

Methodology as a Catalyst for Growth

While reflective practices in teacher education are known to be beneficial to support practice, we found that the use of a collaborative self-study as a methodology enhanced our individual and collective practices. Although this was not our initial intention as we began this study, it became increasingly clear as the study unfolded that the methodology we were using was contributing to our sense of support, our ability to navigate challenges and uncertainties, and

our individual development as teacher educators; and our data analysis confirmed this supposition. Over the course of the year, it became more evident that the collective aspect of our study allowed us to support each other as we reflected on our work, developed new ideas, and grappled with implementation to move our practice forward. Through the use of our reflective co-journaling, we were able to gain insight into each other's dilemmas, highlights of practices, and lingering questions. As we wrote back and forth in our co-journal, ideas, empathy, and support flourished. For example, Samantha shared an activity related to gender stereotypes she facilitated in her course that inspired Nicholas to try similar activities in the same course he was teaching. Samantha wrote, "This activity led to some great discussion about how gender is socially constructed and the role of teachers in avoiding/disrupting gender stereotypes in their classrooms." In response, Nicholas reflected,

With support from Samantha, I added new activities and ways to think about the work we do in the course. I would not have been able to accomplish this without collaboration with Samantha. By having her look at my past lessons and activities through her own, new lens, I feel that it breathed a new life into the course this semester.

Amber agreed with Nicholas as he suggested we work together to reinforce similar ideas and activities into the teacher candidates' internship and seminar space. Nicholas shared, "It could be a really cool thing to bring some of the work Samantha wants to do in our course into your [Amber] seminar space."

Additionally, we emphasized that self-awareness and reflection cannot be overlooked by teacher educators and that our work involves not only learning about others, but also learning about ourselves—especially as we are tasked with teaching and advocating for diverse populations. Nicholas reflected,

I think through this process, I gained some sense of confidence when thinking about equity and social justice in my practice enabling me to engage in more critical conversations with my teacher candidates than I have ever had in the past.

Amber also shared,

Working on this collaborative self-study, I felt renewed knowing that I was not alone in trying to do what is best as a novice teacher educator...that there was a group of other people that had the same commitments to issues of equity. Not being alone in this was empowering as I gained so many ideas and resources.

We all highlighted the space that this study created for us as a space where we could openly talk about concerns and vulnerabilities. Our shared vision and collaborative conversations provided comfort with the unfamiliar and showed us the power that came from the lasting relationships we formed through the space we created during this study. Ultimately, we found that the process of engaging in a collaborative self-study supported our growth individually and collectively regarding equity work, including the development of new ideas and new wonderings as we moved our practice forward.

Research Question #2

How do we, as novice teacher educators, navigate the role of equity-centered supervision?

The Development of a Support Network

Through analysis of our data, another key finding was that our collaboration in this self-study led to the development of a strong support network among the three of us as novice teacher educators. Our relationships with a group of equity-minded faculty advisors and mentors added an additional level of support to our network that contributed to our overall learning and a greater sense of agency around engaging in equity work.

Each of us highlighted the helpfulness of our support network. Nicholas shared, “We probably talk on a daily basis, discussing many things we all have going on and getting feedback and support from one another who are also wondering how things work and the best possible ways to handle our dilemmas.” Amber agreed when she said,

Honestly, if it were not for the support I have from the two of you, I do not think my reflective practices alone would have taught me as much, and I know that I would not have benefited from the supportive pushback from our group.

Accountability was another benefit that we each expressed. As novice teacher educators, we worked together to move our practice forward during those times we felt uncomfortable and vulnerable. In one of Samantha’s journal entries, she wrote, “I want to hold myself accountable to ‘calling in’ when my teacher candidates say or do something that is not inclusive or that is based in deficit thinking.” She noted that sharing this with the others pushed her to follow through with this commitment. We also were each able to open up about instances we felt discomfort and offer support and feedback to one another. Samantha shared an example of this:

It definitely felt a little awkward, and I was reflecting afterward about whether or not I responded the right way...but either way, I am glad I did respond and I hope that it will become more natural the more I practice. I want to develop my skills at ‘calling in’ without making students feel embarrassed or criticized.

The most common questions appearing in our data were “what do you think about this?”, “how would you react in this situation?”, and “how would you respond?”. Being open with our questioning and providing feedback to each other pushed us in our development and provided a sense of motivation in hearing others’ stories and suggestions. We all benefited from this support network as we encountered different situations with our teacher candidates, as shared in the following:

One particular instance that comes to mind was a time we had a meeting a couple of days before I was having a post-conference with a teacher candidate about a lesson I observed, during which she used a book in her first-grade class that presented a really Eurocentric and deficit view of early America. I was glad I was able to share this dilemma in our support network and get feedback before I met with this teacher candidate, because our conversation really helped me to think through how to respond and it pushed me to be direct. Because I still felt new in my role as a supervisor and in my ability to meaningfully discuss equity issues, I can look back and reflect on previous circumstances where I presented certain ideas/issues/conversations in a “friendly” or comfortable way when I should have been more direct or been okay with it being uncomfortable in order to discuss what needed to be discussed. (Samantha)

Talking through issues together as we encountered similar situations allowed comfort and trust to build. The support network we created pushed us to be comfortable confronting issues that need to be confronted, even when it was not easy. We agreed that we felt an enhanced self-

awareness, a clearer understanding of preparing equity literate teacher candidates, and a stronger sense of agency because of our support network.

The empowerment Amber felt from engaging in this collaborative self-study translated to her work with the PDS network, specifically with the CTs in this network who were paired with her teacher candidates. With Nicholas also working at the same school site, an additional layer of support emerged through the collaboration of the CTs in the PDS network with the teacher candidate supervisor and course instructor—all engaging in work with the same cohort of teacher candidates. The structure of our unique connectedness enhanced our growth by drawing upon the knowledge of all stakeholders, enabling us to act on opportunities to problem solve and reflect on dilemmas at the school sites while also utilizing support provided by our various strengths, expertise, and experiences through intentional collaboration.

Within our network, our varying perspectives enabled us to approach teaching and learning from all angles as we co-planned for course assignments and seminars and became more comfortable with the uncomfortable dilemmas encountered when learning about and implementing equitable teaching practices with our teacher candidates.

Learning to Embrace the Messiness of Equity Work

A third finding points to the messiness of engaging in equity work and the tensions involved in the facilitation of advancing equity literacy in our teacher candidates and ourselves. Pushback, resistance from students, and time were all contributing factors to the messiness of our work. However, we felt that our collaborative self-study allowed a supportive space for dealing with these inevitable conflicts and tensions.

As supervisors and course instructors, it can be difficult to determine how to embed equity work into our seminars and courses due to the lack of time and space in the course content design. The following excerpt represents this:

A challenge I am having is (as always) time! This makes me think of my first couple of years as an elementary teacher when I often had this tension between ‘covering everything’ and the actual depth of the content. So, I always feel I have so much to get to during each class, even though they are plenty long. As a result, conversations that could go deeper are often hurried through. (Samantha)

Not only does the 90-minute seminar design inhibit adequate implementation of equity work, our time as supervisors and instructors is limited. In the context of a supervisor being paired with upwards of 10 interns, as we commonly experienced, we often felt limited with the amount of time we could dedicate to each intern along with limited opportunities for participation by all in class discussions. When this work is not embedded into course design as adequately as we believe it should, it takes time on our part to learn about and plan for implementation as we are all doctoral candidates in addition to course instructors and supervisors. In one entry, Nicholas shared this sentiment, “Being completely honest, with all that I have going on this semester, the ideas/articles/activities may need to be quick to implement. With all the content we have to cover, time is often a major barrier to implementation.”

Another example of messiness and tensions that trended in our data were instances of resistance and pushback from our teacher candidates. For example, in one journal entry, Samantha wrote about a conversation about racism that did not go as planned, during which her

attempts to engage the majority-white class in a conversation about race fell short. She explained,

I do know the literature talks about hesitancy or unwillingness to talk about race at first, and this is also still early in the semester so we are still building relationships, but I need to think more carefully about how to begin conversations when topics about race come up next time.

Although we understood the importance of building relationships with our teacher candidates and actively worked to do this, we still received push back and resistance. In a related example, Amber journaled about a lesson observation cycle (consisting of a pre-conference, lesson observation, and post-conference):

Even though we talked about cultural appropriation two weeks ago, the teacher candidate insisted upon dressing up in traditional Native American dress. I probed her during our pre-conference, and eventually confronted her regarding this decision to which she just explained that because she was older and from another generation, she just did not ‘get this kind of stuff’.

Not only did we experience pushback individually, but we faced similar challenges collaboratively as well. The following is an excerpt from a conversation with Amber and Samantha regarding a shared dilemma they faced. Amber stated:

A dilemma I am facing is that most of my interns are white females and have shared that they have grown up in the community where our school site is located and lacks diversity. The school setting reflects the surrounding community, and I worry that my plans implementing equity work may be hard for them to wrap their heads around. Not just because of the school context limiting their experiences with diverse students in diverse settings, but also because of my limited knowledge of how to broach this topic under these circumstances.

Samantha replied,

Amber, since part of my class is your group of interns, your comment definitely resonates with me, too. We talked last week in my class about how [their school sites] are great schools to learn in and full of great resources, but also not reflective of the majority of schools in our area. This is something we have to be really intentional about with this group, since we know they will be at these schools the next four semesters.

Our data demonstrated that there is messiness involved in preparing for the tensions that are faced in this type of work and how to respond in situations where we may not know the right answer. Through this study, we began to make sense of the cumbersome tensions and messiness involved in equity work. This process enabled us to manage continuing to be learners ourselves as we studied theory while questioning and reflecting on our practices and experiences as novice teacher educators.

Miller and Glass (2018), pose this question to teacher educators, “Is there a way to help teacher candidates dismantle or challenge their own perspectives to be open to others...” (p. 147). Throughout this self-study and leading to data analysis, we considered this question as it relates to us, three novice teacher educators, challenging our perspectives. The shifts that each of us had in our own perspectives related to equity included: becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable, coming to expect the tension or resistance and learning to embrace it, and

learning to rely on one another when feeling uncertain about a conversation or incident that we experienced.

When we asked each other what we gained and how we evolved from this experience during one of our interviews, we produced the following reflections:

I think the biggest thing for me was just having this sense of community and space to talk about what we are all doing. Hearing about others' work gave me ideas, pushed me to try new things, and helped me reflect on my own experiences. I also see growth in my attention to/confidence in addressing equity issues with my preservice teachers. I am more able to identify issues related to inequity or injustice that are occurring around me, especially in schools, and to know how to respond or address them as I engage in seminar and coaching cycles with my teacher candidates. I can see how this has helped me personally grow, but I also know that I still have so much to learn, and I hope this continues to be a space where we can support each other in advancing this important work. (Samantha)

Nicholas answered,

This experience has afforded me accountability coaches that held me to thinking about equity as we planned for content with our teacher candidates. But, it also provided me a group of people that I now know I can lean on for feedback and support when I am in doubt.

Answering the same question, Amber reflected,

This experience allowed me to feel comfortable openly talking about concerns that I've had for myself as well as my vulnerabilities, because without confronting those issues, and having my support network with me along the way, my growth would have been limited. We have created such a beautiful space to have conversations that helped me gain confidence in how I react and respond to issues of inequity.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this collaborative self-study was to look into our journey over one year and examine our experiences as novice teacher educators with a commitment to equity. As we spent this time as doctoral candidates as well as supervisors and instructors reflecting on our practices and how we navigate our roles, we also considered the context of working within a school-university partnership. The results indicated that reflection and collaboration are tremendous supports for novice teacher educators as they examine their practice to enhance their instruction and move forward with equity work. Working within a school-university partnership extends opportunities for collaboration and reflection with university supervisors, course instructors, teacher candidates, CTs and teacher leaders with a shared commitment to equity work--making such partnerships ripe contexts for teacher and teacher educator learning.

Although we struggled at times with the messiness and tensions presented along the way, the use of a collaborative self-study enabled us to build a support network that fostered the growth of our relationships as practitioners and researchers, promoted self-study and self-awareness, and inspired a sense of agency. Additionally, we found value in our collaborative efforts, allowing us to benefit from these practices in not only our work but also the work we will inevitably encounter as we work with collaborative groups. Further, collaborative groups or

networks “that meet over time can become contexts that propel transformation forward beyond simply changing or adapting a frame of reference, but changing how one acts on and acts within the world” (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). Being a part of support networks will empower teacher educators to act as they serve as an impetus for purposeful engagement in critical conversations with all members of a school-university partnership (Forsyth & Gustafson, 2013; Hoffman & Dahlman, 2013; Brown et al., 2013).

As we examined our experiences enacting our espoused practices with teacher candidates, we found there to be much work needed with ourselves as we learn, reflect, and challenge each other’s thinking while incorporating equity work in our teaching. Thus, it is no simple endeavor, nor is it possible to effectively advance our equity work before engaging in self-reflective practices. More importantly, equity work cannot only consist of lesson plans and activities built into course designs, ready to be implemented on a course schedule by anyone. This is especially critical when at some universities, including ours, undergraduate teacher preparation courses are primarily taught by doctoral students who are novice teacher educators themselves. As we engage in these practices with our school-university partnerships, the amazing potential exists. Breault and Lack (2009) suggest, “In order for PDSs to preserve a social justice agenda that is truly critical, university partners must both embody the knowledge and dispositions central to the critical pedagogy movement, and they must be transparent about the limits of their conceptions of social justice and equity” (p. 163).

Our findings offer implications for teacher educators committed to equity literacy work, including the importance of reflection, collaboration, and support networks. This study suggests that as universities place increased attention on the preparation of socially just, equity-literate teachers, there are great benefits to developing and strengthening structures that promote collaboration and reflection among teacher educators, particularly when teacher educators are new to this type of work. Further research is needed to explore how such structures enable new efforts, opportunities, and successes around equity literacy in teacher preparation programs. Future research might also explore different types of structures or support networks for teacher educators to better understand their connections to successes and challenges in strengthening teacher preparation programs committed to equity. Despite the messiness and challenges that we find are often inevitable in equity work, we suggest that there is enormous potential when collaboration and self-study around the development of equity-literate teachers is situated as the fulcrum that orients the work of teacher education; and we appeal to teacher educators at large to consider how they might play a role in developing and studying these structures and processes within their own institutions.

Conclusion

Using a collaborative self-study approach to our research, we sought to reflect on and understand our experiences as novice teacher educators focused on advancing equity work with our teacher candidates. Along the journey, we explored our reflections and wonderings, our uncertainties, and how we attempted to overcome challenges within our work. As a result, we found that collaborative self-study as a methodology supports and enhances the growth of novice teacher educators; our methodology and collaboration enabled a support network for each other and our school-university partners, and that messiness and tensions are inevitable in equity work.

Our work may fill the void in the literature on how teacher educators learn about advancing equity work. The findings from this study point to the benefits for collaborative self-studies being used as a tool for teacher educators to improve upon their practice of empowering equity literate teachers; and school-university partnerships have tremendous potential to serve as contexts supporting this work.

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