



Toward a Framework of Resources for Learning to Teach

Rethinking US Teacher Preparation

Lauren Gatti



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Lauren Gatti
University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska, USA

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For my parents, Bill and Florence Gatti.

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Introduction

LEARNING TO TEACH IN TROUBLED TIMES

Winters in the American Midwest are not for the faint of heart. Anyone from Michigan or Illinois or Minnesota or Wisconsin will attest to this. But the winter of 2011 was particularly grim in Madison, Wisconsin, in part because it stretched on for so long. The month of February was the coldest one people could remember, with sub-zero temperatures freezing the world into place long after people had the teeth for it. Hearty Midwesterners, not prone to hyperbole, looked at each other through hollowed eyes as the freezes kept coming. They were long past making small talk about weather. By May the trees had not yet bloomed, their roots shell-shocked and traumatized by the five months of freeze. The most remorseless weather, though, was political in nature. In February of that year, Governor Scott Walker proposed Act-10, the budget repair bill that excised collective bargaining for public employees (with the exception of firefighters and police officers) as part of a larger agenda to address a projected \$3.6 billion budget shortfall. The first to walk out in protest, teachers initiated what would quickly become the largest protests the city of Madison had ever seen. Hundreds, and eventually thousands of people, gathered in minus 13-degree weather to march, sit in, organize petitions, and rally. I remember marching. I remember the steel gray skies and the bitter, bitter cold; the Union Cabs, a worker-owned taxi cooperative, driving in procession around the capitol honking their horns in solidarity with

protesters. I remember Ian's Pizza, the workers bundled to the eyes, delivering hundreds of free pizzas to hungry protesters shivering at the capitol. I remember the electric and overwhelming heat of thousands of people packed into the capitol building. The sheer number of protesters—as well as the number of days that people showed up to voice their dissent—is not insignificant. On one day in March 2011, for example, an estimated 185,000 people including teachers, fire fighters, police officers, students, and other concerned citizens marched in solidarity to show dissent for Governor Walker's Budget Repair Bill (see Parker, 2012). Notably, public school teachers led the first of these protests. Their grassroots sick-outs signaled to many around the state, including educational policy makers, labor bureaucrats, and even Democratic legislators, that the situation required directed action. Wisconsin teachers' collective frustration with the treatment of public education and its workers—and subsequent mobilization—triggered a statewide movement of discontent (Swalwell & Schweber, *In Press*; see also Sinclair, Swalwell, & Schweber, 2014).

This book is not about Wisconsin or its 2011 protests, but I begin here they so clearly underscore the deeply political and precarious nature of our work. Whether we are teacher educators preparing future teachers or novice teachers struggling to learn, we face twin pressures: increased accountability and the loss of professional autonomy. More than this, as state and federal budgets shrink, the public resources that have historically been available for education continue to evaporate. This decrease in school funding coupled with an increasingly hostile policy context has (unsurprisingly) translated to some of the lowest levels of teacher morale in history. The thousands of teachers protesting the Budget Repair Bill in Wisconsin is testament to the collective frustration. This is the arena into which novice teachers are stepping.

Education and teacher preparation as sites of rhetorical and intellectual struggle is certainly not new (Kliebard, 2004; Fraser, 2007; Goldstein, 2014); however, the substance and import of these debates have changed in the last 20 years. Before the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—known to us as No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—pitched debates also raged. Prompted by a variety of policy reports, including the Coleman Report (1966) and *A Nation at Risk* (1983), debates included the intellectual, cultural, and political implications of teaching African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (or “Ebonics”) in Oakland schools and the push for cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987). These debates reflected the larger, thorny issues of social class, lan-

guage, race, and culture in schools and were taken up differently by local communities. But it was not until NCLB that there was a national policy aimed to address issues of educational (in)equality.

The effects of NCLB, especially for schools in disinvested, racially segregated, and poor neighborhoods, have proven troublesome to say the least. High-stakes testing continues to increase. More and more K-12 schools, now at the end of their five-year Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) cycles, are labeled “failing” and in need of transformation or “turnaround.” The educational zeitgeist is animated by a growing faith in the ability of markets to level the educational playing field and the attendant trinity of market-based values—competition, standardization, and efficiency—continues to constitute the pillars of reform. Its rhetoric convinces us that everything of value must be quantifiable and measurable; its narratives, endless and deafening, remind us that public schools are failing and that choice is the answer. College- and career readiness for every student is the *de facto* goal of all schooling. University teacher education is failing. Outcomes for teachers and students alike must indicate linear, unmistakable progress. Education policies today might look different from those before NCLB, but if we could set aside the rhetoric about twenty-first-century skills and college- and career readiness, we might recognize a familiar struggle over what knowledge is most valuable, what should be taught, what should be measured, and to what end (Apple, 2004). Because the preparation of teachers is inherently bound up with the policies and practices of K-12 schools, the field of teacher education must also struggle with these same questions, especially when those programs are preparing teachers for these high-needs schools.

The central assertion of this book is that learning to teach might best be understood as the process of accessing sets of overlapping and distinct resources: programmatic, disciplinary, dispositional, experiential, and relational. Central to this resource-oriented framework is the role of aims, or the “to what end?” of learning to teach a particular discipline or subject. As the field of teaching and teacher education becomes more and more focused on replicable, practice-based skills, it is crucial that we find more expansive ways to think about the work of teaching. More than this, as the top-down goal of “college readiness” becomes the common sense, *de facto* aim of schooling, our work as teacher educators becomes urgent and two-fold: to think critically about how a prescriptive policy aim of “college readiness” shapes pedagogy and content, and to more deliberately and

thoughtfully consider the aims—the *to what end?*—of our work in university and K-12 classrooms alike.

This book advances a recursive framework for thinking about the many resources that preservice and novice teachers already bring into teacher preparation programs (Lowenstein, 2009), and invites us to think about the ways that teacher preparation—discrete methods courses and programs writ large—might leverage, challenge, and build those resources. This book is written for novice teachers and teacher educators of any stripe and, in the same vein, is written so that the concepts, ideas, and questions can be used by and with preservice and novice teachers. The research from which this framework of resources was developed focused on the learning to teach process of novice secondary English teachers in high-needs or “urban intensive” (Milner, 2012) schools; however, this book is written for teachers and teacher educators of any discipline and grade level and those who teach in rural, urban, and suburban contexts. And so it is my hope that not only English, but science, world language, math, and social studies teachers and teacher educators read this book and find it useful.

Finally, I firmly situate this work within the current education policy context where teachers and teacher educators labor. If our work is to be that of transformers (Lipman, 2011; Zeichner & Sandoval, 2015; Ellis & McNicholl, 2014) rather than defenders or reformers of the current system of teacher preparation, then we must do more than pay lip service to the notion that teaching is political. Those of us who prepare teachers as well as those going into the field of education must have a keener sense of what the larger policy debates are and how those debates shape our day-to-day lives in institutions and classrooms (e.g., Alsup, 2006/2013). By re-situating the conversation about teacher education within the lived, complex, and multifaceted terrain of learning to teach (rather than the current treadmill of shrill accusations about failure), this book hopes to generate a productive discussion about reinvigorating and strengthening teacher preparation.

AIMS OF THE BOOK

This book aims to do three main things:

1. To elaborate some conceptual and practical thinking about how we might enact a “transformative” teacher education (Zeichner & Sandoval, 2015; Ellis & McNicholl, 2014) that transcends “reform” or

- “defend” stances toward traditional teacher preparation. Instead, I argue that thinking about teacher learning as a process of accessing distinct but overlapping resources, only *one* of which is programmatic, offers a concrete way to transcend unhelpful debates in teacher education (alternative vs. traditional) and instead think more productively, practically, and expansively about how teachers are learning in any pathway.
2. To show, through in-depth case studies, how a recursive framework of resources for learning to teach can help make visible the contingent, nonlinear, political, and personal work of learning teaching (Lampert, 2010) and in doing so contribute some common language and thinking for programs, teacher educators, and novice teachers.
 3. To advance a framework that not only makes space for existing work on learning to teach and teacher education, but also expands our depth of field to (re)include the most important question of teaching and teacher education, the role of aims and pedagogical vision (Gadotti, 1996). Learning to teach our subject to what end? Teacher education to what end? Techniques to what end? Skills to what end? Career and college readiness has become the common sense answer here, but as I will argue in this book that is simply not enough. Myopic, shallow foci on techniques and skills simply cannot sustain the larger democratic purposes of public schooling.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Part I attempts to answer two questions: What debates currently define the field, and how might refocusing on teacher learning help us to actualize a “transformative” teacher education (Ellis & McNicholl, 2014; Zeichner & Sandoval, 2015)? In Chap. 2, “Teacher Education in Deep Focus,” I lay out grounding concepts, definitions, and aims for the book, arguing that attending more deliberately to teacher learning is one way we might begin to transcend the shallow and paralyzing focus on programmatic designation. I show how the pervasive storyline about the failure of traditional, university-based teacher preparation is shaping policy in the field. In particular, I show how alternative and traditional programs alike are working to advance taxonomies for practice-based teaching, arguing that while valuable and needed, the current efforts to identify and systematize descriptions of skilled teaching practice undervalue the role of pedagogical vision—the “to what end?”—of teaching and teacher education.

I end the chapter by advancing a framework of resources that programs, teacher educators, and novice teachers might use to frame the nonlinear, context-bound process of learning to teach. In Chap. 3, “Transformative Teacher Education: A Framework of Resources for Learning to Teach,” I share the grounding theories for studying learning to teach as well as the study that comprises the heart of this book. I end the chapter by advancing a framework of resources for learning to teach that offers a way for us to consider how novice teachers learn to teach in any program.

Part II, *Teacher Learning in Deep Focus: Resources in and for Transformative Teacher Preparation*, is comprised of four chapters, each of which illustrates how different novice teachers leveraged—with varying degrees of success and failure—the resources laid out in Chap. 3: relational, disciplinary, experiential and dispositional, and programmatic. The resources I identify in this book are by nature overlapping, recursive, and nonlinear; however, by approaching these individual resources in deep focus whereby I hold the novice teacher, the resources drawn upon, and the teaching context in focus simultaneously, I aim to show how a framework of resources for learning to teach enables us expand our work in teacher education from one of shallow focus on program to one of deep focus. In each of Part II’s chapters, I include questions for reflection and discussion for novice teachers and teacher educators that are aimed to stimulate reflection on the particular resource highlighted in the chapter. These are intended to invite readers to critically consider what they bring to their teaching, what gaps might exist, and how they might critically analyze, revise, challenge, and add to those resources.

In Chap. 4, I show how two Leaders for Equity in Education (LEE) residents, Genesis and Sam, learned to create and leverage relational resources in their classrooms. In Genesis’s case, I show how her cultural connections with her students—Genesis is a black woman grew up in the neighborhood and was deeply familiar with the lives of her students—enabled her to build trust with her students so that she could teach them well. In Sam’s case, I show how her realization half-way through her residency that she “was a bitch to them for half the year” catalyzed profound changes in how she approached her students as people and formed relationships with them, in part by having them get to know *her* as a person. In Chap. 5, I explore how Margaret, a student teacher with City University, struggled to teach her urban, middle school students. This case shows the ways in which conflicting disciplinary aims—teaching toward testing