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Enhancing teacher education for inclusion

As the demographic profiles of many education systems continue to change, the challenges facing the teaching workforce and how teachers are prepared to address different aspects of diversity are leading many European countries to reform teacher education policy in support of inclusive education. This move aligns with the 2018 European Union *Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching*, which noted that: *[h]igh quality inclusive education and training at all levels, is essential in ensuring social mobility and inclusion . . . and a deeper understanding of our common values* (European Commission 2018, p1). As an implementing measure, the Commission recommended that teachers, school leaders and academic staff be enabled to: *promote common values and deliver inclusive education, through: (a) measures to empower teachers, school leaders and academic staff helping them convey common values, and promote active citizenship while transmitting a sense of belonging and responding to the diverse needs of learners* (17).

The European Charter of Fundamental Rights delineates the common values of the EU as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values were recently reaffirmed on the 10th anniversary of the Charter's integration within the Treaty of Lisbon in October 2019 (Council of the European Union 2019). They have been supported by a strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training, the Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) agenda to develop education and training systems in the Member States to:

> . . . ensure that all learners – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants – complete their education . . . Education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights and the environment, as well as combat all forms of discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds' (ibid. p.7).

While there are many efforts to address these common values, questions remain about how teachers can be better prepared to respond to the diverse needs of learners in today's schools. These questions are part of a wider discussion about how teachers are prepared to work within a rights-based policy framework of inclusive education, a values-based approach to education intended to combat all forms of discrimination and exclusion (UNESCO 2018). They represent an important step in considering how teacher educators engage with the challenge of preparing teachers to deal with difference, remove barriers to participation and implement policies of inclusive education.

These discussions occur within and across national contexts which offer different programmes of teacher education and different routes into teaching. The many variations in how teachers are prepared suggests that a consideration of programme structure may be fundamental to deliberations about how shared concerns of equity and inclusion in

schooling are addressed within national contexts. This is important because programme structure is often aligned with national qualifications that determine who can teach what.

For example, when teacher education programmes emphasise differences between sectors and different kinds of learners (e.g. early childhood, primary, secondary, special needs education) they perpetuate a belief that different forms of teacher education are needed to prepare teachers to work with different groups. In this case, it is thought that different underpinning disciplinary and theoretical approaches associated with different types of teacher education programmes are divisive rather than supportive in preparing teachers for inclusive education (Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling 2012). Over the years, two main approaches to addressing what teachers need to know about differences between learners have been promoted. One has been to add content knowledge about difference and diversity to existing programmes through additional courses, the other has been to 'infuse' specialist knowledge into existing courses. However, it has been argued that these approaches are insufficient to improve inclusive practice in schools because in addition to being theoretically incompatible, the content is decontextualised from the broader pedagogical and curriculum knowledge that student teachers have to learn and be able to apply in the classroom (Florian and Rouse 2010). While few would disagree that more knowledge about why some learners experience difficulties in learning is needed, questions remain about the nature of this knowledge and how it can be embedded in teacher education programmes.

Over the past decade, a growing number of teacher educators have begun to address this challenge through research and development projects addressing what has been termed, teacher education for inclusive education. In 2007, the European Agency for Special and Inclusive Education initiated a 25 member country project focusing on how classroom teachers are prepared to work in inclusive settings within the initial training phase. This project, 'Teacher Education for Inclusion' (TE4I) examined the skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values thought to be needed by those entering the teaching profession across all age ranges and subjects. The findings were synthesised in a profile of inclusive teachers that describes the essential values and areas of competence that should be developed within initial education programmes, but did not provide advice on how these values and competences should be developed within different teacher education programmes (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2012).

Today, an emergent body of international research has begun to consider how teachers are prepared for inclusive education. Although initially concerned with the inclusion of leaners with special educational needs, these projects have evolved as the concept of educational inclusion has widened beyond a specific concern for the inclusion of learners with special educational needs to incorporate broader issues of social inclusion associated with migration, mobility, language, ethnicity and intergenerational poverty. Consequently, it has become increasingly clear that teacher education reform has an important role to play in supporting the development of inclusive education in addressing the dilemmas of access and equity in education (Barton 2003; UNESCO 2018; Forlin 2010; Florian and Pantic, 2017). These wider deliberations are reflected in a range of projects undertaken by teacher educators interested in developing a shared understanding of what it means to teach in ways that are inclusive of all learners regardless of any differences between them (e.g. Allan 2011; Copfer and Specht 2014; European Agency for Special Education, 2011).

This is important because traditional responses to poor outcomes for marginalised groups have focused on targeted interventions and specialist professional preparation. Yet, as Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) have pointed out, when issues of learner differences are presented as distinct content, issues of diversity become marginalised within teacher education programmes. In response, research and development projects addressing teacher education for inclusive education consider how all teachers are prepared to work with diverse groups of learners and the role that teacher education can play in achieving inclusive education (European Agency for Development in Special and Inclusive Education, 2011).

Still, many teachers still report feeling unprepared or lacking in confidence in responding to a wide range of learning differences and teacher education programmes in many countries are too often criticised as inadequately preparing teachers to work in schools that now commonly enrol diverse learner groups (Cochran-Smith et al. 2016). While research on the effects of teacher education on practice remains inconclusive (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005), recent research on the topic of teacher education for inclusive education suggests that inclusive approaches to teaching should be a core element of general teacher preparation rather than a specialist topic (Rouse and Florian 2012). This necessitates new ways of thinking about preparing teachers as well as the supports teacher educators need to develop programmes that enable class teachers to deliver high quality inclusive education in diverse classrooms. Yet, what it means to deliver high quality inclusive education and training at all levels remains unclear and contested.

To move forward more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which teachers are prepared and supported to work in inclusive settings. Oyler's (2006) account of the Inclusive Study Group, at Teachers College, Columbia University provides a rare description of teacher education for inclusion as 'situated, moral, philosophical and political inquiry' (p. xi). Scotland's Inclusive Practice Project (Rouse and Florian 2012) used Shulman's (2007) conceptualisation of learning in the professions as apprenticeships of the head (theoretical knowledge); the hand' (technical and practical skills); and the heart' (attitudes and beliefs) to think about how course content associated with these apprenticeships can be aligned with the values of respect for diversity and human dignity. These projects showed how divisions created by different types of teacher education programmes for different types of learners can be bridged when difference and diversity are thought of as ordinary aspects of human development and inclusion is seen as a situated process of encouraging participation by removing barriers that exclude some learners from opportunities available to others. More recently, Naraian (2017) proposed eight guiding principles that can be used to support teachers to navigate the structures of schooling to support learners from historically marginalised groups. The principles were derived from studying the everyday realities of classrooms in the United States where mandated testing requirements and accountability policies are sometimes experienced as incompatible with inclusion. Villeas, Ciotoli and Lucas (2017) have expanded their work on developing culturally responsive teachers in favour of inclusive teaching to affirm an approach to teacher education that places issues of diversity at the centre of teacher education. While providing important and promising insights, these projects are in need of replication and more accounts of how others are working are needed.

The papers in this issue of the European Journal of Teacher Education represent current work on teacher education for inclusion. The papers were developed from a seminar held at the European Educational Research Association (EERA) in Bolzano, Italy in September 2018.

The seminar explored how theoretical concepts associated with the development of inclusive education as an equitable response to diversity are being addressed currently in different university-based teacher education programmes. The themes discussed in the papers cover three main areas of interest: teacher education policy; research methodology, and programme development and pedagogical practices. As such they reflect important elements of a reform agenda that acknowledges the many challenges associated with preparing teachers to embrace diversity and respond to differences without marginalising learners when they experience difficulties in learning. A theoretical paper from a team in England and South Africa propose a framework for bridging coursework and practicum experiences as a way to strengthen the synergies between them. Two papers consider the role of national policy (in Portugal and Austria) in shaping teacher education and teaching practice. Colleagues from Iceland, Ireland and Italy present information on the form, content and pedagogy of teacher education.

Collectively, the papers presented in this issue make an important contribution to international debates about how teachers can and should be prepared for the challenges of inclusive education. This work is of particular relevance to teacher educators around the world as the role, value and relevance of university based teacher education is being questioned at a time when the movement of people is changing the demographics of schooling and inequalities are expanding. We are grateful to the Editors of EJTE for their support in publication of this Special Issue bringing these papers to a wide audience. The papers add to what is known about how teacher educators are embedding essential values and areas of competence associated with inclusive education within different teacher education programmes. They document its complexity and provide some insights into why the work is difficult and how teacher educators committed to the core values of inclusion are addressing their role in fostering it.

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