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Disrupting norms in teacher preparation programs: Navigating challenges and sharing successes

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Disrupting norms in teacher preparation programs:
Navigating challenges and sharing successes

Chelsea T. Morris and Lindsey A. Chapman
Guest Editors of the Special Issue

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, a worldwide pandemic. In what seemed like an instant, public schooling was fundamentally changed as educators quickly responded to the need for remote instruction for the approximately 50 million students in U.S. schools. With more questions than answers, the shift to remote instruction resulted in an emphasis on "instructional continuity" despite inequities and widespread impacts of the global health crisis on students and their families. For many educators, how traditional education practices (e.g., grading/evaluation, attendance, grade level promotion/retention) could continue became a pressing problem. At the same time, unprecedented and seemingly unthinkable decisions (e.g., cancellation of standardized exams) demonstrated that wide reaching change of educational norms may not be as untouchable as it once seemed.

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, America soon found itself in the midst of another crisis. George Floyd was murdered by a police officer from the Minneapolis Police Department, just two months after Breonna Taylor was shot dead by police in Kentucky while in her own home. The days-long protests and demands for justice and systemic change following Mr. Floyd's death reflect the "collective condemnation of police violence against the Black community" (NAACP, 2020, para. 3) across the country. Meanwhile, the continued postponement of justice once again reminds us that racial disparities are pervasive in the criminal justice system as well as in health, wealth, housing, and education (The New York Times, 2020).

Everything that happens in the world connects in some way to something else or something bigger (Noah, 2020). As teacher educators, we continue to grapple with what we can learn from current events and how this learning should shape action in our teacher preparation programs (TPPs). More specifically, we find ourselves returning to the original question that first guided our interest in compiling this special issue: *How do the traditional*

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ways of work of TPPs reify the persistent inequities present in the educational system? In this special issue of JCVE, we bring together teacher educators from institutions across the country who have been committed to addressing issues and inequities in TPPs that are perpetuated by traditional ways of doing.

Purpose of the Special Issue

Gorski and Parekh (2020) speak to the need for transformation in TPPs, embracing a more critical focus that centers equity and justice. However, to transform, the systems, practices, and policies standing in the way must first be disrupted and dismantled. To this end, our purpose for this special issue was largely shaped by Blin and Munro's (2008) view of *disruption* as "a serious transformation or alteration of the structure of teaching and learning activities taking place in formal education" (p. 476). We set out, then, to include manuscripts that explicitly address what authors are doing to name and change problematic practices in teacher preparation.

Recognizing that engaging in disruptive practices requires standing against decades- and centuries-old systems, we were particularly interested in the experiences of junior faculty and others who work in TPPs without the protection of tenure. We asked that authors also addressed the ways in which they feel limited in their ability to engage in divergent thinking about teaching practices and policies. In this issue, eight manuscripts focus on the experiences of junior and/or untenured faculty leading change in their respective institutions. Though the authors frame their work in different ways and are situated in different contexts, these papers collectively illustrate the challenges and successes experienced when pushing back against the traditional culture and values of TPPs and the academy more broadly.

Morales and colleagues (2020) begin by describing their critical inquiry group, a reimagined academic space that engages in activities to support the work of critical educators and deconstruct power dynamics between faculty and students. Within the article, the authors center social justice, critical pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogies, frameworks which reappear consistently throughout the issue. They also plant an important question about who is/is not traditionally seen as a producer of knowledge in educational spaces. Second, Kressler (2020) shares insight from a self-study grounded in culturally relevant education and Black feminist theory. She describes the internal and external resistance she experienced while using challenging students to use critical reflection as a means of examining the notions of culture and bias as they relate to assessment in special education.

Next, three manuscripts explore how disruption is enacted in individual courses, especially for instructional and untenured faculty. Newton, Williams, and Feeney (2020) challenge compliance-driven approaches to course policies and procedures. They emphasize how current norms of assessment are dehumanizing and driven by authoritarian teaching styles, instead offering mediated and collaborative learning sessions, mastery learning, and "ungrading" as responsive, student-driven alternatives. Smith (2020) follows with a critical reflection of how Critical Race Theory (CRT), and more specifically, the tenets of interest convergence and permanence of racism, can guide course development. She addresses how

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TPPs often ignore race and racism in course design by illustrating how future teachers can be encouraged to welcome discomfort, begin difficult conversations, and utilize race-related content to explore identity and privilege. Following Smith, authors Bazemore-Bertrand and Porcher (2020) call attention to the use of "diversity" and "equity" as buzzwords in mission and vision statements of colleges and universities that are often not reflected in practice. Through their own narratives, analyzed through Self-Study in Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) and guided by the tenets of CRT, they illustrate the process of becoming disruptors through the (re)design of coursework in their respective institutions.

Finally, three author groups address disruption as it relates to broader programmatic change. Buchter and colleagues (2020) apply a theory of change model to analyze the resistant forces and driving forces of change. They conceptualize change as any attempt to shift the ways of work that the most powerful benefit from and reinforce the need to step back and analyze the ways in which the status quo keeps us stagnant. Then, More and Rodgers (2020) use activity theory to frame their work in an Alternative Routes to Licensure (ARL) program intended to address the issue of chronic teacher shortages in special education. They bring to light how a passion for teaching in the ARL program is often at odds with the implicit and explicit messages from the academy. Finally, Soltero López and López (2020) share the work of the Enseñamos en el Valle Central Initiative, a program aimed at recruiting high school and community college Latinx youth into the teaching pipeline. They highlight the role of cross-institutional collaborations among Hispanic Serving Institutions to address the need for more representation among bilingual, Latinx teachers in the workforce.

In compiling this special issue, we sought to not just share *what* is being done, but also showcase *who* is doing the work in teacher preparation. The process of editing this special issue was one of both learning and unlearning, and we are grateful to have had the opportunity to dig deeper into what it means to truly disrupt. We thank each of the authors for their willingness to be vulnerable and participate in making this special issue what it is. We are hopeful that the varied perspectives and approaches represented in the articles included here serve as both an inspiration and model for meaningful change. Finally, we offer this special issue as a call to action for educators across the entirety of the educational system. In a time of uncertainty and unrest, we have the opportunity and responsibility to do *differently* and do *better*.

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