

Who's Teaching the Teachers? Critical and Transformative Teacher Educator Agency in the U.S.¹

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Study Objectives and Hypotheses:

The purpose of this proposed study is twofold:

- (1) to analyze the roles, positioning, and locations of teacher educators across the U.S.; and
- (2) to explore how teacher educators achieve critical and transformative agency [to prepare justice-oriented and equity-centered teachers] across personal, institutional, geographic, and political contexts.

Guided by a framework for critical and transformative teacher educator agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2012; Priestley, et al. 2015), we plan to conduct a sequential mixed methods study involving: (1) a nationally representative survey of teacher educators describing their roles, positions, locations, and commitments related to social justice and equity; and (2) a series of geographically stratified focus groups with justice-oriented and equity-centered teacher educators describing the multiple contexts that enable or constrain critical and transformative professional agency and practice.

This proposed study aims to provide an up-to-date, comprehensive, and deliberate analysis of the roles of teacher educators and the various conditions that contribute to teacher educators' critical and transformation agency to prepare justice-oriented and equity-centered teachers. Further this study responds to calls for "research exploring the conditions and contexts that enable or constrain the emergence of teacher educator agency... in these complex times in which many issues related to teacher quality, equity, and justice are so highly contentious and politicized" (Cochran-Smith, et al., 2022, p. 447).

In this study, the research team will work with experts in the field to adapt existing instruments to develop, pilot, and administer a survey to explore the roles, positions, and commitments of teacher educators across the U.S. We hope to collaborate with major professional organizations such as the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) and the American Association of College of Teacher Education (AACTE), along with regional affiliates of the national organizations, and experts in the field in the design, pilot, and administration of the teacher educator survey. Following the survey administration and preliminary analysis, and informed by a prior focus group pilot in five U.S. states, the research team will then conduct geographically stratified focus groups and/or interviews with a subsample of teacher educators who self-identify as committed to preparing justice-oriented and equity-centered teachers.

Study Participants: Teacher educators defined as professionals who support the preparation of preservice teachers completing university-based teacher education programs, including:

- (1) University-based teacher educators (full-time, part-time, adjunct, doctoral students, retired educators);
- (2) School-based teacher educators (mentors, supervisors, educational leaders); and
- (3) Community-based teacher educators (community mentors who support the development of pre-service teachers).

¹ Proposal to be submitted to the Spencer Foundation (June 2024) to fund a five-year study (July 2025 - June 2030).

Instruments:

- **Survey** to be developed, based on existing surveys including RATE studies (e.g., Ducharme, 1996), teacher educator surveys and informed by the literature
 - Research team will review the literature and adapt existing instruments
 - Work with an advisory board of representatives from major professional organizations (ATE, AACTE), teacher educator representatives, and experts in the field to develop new scales and items (content validity)
 - Pilot survey to establish psychometric properties (construct validity) prior to full administration
- **Focus Group Protocols:** Informed by a prior focus group pilot (Phase 0) and preliminary results of the national survey (Phase 1)

Data Collection

- **Survey:** Nationally representative sample of teacher educators across U.S. (n = 1,000 - 1,500)
 - Stratified by role (university-based, school-based, community-based), geographic region, and institutional type
- **Focus Groups:** Subsample of survey respondents who self-identify as committed to the preparation of equity-centered or justice-oriented educators (n = 150)

Phases of Study	Research design/ perspective	Methods	Recruitment Strategy
Phase 0 (August 2023 - June 2024)	Qualitative, social constructivism	Pilot study focus groups & individual interviews of teacher educators in CA, FL, IL, MA & NY	Convenience sample of teacher educators.
Phase 1 (July 2025 - June 2027)	Quantitative	Collaborate with the advisory board to develop & pilot national surveys including demographics, where they are located, how they would characterize their roles, commitments to teacher education, institutional contexts. Administer survey to TEs across the US (n = 1,000 - 1,500)	Contact IHE’s to disseminate to all faculty who work in TE Collaborate and disseminate through AACTE (and regional affiliates), ATE (and regional affiliates), AERA Division K, and direct emails to teacher education faculty. At end of survey, ask participant to provide name/email of school- and community-based TE they work with
Phase 2 (June 2027 - May 2028)	Qualitative, social constructionism	Facilitate 25 - 30 focus groups or individual interviews geographically and institutionally stratified, recorded on Zoom (n≈100 - 150)	Subsample of national survey participants (last question on survey to ask whether they will participate in focus groups)

Opportunities for ATE

- As the only individual membership-based professional organization of teacher educators, we believe that this study has the potential to shed light on ATE members and the broad range of individuals who contribute to the work of teacher education.
- We hope to work together to disseminate findings of this study through ATE conferences and publications.

Requests of ATE

- Letter of support/collaboration as part of the Spencer grant proposal
- ATE representation on the advisory board to develop the teacher educator survey
- Opportunities to recruit participants from ATE membership
- Opportunities to share instruments and disseminate findings with ATE membership