

EXPLORING THE PURDUE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Focus on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice

Abstract

During this time of heightened awareness of social injustices via Black Lives Matter protests, the #MeToo movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to ensure that teacher preparation curriculum includes attention to knowledge and skills related to social justice issues in education. The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which social justice, diversity, and equity are addressed in the foundational courses of the Purdue Teacher Education Program (PTEP). McDonald (2005) proposed a framework in which social justice is integrated across all experiences (e.g., courses, activities, clinical placements) in a teacher education program. In an analysis of PTEP, we found that each required course referenced social justice, diversity, and/or equity, albeit to varying degrees, including practical applications of knowledge related to these ideas. In her framework, McDonald recommended conceptual and practical tools related to social justice. In PTEP, such tools (e.g., differentiation, Universal Design for Learning, culturally responsive teaching) are incorporated across multiple courses through readings and assignments. In this investigation, we used curricular analyses, faculty input, and student experiences to identify the nature of social justice references in the program curricula, and also highlight productive connections that begin in the foundations courses and could be continued into the methods courses later in the program. With a better understanding of the program curricula, personnel can both enhance opportunities in their own courses, as well as capitalize on experiences offered in other courses.

Keywords

education, curriculum, diversity, equity, social justice, inclusion, teacher preparation

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Recent movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, #MeToo) and the COVID-19 pandemic have created opportunities for educators to consider societal systems that often promote inequities. Extant literature related to social justice education (e.g., McDonald & Zeichner, 2009) has suggested that effective teacher preparation curriculum goes beyond terminology and awareness to promote actions and practices. Therefore, it is important to identify ways in which teacher education courses address diversity, equity, and social justice because future teachers need the dispositions, knowledge, and skills to confront increasingly visible social issues in education. The goal of this study was to investigate the Purdue Teacher Education Program (PTEP), guided by two research questions: (1) How are issues of diversity, equity, and social justice (DESJ) addressed in the required courses in PTEP? (2) What connections related to these issues are present across the program?

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

In this section, we review literature related to conceptualizations, opportunities, and challenges of social justice in education, including teacher education. We also highlight social justice frameworks that we utilized in our investigation of PTEP.

Social Justice Teacher Education

Social justice teacher education “shifts the focus from issues of cultural diversity to issues of social justice, making social change and activism central to the vision of teaching and learning” (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009, p. 597). A teacher’s role is active, and social justice in teacher education programs is a critical component of that role. In a previous study of two teacher education programs, McDonald (2005) conducted curricular analyses, observed preservice teachers’ (PSTs’) experiences (i.e., courses, clinical placements), and conducted interviews to investigate the incorporation of social justice in the program. Using a sociocultural approach and Young’s (1990) theory of social justice, she found that social justice education was present in both programs, but in different ways. For example, while one program emphasized these issues primarily in their Multicultural Foundations course, the other program

integrated attention to social justice across courses and experiences, thereby providing opportunities for PSTs to enhance their knowledge and make connections.

Social Justice in Education Frameworks

For this study, two frameworks were utilized to provide multiple perspectives on how DESJ were addressed in PTEP.

Cazden's (2012) Social Justice in Education Framework

According to Cazden (2012), *redistribution* in education demands that all students have access “to an intellectually rich curriculum for all students, especially those whose families and communities have been denied that access in the past” (p. 182). *Recognition*, in an educational context, is achieved through thinking critically about what the curriculum consists of, what it lacks, and how it is presented to students. The third dimension, *representation*, involves the assurance that all stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in educational decision-making. Cazden’s framework allowed us to highlight aspects of social justice in PTEP (Figure 1).

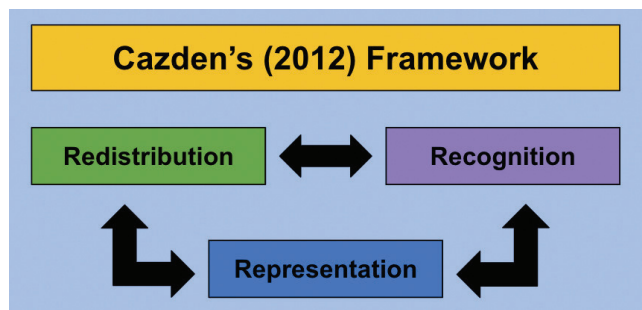


FIGURE 1. Cazden (2012) presented three dimensions of social justice in education: redistribution (i.e., access to resources), recognition (i.e., inclusion of marginalized identities), and representation (i.e., participation in decision-making).

McDonald's (2005) Social Justice in Teacher Education Framework

McDonald’s (2005) framework proposed that attention to social justice should be evident in a program’s mission

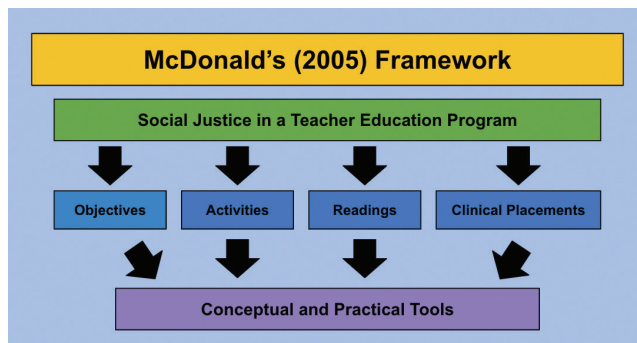


FIGURE 2. According to McDonald (2005), social justice should be incorporated across a program through course objectives, activities, readings, and clinical placements. Furthermore, these course components should include conceptual and practical tools for social justice.

and goals, as well as embedded in PSTs’ experiences throughout the program (Figure 2). Furthermore, McDonald’s framework emphasizes the importance of having conceptual and practical tools for social justice in multiple course components (i.e., objectives, activities, readings, assignments) and clinical placements. This framework allowed us to identify aspects of DESJ in PTEP courses and experiences.

METHODS

Context of the Study

In order to report PSTs’ common experiences with DESJ, we explored the eight required PTEP foundations courses: EDCI 20500 (Exploring Teaching as a Career), EDPS 23500 (Learning and Motivation), EDPS 26500 (The Inclusive Classroom), EDCI 27000 (Introduction to Educational Technology), EDCI 28500 (Multiculturalism and Education), EDST 20010 (Educational Policies and Laws), EDPS 32700 (Classroom Assessment), and EDPS 43010 (Creating and Managing Learning Environments).

Methods of Curricular Review and Analysis

We first compiled electronic versions of syllabi and relevant course materials (e.g., readings, videos, assignments) for all eight foundations courses (Figure 3). We then reviewed the course descriptions, objectives, schedules, readings, and assignments to identify implicit

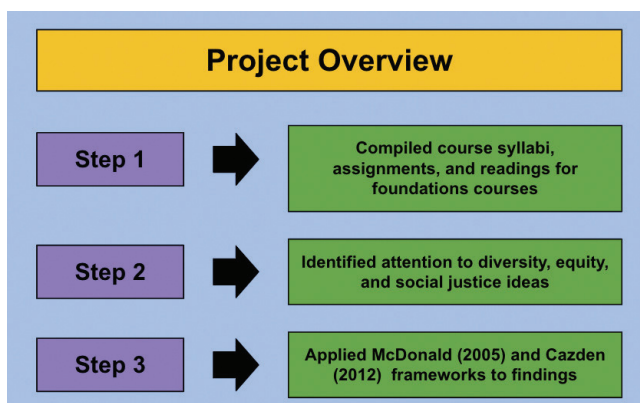


FIGURE 3. Chronological summary of the study.

and explicit references to DESJ. Any trends in references to other ideas related to social justice were also noted (e.g., accessibility, stereotypes, biases, differentiation).

Following these initial analyses, a summary of each foundations course was created, including information about the goals and structure of the course and highlighting attention to diversity, equity, social justice, and related ideas. These summaries were then distributed to the course instructors for review. When possible, interviews were scheduled to discuss the summary and gain further insights into the course; five such interviews were conducted.

FINDINGS

In the final stages of course analyses, the McDonald (2005) and Cazden (2012) frameworks were used to explore the nature of the references to DESJ in the foundations courses and across PTEP experiences.

Foundations Courses Through the Lens of McDonald’s (2005) Framework

McDonald (2005) proposed a framework in which social justice is integrated across all aspects that PSTs experience in a teacher education program (e.g., course objectives, activities, clinical placements, conceptual and practical tools). By looking at PTEP through this framework, we were able to better understand references to DESJ.

Objectives of Foundations Courses

Several foundations course syllabi address issues of DESJ. For example, the syllabus for Exploring Teaching as a Career stated that students will explore “social context issues,” suggesting attention to social justice. Likewise, the Inclusive Classroom course description included that students will learn about “issues related to identification of disabilities and G&T [Gifted & Talented] including cultural and linguistic diversity.” Additionally, differentiating instruction to meet students’ diverse needs was explicitly addressed in the course descriptions for both the Inclusive Classroom and Creating and Managing Learning Environments.

The course description for Multiculturalism and Education stated that students in the course will explore “the impact of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of social group identities on teaching and learning as they relate to contexts both in and out of schools.” After exploring these social group identities, students are equipped with skills related to teaching diverse populations in the subsequent course, Creating and Managing Learning Environments. The course objectives for the latter course highlighted that students will learn about how to create “appropriate educational experiences for students with diverse needs, backgrounds, and developmental levels.”

Activities of Foundations Courses

As defined in McDonald (2005), “activities” in a teacher education program include assignments and clinical placements. While this study explored multiple components of PTEP, it is specifically important to consider the extent to which PSTs engaged in *activities* that allow them to learn, apply, and practice using knowledge and skills related to DESJ.

Assignments. We identified three foundations courses that have one or more assignments that are explicitly connected to diversity, equity, and/or social justice.

Exploring Teaching as a Career. PSTs first generated an autobiography of their educational experience, reflecting on questions related to the diversity of the student population in the schools they attended and the

social contexts of their education. Second, in a visit from a guest speaker, PSTs learned about the process of immigration and the challenges that immigrant students often face when seeking an education in the United States. After the presentation, the students wrote a reflection that addressed their preconceived ideas about immigration that were challenged in the presentation. Finally, PSTs prepared a presentation that addressed a critical issue in education, explaining and developing a solution that adequately addressed the issue (e.g., homelessness, segregation, the school-to-prison pipeline).

The Inclusive Classroom. PSTs completed an assignment, “Diverse Needs in Teaching,” in which they designed accommodations for eight fictitious exceptional learners. Given the diversity of development levels and prevalence of IEPs among students, this assignment required PSTs to demonstrate proficiency in differentiated instruction, which is considered an essential skill for educators who seek to promote equitable learning in their classroom.

Multiculturalism and Education. PSTs practiced critical thinking skills by completing reflections and analyses of case studies. Students also completed an “empathy project” in which they choose a book to read and discuss with other students about the ways in which empathy is or is not exhibited throughout the book. The course concludes with a “Teaching Tolerance Project” in which they present an analysis of a learning plan, connecting it both to key course concepts and the knowledge, awareness, and skills that they might need to implement the learning plan.

PTEP Clinical Placements. Clinical placements in a local K–12 classroom are incorporated into Exploring Teaching as a Career and the Inclusive Classroom. According to the syllabus for Exploring Teaching as a Career, PSTs attended a principal orientation visit and seven classroom observation visits. For the Inclusive Classroom, PSTs completed seven two-hour visits to a classroom, as well as a full school day visit. These clinical placements are in different school contexts (i.e., demographics, school size) to maximize the diversity of their classroom experiences. PSTs develop differentiated lesson plans and reflect on their experiences in these placements.

Conceptual and Practical Tools for Social Justice

McDonald (2005) defined conceptual tools as “general, applicable theories, such as constructivism and instructional scaffolding, or more philosophical views related to the purposes of schooling, such as social justice” (p. 421). On the other hand, practical tools are “classroom practices, strategies, and resources that do not serve as broad conceptions to guide an array of decisions but instead, have more local and immediate utility” (Grossman et al., 1999, p. 13, as cited in McDonald, 2005, p. 421). Through readings and assignments, conceptual and practical tools related to DESJ are incorporated across foundations courses.

Exploring Teaching as a Career. Conceptual tools related to the functions of schooling and what it means to be an educator were explored (Figure 4). Moreover, a critical perspective on teaching was presented in many of the assigned readings. These readings included articulations of social stigmas and constructs (Egan, 2003), authentic and relevant curricula (Figure 5), and a rebuttal to a traditional conceptual tool, color-blindness (Ferguson, 2017).

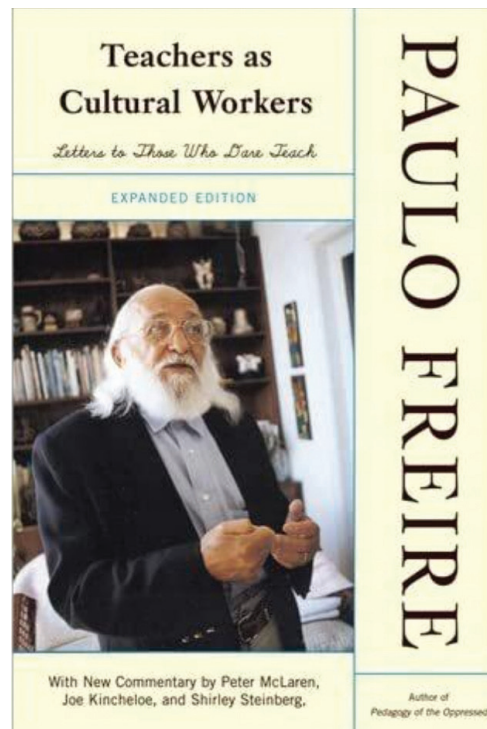


FIGURE 4. In Exploring Teaching as a Career, PSTs read Freire (1998), in which he wrote about the relationship between teaching and activism.

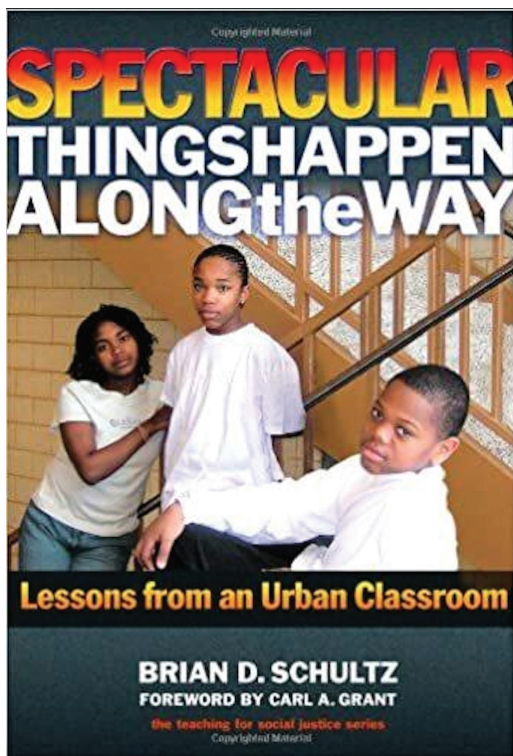


FIGURE 5. In Exploring Teaching as a Career, PSTs read Schultz et al. (2008), in which he proposed that school curricula must be adapted to reflect the needs and lived experiences of the student population.

There were also multiple practical tools introduced in the assigned readings, including critical thinking skills (Awkard, 2017; Collins, 2019), reflective action protocol (Awkard, 2017), and culturally responsive teaching (Martins-Shannon & White, 2012). Class readings also provided PSTs with specific teacher actions to counteract hate, biases, and misinformation (e.g., Fournier-Sylvester, 2013; Pollock, 2017), and practical tools related to supporting and teaching certain populations, such as the LGBTQ+ community and multilingual students (e.g., Robertson, 2014; Teaching Tolerance, 2013).

Introduction to Educational Technology. PSTs were provided opportunities to analyze “the key 21st century legal, social, and ethical issues,” developing conceptions about how these issues impact students’ home and school experiences. In addition, a set of educational practices (i.e., cooperation, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity) were introduced to identify personal learning environment (PLE) technology tools to facilitate effective task accomplishment.

Multiculturalism and Education. Conceptual and practical tools for addressing racism and unconscious biases were introduced in multiple course readings (e.g., Burton, 2014; Joshi, 2007; Nieto, 2008) as well as a TED Talk (e.g., Abdel-Maggied, 2014). In addition, multiple readings in this course included specific teacher actions (e.g., validating experiences of poor students, incorporating curricula related to class and poverty, ensuring equitable access) to meet the needs of their students and make their classrooms more inclusive (e.g., Bollow-Temple, 2011; Gorski, 2008; Randolph & Demulder, 2008).

Learning and Motivation. Conceptual tools were described in the textbook (i.e., Wentzel & Brophy, 2014), including constructs such as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic rewards. Practical tools were also provided in the textbook, such as tips, skills, and strategies that educators can use to increase student motivation in the classroom. More specifically, Reeve (2009) suggested practical tools in which teachers were more supportive of their students and less controlling and overbearing.

The Inclusive Classroom. In Chapter 1 of the course textbook, strategies such as the use of first-person language were proposed for effective teaching and learning (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2018). Later, the definitions of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) were introduced and recommended for more equitable teaching. In addition to being exposed to these practical tools through readings, PSTs had opportunities to apply these practical tools through assignments (e.g., creating a lesson plan that required the techniques of UDL and CRT, creating accessible slide decks and documents).

Educational Policies and Law. One of the stated objectives of this course was equipping PSTs with an understanding of the laws that are applicable to their classroom and provide protections for their students. Judicial tests (e.g., Fraser test, Tinker test, Hazelwood test, TLO test, Lemon test), described in the course readings, acted as practical tools to determine the legality of activities in their classrooms, as well as in their schools. For example, the TLO test protects students from unjustified searches and seizures on school property.

Classroom Assessment. In Cizek (2009), PSTs were provided with questions to ask themselves as they create assessments (e.g., What content domain is covered by the test? Are the test questions or tasks fair for all students? Are there any aspects of the test or procedures that would unfairly advantage or disadvantage some students?) (p. 69). These questions serve as practical tools because if teachers can provide sufficient responses to these questions, then their assessments have met the criteria to be considered fair and valid. Other practical tools are also highlighted, such as approaches to diagnostic assessments, action plans to improve comprehension, as well as creating learning progressions and different types of assessments (e.g., Brookhart & Nitko, 2015; Heritage & Stigler, 2010; McMillan, 2018).

Creating and Managing Learning Environments. In Freiberg & Lamb (2009), a course reading, alternatives to traditional conceptualizations of teaching and authority were explored, perturbing notions about expectations that students have for teachers, and expectations that teachers have for students (e.g., Marzano, 2010; Rosenthal, 2002). Other readings contained practical tools to address and limit biases (e.g., Gehlbach, 2010; Marzano, 2010), as well as create curriculum that fosters 21st-century skills among students (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).

Foundations Courses Through the Lens of Cazden's (2012) Framework

Cazden (2012) presented three dimensions of social justice in education: *redistribution* (i.e., access to resources), *recognition* (i.e., inclusion of marginalized identities), and *representation* (i.e., participation in decision-making). Attention to all three dimensions was present in both Exploring Teaching as a Career and Multiculturalism and Education. For example, in Exploring Teaching as a Career, PSTs were introduced to the complexities of *redistribution* when they read Cloues's (2019) article about corporate attempts to control learning and pedagogy after donating badly needed technology to poorly resourced schools. *Recognition*, which calls for cultural considerations in curriculum, is also highlighted by several articles. For example, in "Science Language for All," Lindahl (2019) acknowledged that most scientific words come from a long tradition of

white men, emphasizing that this lineage is problematic for several reasons but focused on the challenges for emerging multilingual students. Finally, Khalifa et al. (2015) illuminates issues related to *representation* as they advocate for elevating voices of parents and communities.

Several other PTEP foundations courses also addressed these social justice dimensions, albeit to lesser degrees. For example, PSTs in Learning and Motivation read Olszewski-Kubilius et al. (2016), which makes the case for *redistribution* by emphasizing the importance of increasing the pool of talented individuals as "a desirable goal of gifted education, particularly for currently underidentified populations of students, which includes minorities and low-income children" (p. 142). Moreover, attention to *recognition* is present in Cizek (2009), a required reading in Classroom Assessment, which discusses reliability and validity in assessment practices, highlighting "fairness" as one source of validity evidence "to ensure sensitivity to differences in students' gender, culture, ethnicity, language diversity, etc., and that any potentially insensitive language, bias, or sources of unintended score differences are eliminated" (p. 69). Finally, in Creating and Managing Learning Environments, *representation* is included in "Would You Step Through My Door?" (Smith, 2013), a personal narrative in which the author highlights the insights that can be gained by visiting students' homes and talking with parents in the community.

PTEP Updates

PTEP is currently undergoing major changes: Innovation Initiative, or I², to ensure that "graduates will be prepared with the knowledge and skills to better meet the evolving environment of P-12 schools" (Merzdorf, 2021, p. 6). The six innovation hallmarks of I² are (a) guaranteed, specialized preparation; (b) more hands-on experience; (c) year-long student teaching; (d) community-based learning experiences; (e) preparation in virtual instruction; and (f) induction and mentoring. In addition, students will engage in field experiences each semester, and key components of teaching practice, such as technology and assessment, will be integrated into courses throughout the program. Moreover, the I² program will use the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (Figure 6) across all courses. According to the literature, social justice education is most effective

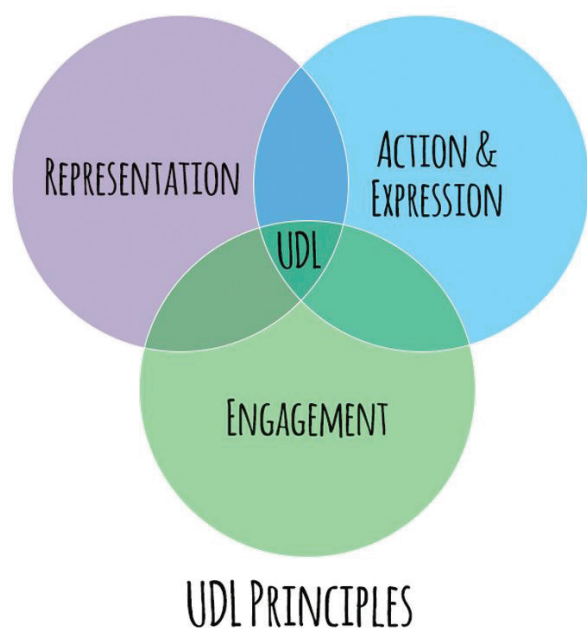


FIGURE 6. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a practical tool that is incorporated into multiple foundations courses.

for PSTs when it spans across the program, rather than in individual courses (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009), and a consistent focus on UDL will prepare PSTs to consider all learners during planning.

DISCUSSION

In this section we address findings related to the research questions posed in this study; that is, how are DESJ issues addressed in PTEP foundations courses and what connections exist across these courses? One overall takeaway from our analyses was that references to diversity, equity, and social justice were more often implicit than explicit, and that in explicit cases, “diversity” was more often mentioned. It is possible that implicit references led to more explicit in-class discussions, but such observations were beyond the scope of this study. In the findings section, we detailed examples of attention to DESJ in various aspects of the courses, noting that two courses, Exploring Teaching as a Career and Multiculturalism and Education, more consistently addressed these issues. We also noted several instances of connections across PTEP foundations courses. For example, multiple foundations courses utilized common practical tools, including differentiated instructional techniques such as UDL and

CRT. Such cross-course connections allow PSTs to develop enhanced understandings of these tools.

An examination of PTEP utilizing the components of McDonald’s (2005) framework (i.e., course objectives, activities, clinical placements, conceptual and practical tools) highlighted evidence that two courses (i.e., Exploring Teaching as a Career, The Inclusive Classroom) included explicit references to DESJ in all four components. In addition, Multiculturalism and Education addressed these issues in three components because no clinical placement is attached to the course. However, in the new I² program, PSTs will engage in clinical placements every semester. We noted a greater emphasis on conceptual tools in Exploring Teaching as a Career and Multiculturalism and Education (typically taken early in PTEP), and more practical tools highlighted in the foundations courses taken later in the program. We wondered if students in their early semesters of PTEP would be able to fully understand the complexities of the conceptual tools presented in the early courses. To ensure that PSTs are able to understand and utilize both the conceptual and practical tools for social justice at the end of PTEP, it would likely be beneficial to introduce these tools in early courses and then revisit them in later courses.

As mentioned in the findings, all foundations courses included attention to at least one of Cazden’s (2012) social justice dimensions (i.e., *redistribution, recognition, representation*). While it is not surprising that more attention was given to these dimensions in Exploring Teaching as a Career and Multiculturalism and Education, it seems likely that there are additional potential opportunities to further address and build on the dimensions in other courses. Enhanced attention to *representation* is particularly important because without the voices of those who are so often not acknowledged and respected, it seems likely that resources will continue to be inequitably distributed and dominant cultures will be primarily represented in curriculum. It is critical that PSTs understand the importance of and advocate for all voices at the table in educational and decision-making contexts, ranging from their classroom to school boards to state and national leadership.

Both McDonald’s and Cazden’s frameworks for social justice provided lenses to highlight PTEP’s attention to

DESJ issues. This study began at a time when PTEP was transitioning to the I² program; in this transition, the structure of the foundations courses and the program as a whole have changed significantly. Several program changes (e.g., additional clinical placements, use of UDL and CRT across courses) have the potential to enhance PSTs' experiences related to social justice as described and highlighted in the literature. Only continued, purposeful collaboration among instructors and program designers will ensure that PSTs complete PTEP with the skills and attitudes necessary to serve their future diverse learners.

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