

# **TEACHERS AS CHANGE AGENTS: TRANSFORMING CLASSROOMS AND COMMUNITIES**

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This special issue explores the theme of teachers and teacher educators as agents of change. In assembling this special issue, we sought to lift up the voices and experiences of educators in order to highlight the important ways they are innovating and actively engaged in changemaking around the world. This collection of articles offers an intentionally wide scope for interpreting teacher agency: while all pieces explore ways that educators purposefully impact their students and communities, we allow authors to interpret the concept of change agency and its relevance to their respective contexts.

This open framing has enabled the resulting issue to emerge—a diverse collection of articles on change agents' aspirations, relationships, responses to challenges, and collaborative efforts. One of the strengths of this issue is the diversity of voices, experiences, and perspectives captured within it. Collectively, this issue includes research findings and perspectives from Burkina-Faso, Canada, China, Ghana, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, and the United States. Authors consider teachers as change agents in diverse educational settings, including university teacher preparation programs, university language programs, primary and secondary schools in rural and urban settings, online graduate programs, study and teaching abroad programs, academic exchanges, and non-traditional teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, this issue includes a diversity of manuscript types. Authors contributed empirical (qualitative, quantitative, and practitioner-research), theoretical, and experiential pieces to this thematic special issue.

In looking across these diverse perspectives and pieces, we saw several salient themes that connected authors' respective contributions. We organized the issue to explore four of these; sections bring together articles that explore how change agents might expose power and privilege, create responsive environments, engage in messy and ongoing work of pursuing ideals, and benefit from international collaborations. While manuscripts are organized into sections to highlight convergences and divergences of perspectives within themes, readers will find connections across sections as well.

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The first section of the issue includes three empirical pieces that focus on the roles teachers play in exposing power and privilege. Bracho, Dharamshi, and Lussier, Assaf, and Hoff respectively consider ways to foster criticality. Their perspectives are grounded in qualitative studies in Mexico, Canada, the United States, and South Africa.

In his ethnographic study of rural pre-service teachers, “Trained to Resist: Teachers Learning *Lucha* in Oaxaca, Mexico,” Bracho takes on the idea of change through the lens of revolution, pushing us to see the preparation of teachers, especially rural and indigenous teachers, as rooted in activism and resistance. Teacher educators and preservice teachers in this study call attention to the importance of ideology and praxis of struggle, and how future teachers need to be prepared through a variety of strategies to cultivate solidarity with local communities and organizations. In this conceptualization, learning to teach is more than a technocratic endeavor; it is an evolving commitment to action and service to community. As we see in Bracho’s work, the development of teachers as change agents requires teachers to develop an identity towards political struggle and resistance as a facet of teacher identity.

Next, Dharamshi’s piece, “This is far More Complex Than I Could Have Ever Imagined: Studying Student Teachers’ Shifting Perceptions of Literacy and Indigeneity in British Columbia, Canada” considers the impact of teaching and modeling critical literacy strategies in a literacy course for pre-service educators. Based on findings from her qualitative study, the author considers how pre-service teachers’ mindsets towards literacy, Indigeneity, and power/privilege shift as they engage with these pedagogies.

Lussier, Assaf, and Hoff’s piece, “A ‘Literacy Awakening’: The Role of Study Abroad and International Service Learning for Preservice Teachers’ Literacy Engagement” also considers the shifting mindsets of preservice teachers as they are exposed to critical literacy practices. Their piece, based on a qualitative study of American preservice teachers in South Africa, considers the impact of community mapping projects and international service learning on preservice teachers’ thinking about literacy and culture. Authors ultimately argue for the learning potential of both critical literacy efforts and international service learning.

The second section of this issue brings together pieces that explore ways that teachers can transform classrooms and communities through responsiveness to students’ needs and interests. Four pieces are included in this section: three experiential pieces by Bohannon, Clapsaddle, and McCollum, Kim, and Lê, Martínez, Kraus, Hassan, and Plough respectively and a quantitative piece by Sofo, Thompson, and Kanton. This section begins in an American teacher education program before transitioning to a Korean secondary science class, a language across the curriculum program at a U.S. university, and finally a Ghanaian non-traditional teacher training program. While contexts that authors describe are varied, educators’ aims are connected through a shared interest in cultivating learning spaces that meet students’ needs and interests.

The first piece in this section is by Bohannon, Clapsaddle, and McCollum. In their experiential piece, “Responding to College Students who Exhibit Adverse Manifestations of Stress and Trauma in the College Classroom,” the authors reflect on the impact of trauma on undergraduate preservice teachers. As they do so, they consider both definitions of trauma and research-based strategies for addressing it.

Next, Kim’s autoethnographic work “Teacher as Change Agent for Consequential Learning: One Korean Teacher’s Autoethnography on the Dance-with-science Project” invites readers to think about how teachers can impact change in students’ dispositions to curriculum through out-of-the-box thinking: incorporating choreography, dance, and music to learning science (dancing with science). In this case, we see how consequential learning is implemented to promote equitable learning as students make decisions and take actions on

science that matter to their lives and their local community. However, Kim's discussion helps us see the importance of the teacher's intentionality in curricular design; we see that change for students begins through change in the teacher, the expansion of professional horizons.

Then, in "A Catalyst of Change: A Graduate Student's Perspectives on Transformational Teaching," Lê, Martínez, Kraus, Hassan, and Plough show us how a team composed of graduate students and a faculty advisor in a Cultures and Language Across the Curriculum program promote opportunities for learning about and implementing transformational teaching, a framework that suggests viewing teaching as a space where inspiration and life-changing experiences can occur. In this article, we see how a graduate student reflects on their implementation of transformational teaching to promote language development through action by empowering students.

Finally, Sofo, Thompson, and Kanton's piece, "Prospects and Challenges of Upgrading Untrained Teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Ghana," explores the effectiveness of a non-traditional teacher preparation program in Ghana. Authors reflect on the challenges that program faced based on findings from a quantitative, survey-based program evaluation. As the authors describe key findings, they consider implications for working effectively with non-traditional teacher candidates in Ghana and across Sub-Saharan Africa.

The third section of this special issue includes four pieces that highlight the difficulty of pursuing complex ideals in practice. Efforts to pursue ambitious aims, such as infusing human rights education into existing curriculum or teaching in a culturally responsive manner, are both messy and challenging. The first two pieces in this section, by Fickel and Daly respectively, describe the process of implementing new curricular approaches in the United States and New Zealand. Riedel and Moll then analyze teaching Canadian curriculum by Canadian preservice teachers in Asian education settings, continuously wrestling with the familiar and the strange in teaching. This section concludes with a quantitative piece by Spear that inspires educators to critically reflect on the roles that they play in the systems that they aim to improve. Collectively, authors within this section demonstrate how challenging change agents' pursuits can be and emphasize the ongoing evolution of their efforts.

Fickel's piece, "Supporting Secondary Pre-service Teacher Identity Development as Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teachers," considers the application of culturally sustaining pedagogies in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Fickel offers a nuanced justification for culturally sustaining pedagogies. She describes ways that the teacher education program she teaches within developed a community of practice based on Māori principles. Through findings from a related qualitative study, Fickel examines pre-service teachers' identity development as they are exposed to culturally sustaining pedagogies.

Next, Daly's theoretical and experiential article, "To Create a Better and More Peaceful World: Infusing Human Rights Instruction in PK-12 Classrooms," reflects on ways that Human Rights Education (HRE) can be explicitly taught. Daly shares her experiences developing a particular course with a HRE focus. In her piece, Daly lays a foundation for HRE, describes specific strategies she used to cultivate her students' understandings of HRE, and reflects on strengths/limitations of her approach.

In the third piece in this section, "Between the Familiar and Strange: Understanding Good Teaching in Transnational Education Settings," Riedel and Moll push against conceptualizations of teaching as a technocratic activity; instead, they help us understand learning to teach in transnational contexts by describing the lived experience of preservice teachers. Their work reveals the ways that being an agent of change requires challenging our epistemologies (how do we know what we know) and wrestling with the familiar and the

strange. They argue that when confirmations and interruptions of the familiar and strange are supported with conversation focused on the space between the familiar and strange, they can provide the ideal context for exploring understandings of good teaching and to change practices in light of new and shifted understandings.

Finally, in “Teachers as Change Agents? Assessing Teachers’ Perceptions of and Responses to Sexual Gender-Based Violence in Schools in Burkina Faso,” Spear provides insight into a complex phenomenon – when teachers are both the problem and the solution. Teachers in her study talk about knowing other teachers engaged in gender-based violence, and they wrestle with how to respond— sometimes teachers do not report for fear of retaliation, and sometimes they do not report due to conflicting ideologies. Yet, we see many participants seeking more information and training in this area on how they can promote change.

The special issue concludes with a section that highlights the potential of ongoing professional development and international partnerships in change agents’ efforts. Three pieces are included in this final section, authored by Khan, Grijalva, and Enriquez-Gates, Baily and Holmarsdottir, and Bilash respectively. These pieces collectively help us see how change can happen through global collaborations and intentional training. Pieces explore collaborative efforts between educators in the United States-Saudi Arabia, United States-Norway, and Canada-Japan.

In their piece, “Teachers as Change Agents: Promoting Meaningful Professional Development Using Action Research to Support International Educational Reform,” Khan, Grijalva, and Enriquez Gates describe efforts undertaken by faculty at Arizona State University’s Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College to introduce teachers visiting from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to action research methodology. Their piece overviews the Saudi Arabian educational context and explores the benefits of teachers within that context engaging in action research. The authors then describe in detail how action research was presented and the responses of Saudi Arabian teachers before reflecting on implications.

Next, in “Fostering Teachers’ Global Competencies: Bridging Utopian Expectations for Internationalization Through Exchange,” Baily and Holmarsdottir bring attention to the professional development of teachers for engaging with diverse classrooms, especially as classrooms seek to become more internationalized. By showing the ways different participants carried out the goals of the grant/program, they highlight the impact of collaboration and reflection by teachers. However, their work is significant in highlighting the importance of structural supports to promote teachers’ actions for change.

Finally, in Bilash’s case study titled “Study Abroad, Transformation, and *Ikigai*: A Case Study,” we learn the unfolding story of Kuni and how an intentional relationship across time and space (through study abroad) revealed *ikigai*, *raison d’être*, “the spark that initiates their interest in the profession and the internal forces that drive, sustain, and transform their practice.” In this story, we see Kuni show us that teachers as change agents have an internal joy and motivation for their work that grounds them in their work despite social and cultural pressures to confirm or move on to other roles.

Collectively, through reviews of the literature, reflections on experiences, and empirical studies, authors in this issue justify, exemplify, and problematize the practices of transforming classrooms and communities. This unique collection of articles from around the world invites conversations about the ways that change agents expose injustices, respond to student needs and contextual factors, navigate the messiness of their pursuits, and work across boundaries to transform their communities. We are grateful for the opportunity to be guest editors on this unique special issue.

### **About the Special Issue Guest Editors**

*Sarah Lillo*, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Middle and Secondary Education at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, USA. She holds a PhD in Education with a specialization in Social Sciences and Comparative International Education from the University of California, Los Angeles. She completed her MEd in English Education and her BS in Child Development, English, and Deaf Education at Vanderbilt University. Dr. Lillo's research interests include global citizenship, community engagement, diversity issues in secondary English curriculum, and the role of informal networks in pre-service teachers' development and learning. She has conducted related qualitative, mixed methods, and critical studies in the US, South Korea, Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Africa. Prior to her appointment at Southeast Missouri State University, Dr. Lillo taught at the University of Southern California, the University of California, Irvine, UCLA Extension, and the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Lillo was previously an international educator, teaching secondary English at International Baccalaureate Schools in South Korea and Uganda and facilitating service-learning projects. Whether teaching secondary, undergraduate, or graduate students, Dr. Lillo strives to foster global awareness, critical thinking, and personal responsibility in her students through experiential, inquiry-based, and collaborative approaches.

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