

New book examines best methods to prepare future English teachers

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How do you teach someone to be a teacher? And what does it mean to be a professional educator? Those questions are at the heart of a new book from a University of Kansas educator and author working to guide the methods of how English arts teachers are prepared to lead their own classrooms.

"Principles That Shape English Teacher Education: Pedagogy for Innovation and Change" is a new book co-edited by Heidi Hallman, professor of curriculum & teaching at KU. The book examines both theory and practice of the methods course, a class every aspiring teacher takes to learn the practice of being an educator. The book seeks to inspire English teacher educators with practical ways to apply methods of preparing future teachers and considering the theory behind methods courses.

About five years ago, Hallman was part of a committee formed by the National Council of Teachers of Education to examine how English language arts courses are taught at more than 1,000 institutions across the country. The book is highly informed by lessons learned from that work.

"This book really delves into the question of what we teach in those methods courses and how," Hallman said. "A lot of people want a textbook, or a gathering of syllabi. That's all fine, but you can't remove the context of classes and teachers."

The book was edited by Jessica Gallo of the University of Nevada, Christopher Parsons of Keene State College and Hallman. It contains chapters contributed by teacher educators from across the country. Chapters examine topics such as embracing field experiences, pre-service teachers and pedagogical thinking, the English classroom as a contested space, developing a sense of authority as teachers of English reading, policies that promote science of reading and pairing

expectations of policy with economic reality.

Hallman contributed a chapter titled "Debating the Discourse of Professionalism with Pre-Service English Teachers." It examines the idea of what it means to be a professional teacher and how pre-service teachers view the concept.

Historically, teaching has been considered semiprofessional, and some scholars have argued it still is, due to a lack of a common body of knowledge, practices and skills that constitute a basis for professional expertise, Hallman writes, while pointing out that teacher educators have fought to increase the status of the teaching profession for roughly three decades.

She goes on to examine the term professional and what it means for teachers, noting how assaults on teacher professionalism intensified during the pandemic, leading to increased burnout and teachers leaving the field. Additionally, education has been influenced by neoliberal thinking, wherein education is viewed as a commodity in which the teacher is providing a service and students and parents are customers, as opposed to a free exchange of ideas.

Hallman's chapter also features results of a focus group with several pre-service English teachers regarding their views on teaching and professionalism. Participants stated that teaching is more complex now than in past years. One gave the example of watching a teacher during a field experience as they attempted to lead a class on Zoom during the pandemic. The teacher was looking at a screen full of students who would turn off their cameras and the observer felt bad for the teacher, thinking they were not able to engage the class, but also being unsure of what they would do differently in the scenario.

That complexity played into a second major theme of compliance, not

critique. Teachers are expected to practice in accordance with both state and federal guidelines that govern methods and curriculum. Those standards are also notorious for shifting frequently. Especially early in their careers, teachers are expected to follow along, yet there can be a tendency to be idealistic and want to change things for the better.

"How do teachers think about how they can affect things if they are only one part of a huge machine? How do you talk to pre-service teachers without overwhelming them and keeping them excited about teaching?" Hallman said. "Those kinds of questions can be a lot for pre-service teachers, and we need to be aware of how we approach them as teacher educators."

The idea of the technocratic professional, or someone who is a professional but is bound to follow strict guidelines, was the third major theme. To prepare teachers who are both able to meet standards without being robotic and to have a healthy view of professionalism, teacher educators should help them understand the history of the field and how views of it have evolved, Hallman writes. Additionally, educators can help teachers understand professionalism in context of multiple stakeholders including the teacher, parents, students, faculty, administration and others.

Finally, novice teachers could benefit from understanding multiple meanings of the term professionalism and by teacher educators encouraging them to find themselves within the debate.

"Principles" stands as a text that can both guide [teacher](#) educators on preparing new generations of English teachers, Hallman said, and a way for the latter to consider their own place in teaching as they enter the field.

Provided by University of Kansas

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