

Keynote Speaker

Reclaiming Teacher Education Accountability for the Democratic Project: Now More Than Ever

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Abstract

For the last two decades, much of the discourse regarding teacher education in the United States has revolved around a three-part logic: “holding teacher education accountable” will boost the quality of teacher education programs and institutions; boosting the quality of programs will increase the nation’s overall level of teacher quality, defined primarily in terms of students’ achievement; and, higher levels of student achievement will ensure both individual prosperity and the economic health of the nation. The key accountability assumption here is that the way to “fix” what has been repeatedly referred to in the U.S. as the “broken system” of teacher education is systematic, vigilant public evaluation and monitoring of initial teacher education programs. In fact, the language and logic of accountability have become so deeply embedded in the everyday discourse and practice of U.S. teacher education (and education more broadly) that they are now difficult to discern as policy and practice alternatives. These same accountability assumptions—or assumptions that are very similar—have also been a major part of the discourse about initial teacher education in other countries around the world, including Australia.

Using the U.S. case as a provocation for broader consideration of accountability and initial teacher education, this keynote will take up three pointed questions: (1) Where are we? (2) How did we get here? and (3) Where do we need to be? In response to the first question, the keynote will argue that a dominant teacher education accountability paradigm has emerged based on deep mistrust of the profession and on theories of change that are not supported by strong evidence. This dominant paradigm is characterized by market ideology, thin equity, externally-controlled monitoring schemes, and narrow definitions of effectiveness. To answer the second question, the presentation will briefly explore the major policy, political, and professional developments that contributed to both the emergence of the accountability paradigm and to its staying power. In response to the third question, the keynote will argue that despite the fact that the dominant accountability paradigm has had a negative impact on the field and has failed to bring about real change, we should not reject accountability in initial teacher education. Rather the keynote will conclude that—now more than ever—in the U.S. and in many countries around the world, we need to reclaim accountability for the democratic project by redefining its purposes and goals in terms of the common good, changing the narrative about the problem of teacher education, and radically disrupting existing power relationships.