

**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**Navigating the Contested Terrain of  
Teacher Education Policy and Practice**

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**Responding to Policy Challenges with Research Evidence:  
Introduction to Special Issue**

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.26.3753> This article is part of the Special Issue, *Navigating the Contested Terrain of Teacher Education Policy and Practice*, guest edited by Elena Aydarova and David Berliner.

**Abstract:** In a policy climate where various actors claim to have solutions for the enduring challenges of teacher education, policy deliberations sideline certain voices and omit important perspectives. This special issue brings together scholars who attend to the voices, perspectives, and issues overlooked by teacher education policy debates dominated by market logic and accountability pressures. It highlights debates surrounding teacher performance assessments, teacher candidate selection, value-added assessments, as well as

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teacher preparation for linguistically diverse learners. The introduction to the special issue explores different dimensions of the relationship between research and practice urging teacher educators to become more proactive in policy debates.

**Keywords:** teacher education, educational policy, education reform, educational research, policy advocacy

### **Responder a los desafíos políticos con evidencia de investigación: Introducción al número especial**

**Resumen:** En un clima político en el que varios actores afirman tener soluciones para los desafíos permanentes de la formación del profesorado, las deliberaciones sobre políticas dejan de lado ciertas voces y omiten perspectivas importantes. Este número especial reúne a académicos que atienden las voces, perspectivas y problemas que pasan por alto los debates sobre políticas de educación docente dominados por la lógica del mercado y las presiones de rendición de cuentas. Destaca los debates en torno a las evaluaciones del rendimiento docente, la selección de candidatos docentes, las evaluaciones de valor agregado, así como la preparación del docente para alumnos lingüísticamente diversos. La introducción al número especial explora diferentes dimensiones de la relación entre la investigación y la práctica instando a los formadores de docentes a ser más proactivos en los debates sobre políticas.

**Palabras clave:** formación del profesorado, política educativa, reforma educativa, investigación educativa, defensa de políticas

### **Respondente a desafiantes políticos com evidencia de pesquisa: Introdução o dossiê especial**

**Resumo:** Em um clima político no qual vários actores afirmam ter soluções para os desafios permanentes da formação do profecio, as deliberações sobre políticas do lado do ceu desejado. Este número especial reúne-se a academicos que atienden as voces, perspectivas e problemas que passam por alto os debates sobre políticas de educação docente dominados pela lógica do mercado e as presidências de rendição de contas. Destaca os debates em torno das avaliações do desempenho, a escolha de candidatos, as avaliações de valor agregado, assim como a preparação do docente para alunos multilinguados diversos. A introdução o dossiê especial explora diferentes dimensões da relação entre a pesquisa e a prática instando os formadores de documentos no ser mais proativos nos debates sobre políticas.

**Palavras-chave:** formation del profesorado, política educativa, reforma educativa, investigación educativa, defensa de políticas

## **Responding to Policy Challenges with Research Evidence**

In the introduction to the first part of the special issue, we underscored a new set of priorities for the teacher education community: engaging in dialogue within and beyond the field of teacher education, building collectives to work together as public intellectuals, and developing alliances with diverse stakeholders to create cultural change towards equity and social justice in public education. An important centerpiece of all these activities is teacher educators' research that could inform the public and the policymaking community about ways the field could move forward (Grossman, 2008; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; National Research Council, 2010; Sleeter, 2014; Tatto, Richmond, & Carter Andrews, 2016; Zeichner & Conklin, 2016).

Many scholars argue that in order to influence policy, studies in teacher education should utilize randomized control (National Research Council, 2010; Zeichner, 2005) or large-scale mixed-methods designs (Sleeter, 2012). Yet the most influential reports from the non-profit or private sector rarely display such methodological sophistication. For example, a highly cited report by Barber and Mourshed (2007) produced by the McKinsey & Co is based on interviews, a literature survey, and “an analysis of the achievements of the best-performing school systems” (p. 8). Despite the report’s methodological vagueness and conceptual weakness (Coffield, 2012), it is well known in the policy community. Educational reformers around the world often repeat its catchy claim – “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” – as they usher in educational change (Aydarova, *in progress*; Paine, Blömeke, & Aydarova, 2015). All of this suggests that the relationship between research and policy is complex, and it behooves us to engage with that complexity instead of moving to prescriptions for the most convincing research designs. The manuscripts selected for this special issue attempt to do just that. They approach the relationship between research and policy from different angles, moving from critical appraisals of teacher education policies to direct interventions in policy debates that create alternative paths for teacher education reforms.

Charisse Gulosino’s manuscript (this volume) focuses on the use of value-added models (VAMs) to compare the effectiveness of different teacher preparation programs. The author analyzes the Tennessee report card based on VAMs using the constructs of accuracy, consistency, measurement validity, as well as usability. The paper highlights omissions in the report card and sheds light on variations between different routes into teaching, such as traditional university-based programs, Teach for America, or residency programs, obscured by the report card. Gulosino cautions against overreliance on VAMs and urges policy-makers to take up a more fine-grained approach to evaluating teacher education programs.

Another example of critical engagement with teacher education policies is Beatriz Fernandez’s manuscript “Framing Teacher Education: Conceptions of Teaching, Teacher Education, and Justice in Chilean National Policies.” This paper explores how globally circulated teacher education reform proposals found traction in Chile. Fernandez applies critical policy analysis to a corpus of government policies and reports that steer teacher education. Her analysis shows how the Chilean Ministry of Education, as is true internationally, blamed K-12 students’ underachievement on the low quality of teachers produced by teacher education’s lack of selectivity. Echoing the proposals circulated by global actors, such as the OECD and McKinsey & Co, the Chilean government focused on increasing teacher education’s selectivity and strengthening their subject knowledge preparation. The story that justified these measures was the importance of education for national development. Instead of approaching teacher education from the distributive justice perspective, these policies placed responsibilities for structural inequalities on individual teachers and students. This manuscript highlights the narrowing conceptions of justice and equity that inform teacher education reforms globally. One potential implication of these findings is that teacher educators should pursue transnational networks that could create opportunities for collective responses across national borders.

Continuing with the theme of selectivity, Jennifer Waddell and Jacob Marszalek (this volume) respond to the call emanating from different policy communities for teacher education programs to improve the quality of the candidates they admit. While the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation urges teacher preparation programs to raise their admission standards based on students’ GPAs and standardized assessment scores, Waddell and Marszalek evaluate an alternative approach to candidate selection – the Haberman Star Teacher Interview Protocol. The protocol evaluates teaching candidates on such categories as persistence, response to authority,

application of theory and generalizations, their approach to at-risk students, their resilience, their potential for burnout, among other factors. Using data collected over six years from over 100 students, the authors test whether this tool is useful for identifying which students would complete or leave an urban teacher preparation program. Their analysis reveals that while the total score on the questionnaire had low predictive validity, subquestion scores improved classification rates. This manuscript challenges current policy priorities of greater selectivity and underscores the importance of considering more than students' academic ability during candidate selection.

Francesca López and Lucrecia Santibañez analyze policies about preparing teachers to work with emergent bilinguals in Arizona, California, and Texas. Using content analysis, the authors show that the Texas models of teacher preparation for emergent bilinguals are more closely aligned with the recommendations provided by the scholarly community. López and Santibañez also analyze data on teachers' self-efficacy, their job satisfaction, and their perceptions of the professional development they receive, noting that despite some similarities, teachers in California and Arizona reported being less prepared to meet the needs of emergent bilinguals. Finally, Lopez and Santibanez connect these findings with student achievement data to show that emergent bilinguals in Texas tend to perform better on national assessments than their peers in Arizona or California. While there are multiple intervening factors that could affect how students perform on standardized assessments, this paper highlights the fact that student achievement could be improved if policies that shape teacher preparation for diverse learners are informed by the scholarship in relevant fields. This manuscript's findings raise important questions about how teacher educators could communicate research findings and scholarly recommendations to policy-makers in ways that have a greater impact on policy-making processes.

The final manuscript, "Building a Dangerous Outpost in the Green Mountain State" by David McGough, Claudine Bedell, and Barri Tinkler, extends the dialogue about the use of edTPA for teacher licensure in the first part of the special issue and offers insights for research to policy connections raised by the second part. The manuscript presents a case of teacher educators' engagement with the policy-making community, documenting how Vermont opted out of using edTPA. The manuscript uses narrative policy analysis to reconstruct the process of negotiations, contestations, and collaborations that Vermont teacher educators participated in to create an alternative assessment for teacher licensure that, according to the authors, fits the local context better than national assessments. This manuscript is a story of possibility and hope. Despite numerous contestations about teacher preparation policies, it is possible for teacher educators to get their voices heard by policy-makers and to make a difference in shaping the future of the field.

Concluding the work on this special issue, we want to acknowledge that the teacher education community has taken steps to become more responsive to policy changes. For instance, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education offers a monthly Federal Update<sup>1</sup> that informs the community about items on Congress's agenda, budget negotiations, or federal policy reauthorizations. These updates also provide resources for policy advocacy, so that interested individuals could contact their legislators with ease. Perhaps what is necessary now is for teacher educators to become not just reactive but proactive in the policy-making processes, so that policy proposals become more responsive to the needs of teacher candidates and K-12 students that their graduates will ultimately serve. In the policy context where the drumbeat of reform is set by research that promotes a neoliberal agenda (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016), teacher educators need to make their scholarship accessible to a variety of stakeholders and become savvy about getting research findings to legislators and policymakers before new reforms are conceptualized (White,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://aacte.org/policy-and-advocacy/advocacy-center/federal>

2016). We hope that the manuscripts collected in the two parts of this special issue offer insights into ways that contemporary teacher educators could make their voices heard in order to disrupt policy ventriloquism and break down echo chambers created by philanthropic organizations and the non-profit sector (Zeichner & Conklin, 2016). As Barack Obama noted in his speech on hope: “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

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David C. Berliner is Regents’ Professor Emeritus of Education at Arizona State University. Dr. Berliner is a member of the National Academy of Education (NEA), the International Education Academy (IEA), a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and a past president of both the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Division of Educational Psychology of the American Psychological Association (APA). He is the recipient of awards for distinguished contributions from APA, AERA, and the National Education Association (NEA). Dr. Berliner is co-author (with B. J. Biddle) of the best seller *The Manufactured Crisis*, co-author (with Ursula Casanova) of *Putting Research to Work*, co-author (with Gene Glass) of *50 Myths and Lies that Threaten America's Public Schools*, and co-author (with N. L. Gage) of six editions of the textbook *Educational Psychology*. He is co-editor of the first *Handbook of Educational Psychology* and the books *Talks to Teachers*, and *Perspectives on Instructional Time*. Professor Berliner has also authored more than 200 published articles, technical reports, and book chapters. He has taught at the University of Arizona, University of Massachusetts, Teachers College and Stanford University, as well as universities in Australia, Canada, The Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland.

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