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Book review

Revisiting Enduring Questions in a Changing Educational Context: A Review of the Handbook of Research on Teacher Education.

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Abstract

The Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts (Third Edition), edited by Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, D. John McIntyre, and Kelly E. Demers, offers a comprehensive and critical exploration of foundational issues in teacher education. Structured around nine enduring questions, the volume examines the purposes, content, institutional contexts, recruitment and retention, diversity, professional learning, governance, research, and outcomes of teacher education. This edition departs from traditional handbook formats by organizing content through thematic sections, each combining framing essays, historical and contemporary artifacts, and diverse commentaries. The collection draws on multiple philosophical, historical, empirical, and critical perspectives to interrogate longstanding challenges in teacher education. It addresses contemporary concerns such as preparing culturally responsive teachers, supporting democratic and equitable schooling, and advancing teacher identity formation. While the handbook synthesizes a range of scholarly perspectives and includes discussions of research genres (quantitative, qualitative, and critical), it is primarily analytical and conceptual rather than empirical. It does not present original data or formal meta-analyses, and its focus is largely centered on the U.S. context, with limited engagement in international comparative analysis. Similarly, while it critiques standardized evaluation systems and explores the political dimensions of teacher education policy, it stops short of offering a unified framework for assessing program effectiveness. The volume's emphasis lies in its theoretical richness, historical grounding, and inclusive dialogue among educators, scholars, and policymakers. Future research could build on these foundations by incorporating developments in digital pedagogy, interdisciplinary approaches, and cross-national comparisons. Positioned within broader educational research and policy discourses, the handbook remains a vital resource for scholars and practitioners committed to equity, inclusion, and the continuous reimagining of teacher education in a changing world.

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.Introduction

“Teaching is the profession that lays the foundation for all other professions.”

Teacher education research shapes pedagogical practices, policies, and institutional frameworks. As the field continues to evolve in response to socio-political changes, there is a growing need for research that critically interrogates the foundations of teacher education while offering new insights.

The Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts (Third Edition) thoroughly examines key issues in teacher education research, policy, and practice. Edited by Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, D. John McIntyre, and Kelly E. Demers, this volume aims to promote discussion on fundamental questions in teacher preparation. Teaching is recognized as a vital profession that influences all other fields by equipping individuals with essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The well-known phrase, “Teaching is the profession that lays the foundation for all other professions,” highlights the important role of the teaching profession in shaping society’s future and echoes the main themes of this handbook, stressing teacher education’s powerful impact.

Teacher preparation programs equip educators with pedagogical skills and foster critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and intercultural competence—qualities applicable across all fields (Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, & McIntyre, 2008). This perspective emphasizes the importance of teacher education in developing individuals who contribute to various sectors, reinforcing the idea that the teaching profession serves as the foundation for societal progress. The Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts (Third Edition) thoroughly examines the challenges, debates, and ongoing developments in teacher preparation.

Why did I choose to review this book?

Although the Handbook of Research on Teacher Education was published in 2008, its conceptual relevance remains strong, especially given current reforms and ongoing challenges in teacher education across developing countries. Core themes such as teacher learning over time, diversity, equity, and the role of educational settings continue to be central to policy and practice, particularly in developing countries, where educational transformation is still ongoing. By revisiting these themes, this review offers a timely reflection that links longstanding scholarly questions to present-day realities, providing insights for both national and regional audiences navigating complex reform environments.

Additionally, it addresses fundamental issues in teacher education that align with my research interests and makes a timely contribution to ongoing debates in the field. Moreover, it offers a comprehensive and critical analysis of teacher education. It also focuses on core topics related to my PhD specialization in teacher education and higher education studies. Since my research centres on pre-service teachers’ intercultural

competence and its internalization versus institutional compliance, this book provides valuable insights into the broader educational landscape, including how teacher preparation programs influence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. This aligns closely with my area of study and provides important information about how these programs shape future educators.

The handbook explores ongoing debates in teacher education, including the influence of institutional expectations, the role of training in shaping teacher identity, and the factors that predict teaching effectiveness (Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, & McIntyre, 2008). These themes align with my research, especially the investigation of how teacher education promotes intercultural competence, whether as a deeply internalized value or simply a response to institutional demands. By reviewing this book, I connect with established research that helps contextualize my study within the broader conversation on teacher preparation, pedagogical reform, and higher education policies. Therefore, this book acts as a key resource, emphasizing the importance of my research while offering a wider framework for analyzing how teacher education develops culturally responsive and reflective practitioners.

Key summaries of the book

The book is structured around nine fundamental questions that define the field of teacher education. Each question addresses key concerns related to its purpose, content, settings, recruitment, diversity, learning, policy, research, and effectiveness. This critical review evaluates these nine themes, identifying their strengths, limitations, and implications for future research and practice.

The Purpose of Teacher Education: What's the Point?

At its core, teacher education is about more than just transferring knowledge; it is about shaping educators who will, in turn, shape future generations. This section explores the philosophical and societal purposes of teacher education, drawing on the works of John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jane Addams, who emphasized the need for teachers to be critical thinkers, democratic citizens, and social change agents. The book presents a compelling argument that teacher education must go beyond technical training to foster civic engagement and ethical responsibility.

While the handbook offers a rich theoretical exploration of the moral and civic dimensions of teacher education, it includes limited empirical evidence measuring the direct impact of teacher preparation on civic engagement. Additionally, its U.S.-centric focus leaves out comparative perspectives on how teacher education is conceptualized and enacted in diverse cultural and political contexts. To strengthen this line of inquiry, future research should pursue cross-national studies that examine how various societies define the purposes of teacher education and how these definitions shape educational practice.

Teacher Knowledge and Capacities: What Should Teachers Know?

The question of what teachers should know has long been debated. Should teacher education focus on subject-matter expertise, pedagogical skills, or social-emotional competencies? This section argues that teachers need well-rounded skills, including content mastery, pedagogical proficiency, and cultural competence. The emphasis on social justice, equity, and the ability to work with diverse learners is particularly notable, reflecting the growing need for teachers to navigate multicultural and multilingual classrooms.

Although it has strengths, this section does not adequately cover emerging areas like digital literacy and the use of educational technology in teacher preparation. As classrooms become more technology-focused, teacher education programs need to include training in digital pedagogy. Future research should examine how technology can improve teacher training and lead to better student learning outcomes.

Institutional Settings for Teacher Education: Where Should Teachers Be Taught?

Recently, the debate has intensified over where teachers should receive their training, in universities, schools, or alternative certification programs. While traditional university-based teacher education programs provide robust theoretical foundations, they often face criticism for their lack of practical classroom experience. On the other hand, school-based and alternative programs (e.g., Teach for America, professional development schools) provide hands-on training but sometimes lack rigorous academic grounding.

While the book thoughtfully examines the strengths and limitations of various teacher education models, it does not engage in comparative analysis across national contexts. Although the volume includes occasional references to international examples, such as Finland and OECD benchmarks, its primary focus remains on U.S.-based systems. Future research would benefit from a systematic global comparison of teacher education models to identify adaptable best practices and inform more culturally responsive policy and program development.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Who Teaches? Who Should Teach?

A growing body of research confirms that teacher quality is a key factor in student achievement. However, recruiting and keeping highly effective teachers remains a major challenge, especially in underserved and high-need communities.

The handbook points out barriers to building a diverse teaching workforce, including systemic hiring biases, limited financial access to teacher preparation, and cultural perceptions that affect career choices. A common concern discussed is teacher attrition, with many educators leaving within their first five years. While the book notes financial difficulties and lack of institutional support as the main reasons for turnover, it offers limited focus on policy efforts that have successfully improved retention. Future research should focus on evaluating financial incentives, mentorship programs, and career advancement options to foster a stable, diverse, and high-quality teaching workforce.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Teacher Education: Does Difference Make a Difference?

The growing diversity of student populations demands culturally responsive teaching, yet many teacher education programs remain rooted in Eurocentric pedagogies. This section makes a strong case for the need to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into teacher education curricula. It critiques the lack of representation of teachers of colour and highlights the importance of training all teachers to work with students from diverse racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Although the section strongly addresses race and ethnicity, it gives comparatively less attention to intersectional issues such as gender, disability, and socioeconomic background, even though these issues are still acknowledged. Future research should explore how teacher education can prepare educators to address multiple, overlapping forms of classroom marginalization.

How do teachers learn to teach over time?

Teaching is not a static profession; it requires ongoing learning, critical reflection, and adaptation to changing educational settings. This section of the handbook highlights the importance of mentorship, professional learning communities, and reflective practices in fostering teacher development. It states that pre-service education, while essential, is not enough on its own and must be supplemented by continuous professional development to achieve lasting impact. Although these points are compelling, the section pays limited attention to other models of teacher learning. As digital platforms play an increasingly vital role in professional development, future research should compare the effectiveness of virtual learning environments with traditional in-person training to better guide teacher education in a digitally connected world.

Authority and Policy in Teacher Education: Who's in Charge?

The governance of teacher education is inherently political, involving competing interests among governments, accreditation bodies, universities, and other stakeholders. This section of the handbook examines these tensions, especially the conflict between calls for standardization and the need for flexibility in teacher preparation. While the discussion provides a thorough look at U.S.-based policy debates, it does not include a comparative analysis of accreditation systems in different international contexts. Future research could benefit from exploring governance structures in countries with high-performing teacher education systems to identify effective and equitable models' oversight.

Research in Teacher Education: How Do We Know What We Know?

Teacher education research uses various methods, including quantitative, qualitative, and critical approaches. While quantitative studies often measure teacher effectiveness through metrics like student achievement scores, qualitative research offers deeper insights into teacher identity, pedagogical reasoning, and classroom dynamics.

The handbook highlights that no single method is enough and promotes multi-method approaches that combine statistical data with contextual understanding. However, it does not include formal meta-analyses of existing studies, which could strengthen its empirical base. Although meta-analyses are rarely found in conceptual handbooks, adding them to chapters on teacher effectiveness, program evaluation, or learning outcomes would enhance the evidence base without compromising the book's analytical goals. For policymakers and researchers, especially in developing countries, such a synthesis could provide clearer guidance for evidence-based decision-making.

The Effectiveness of Teacher Education: Evaluating Its Impact

This section of the handbook questions the dominance of standardized test scores as the main way to measure teacher education effectiveness. Instead, it stresses the importance of developing broader, more contextually relevant indicators that capture the complex goals of teacher preparation. Kennedy et al. critique the limitations of test-based accountability systems and explore value-added models and longitudinal studies as alternatives. While these tools provide some insights, they are not enough on their own. The authors support multidimensional, context-aware evaluation methods that better match the moral, civic, and pedagogical goals of teacher education. The handbook does not offer a single evaluative framework, despite including empirical studies. Instead, it calls for combining quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate how well programs prepare reflective, equitable, and adaptable teachers.

Summary

The Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts (Third Edition) is a thorough and authoritative resource in the field of teacher education. Edited by Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, D. John McIntyre, and Kelly E. Demers, the book is organized around nine enduring questions that explore the key aspects of teacher education: its goals, knowledge foundation, environments, participants, learning methods, diversity, governance, research traditions, and effectiveness.

The handbook brings together leading scholars to provide rich conceptual analyses, critical perspectives, and reviews of empirical literature. Instead of presenting original empirical research, it reflects on research findings and the paradigms that shape them. It engages with a range of methodologies—quantitative, qualitative, and critical, mainly through synthesis and critique. While it references case studies, longitudinal research, and policy debates, the volume does not adopt a prescriptive or unified evaluative framework. Rather, it highlights the complexity, contextuality, and philosophical diversity that influence teacher education.

A recurring theme throughout the book is the moral and civic responsibility involved in teacher preparation. Contributors like Cochran-Smith, Zeichner, and Ladson-Billings highlight the importance of reflective, culturally responsive, and socially engaged teaching. Discussions deeply explore issues of teacher identity, political context, and

social justice. However, the geographic scope remains mostly U.S.-focused. While international references such as Finland and OECD metrics are included, the handbook does not pursue systematic global comparative analysis.

In its section on effectiveness, the book criticizes narrow evaluation models that focus solely on standardized testing. It discusses alternative methods, including value-added models and qualitative assessments, but does not endorse any specific evaluative framework, aligning with the editors' view that evaluation should adapt to different contexts and purposes. While comprehensive in exploring fundamental questions, the handbook offers limited coverage of emerging areas such as digital pedagogy, teaching, and technology-based education. These are promising directions for future research. Overall, the Handbook remains a key resource for researchers, educators, and policymakers, valued for its conceptual depth, thematic structure, and thoughtful engagement with longstanding and evolving questions in teacher practice education.

Conclusion

The Handbook of Research on Teacher Education (Third Edition) provides a detailed and nuanced overview of the changing field of teacher education. Its structure, around nine key questions, offers a clear yet flexible view of various philosophical, research-based, and policy aspects of preparing teachers. The editors avoid giving prescriptive answers, instead presenting a diverse range of perspectives that highlight the field's complexity and vitality. A major strength of the volume is its thoughtful critique of basic assumptions about teacher knowledge, learning, and accountability. Rather than promoting universal models, the handbook stresses the importance of context, diversity, and equity. It advocates for teacher education that is not only supported by evidence but also morally and socially responsive, equipping educators to thoughtfully navigate increasingly complex and contested educational environments.

The editors conclude by highlighting the importance of continually questioning these persistent issues as educational settings change. They advocate for openness to new theoretical frameworks, interdisciplinary research, and varied methodologies that address shifting political, cultural, and technological landscapes. Although the volume mainly concentrates on the U.S., its conceptual basis remains relevant for international adaptation and comparative study. It mentions international examples like OECD benchmarks and practices in Finland but does not conduct a comprehensive global comparison. Additionally, while emerging fields such as digital pedagogy and global teacher mobility are only briefly discussed, this reflects the publication date (2008) rather than an oversight. Its lasting significance lies in encouraging ongoing questioning, critique, and reimagining of teacher education as a profoundly intellectual, ethical, and socially active pursuit.

Although the handbook predates the COVID-19 pandemic, many of its core themes, such as reflective practice, teacher collaboration, and responsiveness to diverse learning environments, remain highly relevant. The pandemic has brought significant changes to

the field, including increased digitalization, the rise of hybrid and remote instruction, and a greater focus on inclusivity and adaptability. These shifts have created both challenges and opportunities, especially for low-resource and underserved educational settings. While the handbook does not directly address these developments, its focus on complexity, justice, and responsiveness continues to offer valuable guidance for post-pandemic educational reform. For scholars, practitioners, and policymakers in both developed and developing countries, the volume remains a foundational resource. As education systems face growing inequality, teacher shortages, and rapid technological change, future research and practice will need to build on the handbook's legacy, integrating interdisciplinary approaches, global perspectives, and innovative pedagogies to create more just, inclusive, and resilient systems of teacher education.

Reference

Cochran-Smith, M., Feiman-Nemser, S., McIntyre, D. J., & Demers, K. E. (2008). *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions in changing contexts*. Routledge.