

Pratikte Bireysel Çalışma ve Araştırma: İlkokul sınıfında eşitlik ve sosyal adaleti öğretmeyi öğrenmek

Naime ELCAN KAYNAK* 

Kitabın Adı: Self Study and Inquiry into Practice: Learning to teach equity and social justice in the elementary school classroom.

Kitabın Yazarı: LİNDA R. KROLL

Sayfa Sayısı: 170 s.

Yayınevi: Routledge, New York

Yayın Tarihi: 2012

ISBN:978.041.5600705

Today, school culture is becoming more diverse than ever, which often leads to diverse learning experiences, traditions, culture, language and attitudes. One of the prominent questions now in education is how teachers should be prepared to teach in this diverse environment. Some scholars suggest that teaching for diversity requires understanding the meaning of diversity. Educational psychologist Lee Shulman (1987) said, “To teach is first to understand” (p.14). In order to understand the meaning of diversity in schools, teachers may find it beneficial to be aware of their diversity understanding. Linda Kroll’s book *Self – study and Inquiry into Practice* makes an important contribution to comprehension of teaching and may help teachers understanding diversity in teaching. Her insights were grounded in her experiences as a college professor and a teacher educator. The purpose of this review is to explore the substance of Kroll’s contribution to teacher education and thus raise several issues for those who are concerned with learning to teach for equality.

Overview of the Study

Kroll’s book is served as a guide on the use of inquiry and self-study in learning to teach and in continuing to learn as one teaches, particularly in the challenging context of the U.S urban school setting. Specifically, Kroll is presenting the use of inquiry and self-study as a way to understand what

* Dr., Erciyes University, School of Education, Department of Educational Sciences. E-posta: naimekaynak@erciyes.edu.tr, Orcid ID: 0000-0002-2132-1124

teacher educators learn from their own learning and what students learn from teacher educators' teaching.

In the opening chapter, Kroll starts with a reflective story about her observation of a student's experience as both a student teacher and a practicing teacher. Based upon this particular individual's experiences, she goes on to briefly describe and discuss the context of urban schools and the challenges many teachers face. In this chapter, Kroll discusses teacher education as a policy problem. She says "The emphasis on education to produce citizens who can contribute to the economy results in educational system that uses test scores as the measure of its success" (p.4). In light of recent political policies that seem to undermine the work of teachers Kroll focuses on how to prepare teachers to understand complex education in a changing world. Based upon her own experience in conjunction with colleagues at Mills College, she emphasizes the importance of thoughtful study to becoming an outstanding teacher. The opening chapter serves as a map of her ideas and studies in relation to teacher education.

In the next two chapters, Kroll brings the value of using self-study and inquiry in teacher education. In chapter 2, Kroll identifies the self-study and inquiry stance as a research methodology, with emphasis on its benefits for novice teachers. She proposes that teaching is inherently complex, not simply matter of learning a few tricks. Kroll claims that new teachers may successfully meet the challenges of teaching by learning to ask questions of and reflect upon their own teaching. In her words,

Developing inquiry stance or disposition helps both new and experienced teachers to take a step back from the immediate moment to understand that moment and to proceed in their teaching with confidence as well as questioning, supporting the development of further knowledge (p.13).

She invokes Korthagen's (2001) ideas of *episteme* and *phronesis* to describe the nature of pedagogical knowledge and how teachers use that knowledge. *Episteme* means scientific knowledge that is determined by research. However, *phronesis* refers to knowledge that is contextually situated and particularly complex, rather than universal. By discussing *episteme* and *phronesis*, she gives a picture of the relationships among what teachers know, how teachers come to know, and the different structures of teachers' knowledge. In the rest of the chapter, Kroll discusses how inquiry can help teachers to gain insight into various aspects of teaching, including the cognitive, moral and emotional struggles that many teachers face.

Throughout chapter 3, Kroll describes her own struggles to understand the meaning of teaching for equity and social justice. This portrayal and discussion is based upon work in two different courses with two groups of students.

Starting with chapter 4, Kroll sets the stage for her investigation into how pre-service teachers think about theory and make it relevant to their own teaching experiences. She identifies her study as a case study focusing on "student teachers learning to ask questions of theory that relate to theory and the text to their own practice and on their own learning" (p.13). The author claims that when

student teachers focus partially on their own learning, they begin to make some connections between their learning process and the learning challenge of young students.

Chapter 5 is based upon Kroll's investigation into how assumptions and preconceived notions affect a teacher's ability to teach. Kroll draws on an action research model to investigate the results of one's teaching. In that model, she uses various representations in order to provoke students' thinking about their beliefs.

Chapter 6 explores the ways in which teachers can employ an inquiry stance in their teaching by refining their question-asking abilities. She discusses how the inquiry stance is best used when it becomes a "habit of mind" in the context of teaching. She supports her discussion with some documentation based on how the informants developed their talents for asking questions about their learning. According to her, asking questions about their own learning allowed pre-service teachers to become more authentic and conscious teachers.

In the final chapter, Kroll revisits teacher education as a policy problem, and she emphasizes the requirement that teachers need to be empowered as experts in exploring and improving their own practice. In this chapter, she gives a broad place to numerous studies which involve the use of action research, case study, and self-study. Each inquiry model mentioned in earlier chapters is revisited in this chapter via cases of students who applied these inquiry models in their work. Through these concrete studies, Kroll demonstrates how inquiries can be a powerful tool in learning to teach.

Themes of the Book

As previously mentioned, Kroll's study raises several issues for teacher education in relation to equity and social justice. In particular, her study reveals four issues that are worth consideration here. These are: (1) awareness of the idea that teaching includes uncertainty, (2) the value of using inquiry as a stance, (3) being reflective educators, and (4) the importance of self-realization.

Teaching is uncertain

Kroll's study is based upon the premise that teaching is inherently complex. She builds up her ideas on the uncertain aspects of teaching. Kroll goes on to say that the teaching is uncertain in all cases, but is particularly true in urban school settings. The author claims that urban schools present a particular challenge to the persistence and resilience of teachers, especially novice teachers. Kroll illustrates her claim with the case of Susan, one of her students. Susan was a good student in the master's program at Mills College. She expressed a strong motivation to teach well. After graduation, Susan was hired at one of the "famous" elementary schools in Oakland. This school had a large number of immigrant student still learning English, African-Americans, and children from low socioeconomic communities. After five hard years, Susan became discouraged and left the school and teaching. Kroll asserts that pre-service teachers should be better informed of the context of urban schools and the uncertain aspects of teaching. During their preparation, it would be beneficial for pre-service teachers to explore ways to survive and adapt in various school contexts

with flexible approaches. She proposes that adapting the inquiry stance may help new teachers deal with uncertainty, overcome the challenges they encounter, and find other possible ways to solve classroom problems.

Kroll makes clear that teaching is a complex and ongoing process. Teachers should recognize the need to be patient, think reasonably, and allow for time to see outcomes (Zumwalt & Craig, 2008). In general, student teachers tend to see teaching as a concrete thing, and they want to see the outcome of their teaching in a short time. Posner (2003) noted that,

Education refers to context in which we cannot predict with any specificity or certainty the situation in which people will use what they learn. regardless of approach used, the assumptions when formulating curricula for educational context is that most of the situations for which we prepare students are unpredictable (p. 70).

As Posner claims, no teacher can be sure about how lessons will go or what students will learn. No teacher can predict which teaching strategy will be most successful with a certain type of students. It is vital that student teachers be aware that teaching is uncertain at many levels.

Teaching is inquiry

The second main issue of discussion emerges from Kroll's use of inquiry as a beneficial approach to teacher education. As mentioned previously, Kroll sees inquiry as an important part of professional development for teachers. She believes that adopting an inquiry stance in teaching may enable fledgling teachers to deal with obstacles during their career. In this book, Kroll introduces readers to inquiry methodologies like action research, case study, and self-study. She illustrates how inquiry in teaching leads to self-realization and to reflection on one's own teaching. To give an example, Kroll mentions an action research study that she conducted with a partner. In that study, they used drawings and representations to challenge the assumptions of the students. They asked students to "draw a picture of imaginary students who are having difficulty to read. Label your drawings with something about each child in the group." (p.88). Then they encourage students to think about how issues such as race, class, gender, or language influenced their drawings and why they drew those things. Many student teachers claimed that their drawings were shaped by their previous experiences. Three out of 28 student teachers included an African – American child in their drawings, since these three pre-service teachers had some experience with African-American children. Kroll demonstrates how the use of drawings in inquiry may provoke student teachers to think and reflect more deeply. Kroll also discusses the ethical and moral aspects of using inquiry in teaching. She asserts that inquiry may relieve the tension surrounding sensitive issues like race, discrimination, etc.

Just like doctors, engineers, and other professionals, teachers should update their content knowledge and skills so that they align with new changes and demands. Universities should teach pre-service teachers how to use inquiry in their career and encourage them to conduct research on teaching and education. Likewise, teacher educators should upgrade their knowledge and teaching skills with consideration to contemporary changes in teacher education and theory. They should

create a classroom environment that gives them the chance to have reflective, imaginative, creative, critical, and constructive experiences.

However, it seems as if Kroll's use of the inquiry approach overly circumscribed. In almost every chapter, she repeatedly emphasizes the importance of inquiry in teacher education, but always bases her argument on her own personal experience and context. Although she tries to persuade readers of the value of inquiry at an international level, her examples remained weak. For example, she discusses the contribution of inquiry to Finland's education system and how it improves the quality of teaching in there, but she does not provide any information about the education context of Finland.

Reflective Educators

Perhaps one of the most important of Kroll's contributions is her argument for the importance of reflection in teacher education. In her words, "Reflection has long been an important piece of effective teacher education" (p. 22). She asserts that the main purpose of the reflection process is either to develop and comprehend one's own theories of practice, or to develop understanding and strategy from others' theories to use in particular circumstances. Kroll illustrates how reflection enables her pre-service students to analyze their own understanding and develop new insights from others' reflection. She provides readers with invitations and stimuli for allowing students to reflect on their understanding about a specific issue. For instance, in chapter 3, Kroll uses the trip to Museum of Tolerance as an invitation to bring the issues of equity and social justice into classroom. This trip pushes student teachers to think about their understanding about equity and social justice. As a result of the trip, both Kroll and her students start to elaborate and reflect on hard issues like equity, social justice, and communicating effectively to all children. All these discussions enable teachers to create a classroom environment in which students write a reflection journal and meaningful discourse on these issues. Using concrete examples like journal entries or transcripts of discourse with student teachers on topics of diversity and social justice serves to convince the reader that Kroll's argument for reflection is true, that it gives student teachers the chance to delve into and think about sensitive issues. Through the journal entries and classroom discourses, readers are able to hear the voices of Kroll and other teachers. For example, one of Kroll's students, Alice, gives the following response to a question on equity: "I am imagining what are people discriminated against for race, ethnicity, the way they learn, learning modalities go under that, religion, sexual orientation, family background. I am thinking of children with special needs. Learning modality can contribute to that. Equity issues are not just about cultural background and ethnicity..." (p.47). The voices of teachers may enrich the readers' understanding of equity and social justice, as well as illustrate the effectiveness of self-inquiry in learning to teach well.

The Importance of Self-realization

Throughout the book, Kroll underlines the importance of self-awareness. Teachers' personal and professional values and beliefs affect their teaching skills and underpin what they do. She

sees self-realization as an initial step to understanding equality and social justice. She claims “understanding our own beliefs and assumptions is critical in constructing effective pedagogy for teaching all children well. Learning to inquire into our own beliefs is essential to addressing ongoing issues of social justice and equity in U.S urban classrooms” (p.78). In other words, self-realization helps teachers acquire diversity awareness, and thus, teachers can build a belief system in which they are aware of what they require to teach and what they need to know to make their subjects accessible to all learners. In order to gain self-realization and diversity awareness, teachers should be ‘open minded ‘and critical thinkers,’ able to see the issues from different angles, and should strive to eliminate any biases and stereotypes. Being open-minded is very important, since as Dewey (1903) wrote, “it includes an active desire to listen to more sides than one; to give heed to facts from whatever source they come; to give full attention to alternative possibilities; to recognize the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us” (as cited in Loughran, 2006, p.3).

Self-awareness means recognition of personality with a sense of who one is. Teachers who grow in self-awareness are able to identify their abilities, skills, emotions, ideals, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses. Through self-awareness, teachers can learn to exploit the strengths and cope with the weaknesses of their teaching environment. As teachers grow in self-awareness, they can increase their understanding of who they are and determine their aims, plans, and their methods of achieving them. Loughran (2006) writes that novice teachers should be encouraged to get to know themselves. Knowing yourself is linked to the maxim that “by better knowing yourself, you are more likely to know how to help others” (Loughran, 2006. p.18), because knowing about their own personality helps teachers to develop empathy with how students think and act.

Conclusion

Kroll’s study encompasses significant issues in teacher education, including teaching as research, the importance of reflection, and so on. Her exploration of these issues, along with sensitive public issues like social justice and equity, makes her study insightful in many aspects. Particularly, her announcements on her own and her students’ reflections on social justice and equity may contribute to readers’ learning.

The aim of the teacher education is ‘not to indoctrinate or train teachers to behave in prescribed ways, but to educate teachers to reason soundly about their teaching as well as perform skillfully” (Shulman, 1987, p.13). In line with this idea, Kroll’s study represents inquiry approaches that might be used to allow teachers to reason soundly about their own teaching and investigate other possible ways to make knowledge accessible to all learners. The goal of this book is not to only present inquiry in relation to issues in teacher education, but to encourage readers to develop new insights and understanding through the use of inquiry, particularly in considering sensitive issues like race, diversity, and discrimination.

In spite of the fact that Kroll’s study includes some limitations, it might be a beneficial book to get knowledge about using inquiry in teaching. Being a teacher and a teacher educator means that Kroll is familiar with both the teacher education process at the college level and the problems novice

teachers might face in schools. She is able to see “two sides of the coin”. Kroll’s arguments may enable readers to position themselves as teacher educators, practicing teachers, and pre-service teachers and look at the issues in teacher education from their perspectives. She portrays the ways in which both teacher educators and teachers take actions to relieve the challenges of teaching via using inquiry.

References

- Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). *Walking the Road: Race, Diversity, and Social Justice in Teacher Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dewey, J. (1903). The relation of theory to practice in education. In C.A Murray, ed. *Third Yearbook of the National Society for the Scientific Study of education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.9-3.
- Loughran, J (2006). *Developing a Pedagogy of Teacher Education: Understanding Teaching and Learning and Learning about Teaching*. New York: Routledge.
- Posner, G. J (2003) *Analyzing the Curriculum* (third edition), New York, NY: McGraw-Hill
- Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 1-22.
- Zumwalt, K. & Craig, E. (2008). Who is teaching? Does it matter? In M. Cochran – Smith, S. Feiman – Nemser, and D. J. McIntyre, Eds. *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts*. New York: Routledge/ Taylor Francis and the Association of teacher Educators, 404-423.