"Teachers care...But us kids got to help them"

Imagining and Enacting Equitably Consequential Teaching and Learning in Dehumanizing Times

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Abstract: Persistent inequalities remain in access and opportunities in STEM for youth from historically marginalized communities. However, with few exceptions, the dominant equity focus has been on supporting individual participation and learning opportunities. This individual focus does not necessarily disrupt systemic injustices and the ways in which systemic forces shape classroom practice. In this seminar, I draw upon a critical justice perspective and two large studies of teaching and learning STEM in both out-of-school and in schools, to build a case for new tools and approaches that supports and promotes more equitably consequential experiences and outcomes for learners. I use the term “equitably consequential” to call attention to how teaching and learning is (or ought to be) a) rooted in the history and geographies of young people’s lives in ways that b) support rigorous engagement with and connections among disciplinary knowledge/practice, community, and broader social issues in pursuit of c) transformative individual and systemic outcomes. These outcomes include, but expand beyond, disciplinary learning/engagement, such as critical agency and shifting power dynamics. This stance builds on, but advances, work in the learning sciences on teaching and learning as relational and historicized activities, by pushing beyond the focus on individual learners to also address how systemic injustices intersect with classroom practice. I will present cases from my collaborative research with teachers and youth in historically marginalized urban communities as we sought to understand and disrupt the political and structural continuities that shape life in classrooms, envision ways to transform them, and the impacts they had on student learning and engagement. In sharing cases I will present both insights and dilemmas regarding what equitably consequential teaching and learning may look like and its possibilities among teachers and students. I also discuss implications of this stance for new approaches to designing for empowering and just learning environments.

Bio: Angela Calabrese Barton is a professor in teacher education. Her research focuses on issues of equity and social justice in science education, with a particular emphasis on the urban context. Drawing from qualitative and critical/feminist methodologies, she conducts ethnographic and case study research in urban community- and school- based settings that targets the science teaching-learning experiences of three major stakeholder groups: upper elementary and middle school youth, teachers learning to teach science for social justice, and parents engaging in their children’s science education. She also engages in curriculum research and development that links nutrition and science literacies in the upper elementary and middle school classroom. She is currently co-editor for the Journal of Research in Science Teaching.