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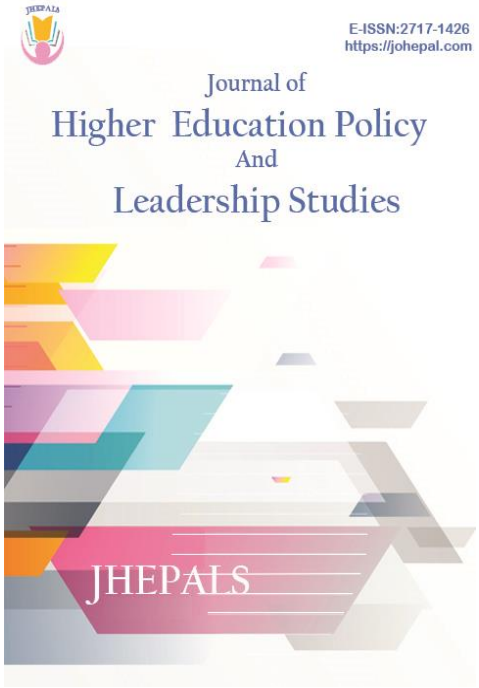

Examining Complexities of Equity and Social Justice Education: An Interview with Prof. Ann Lopez

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Ann Lopez *

Dr. Ann Lopez is a Jamaican born professor of educational leadership and policy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, Canada. A former public school teacher and administrator she is a leading voice and scholar on anti-racist, decolonizing and equity education in K-12 schooling. She is the Director of the Center for Leadership and Diversity, Co-Director Centre for Black Studies in Education, and Provostial Advisor, Access Programs. Dr. Lopez has recently been appointed as Professor Extraordinarius at UNISA, South Africa and Visiting Professor Kwame Nkrumah University, Zambia. She is a teacher educator and held the position of Academic Director, Initial Teacher Education at OISE/UT. Her recent research projects have focused on school leadership in Canada, Jamaica, Kenya, Ghana and Zambia where she collaborates with local scholars. Dr. Lopez is the author of several journal articles and books including her most recent book entitled, Decolonizing Educational Leadership: Alternative Approach to Leading Schools.

Professor Lopez is co-Editor-In-Chief of the Journal of School Leadership and Co-Series Editor, Studies in Educational Administration. Professor Lopez has been honored for her work and is the recipient of the OISE 2020 Award for Distinguished Contributions to Teaching, and the 2022 University of Toronto Award of Excellence and Jus Memorial Human Rights Prize – Influential Leader.

https://discover.research.utoronto.ca/17341-ann-lopez/about

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Interview

It is an honor and privilege for us to host Prof. Ann Lopez from the Department of Leadership, Higher & Adult Education (LHAE) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto and as a globally renowned scholar and higher education leader whose research, talks, interviews, and notes are extensively cited and acknowledged worldwide.

We are sure that Prof. Lopez's insightful, illuminating and critical responses to the following questions will be of interest to a broad audience of international researchers, students, policymakers, and leaders in Higher Education.

Question #1

You have many years of experience doing equity and social justice education, how do you see the progress particularly in teacher education?

Answer:

First, let me congratulate on the Journal. Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts and ideas on equity and social justice education. I have been engaged in social justice education I would say from I was a child growing up in Jamaica and seeing my grandmother engage with community members and her strong desire to support those who in her words "were less fortunate". I have been an educator for 30 years in K-12 and higher education. My entire career has been dedicated to supporting students, challenging all forms of inequities in practices and policies in K-12 and higher education.

As you know I was a classroom teacher and teacher educator. There has been progress made in teacher education in many countries as teacher education programs have embedded courses focused on equity and social justice and supporting teacher candidates in translating theory to practice in their pedagogy, curriculum, and teaching and learning spaces. Equity and social justice is about student success, and not something additive. Notwithstanding, there is a far way to go as there are those that would like to keep the status quo that does not serve all students well remain in place. Practices and policies grounded coloniality and white supremacy logic are still in education and must named and dismantled so that all students can thrive.

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Question #2

What do you think as major issues dealing with equity education in schools or institutions of higher education?

Answer:

Creating structural, long lasting change is never easy. Some of the issues embedding equity education in schools and institutions include some seeing the equity education as additive. That is on top of their everyday work instead of being part of their work and an integral and necessary part of student success. Lack of resources to provide the necessary support to educators can also be challenging, as well as educational leaders in schools and higher education who do not support equity education and make it challenging for those educators who are using their agency to create change. Another issue that can be challenging for some is ways to connect theory to practice in their everyday work and contexts. Sometimes this requires additional resources and practice. Educators need to be supported in their efforts. And of course dealing with resistance from those who do not want change, and support white supremacy logic that gives power to some and marginalizes others.

Question #3

In the past few years there seems to be more emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion in universities (particularly related to their hiring practices). Is that working or going to work from your perspective?

Answer:

In recent years EDI initiatives have gained support as organizations recognize the need for greater diversity and representation. So while EDI can be an entry point towards greater inclusion, I raise some caution. There cannot be representation without power. That is change in faces at the table, but no change in polices or practices. EDI without change in policies and practices within organizations are performative. There must also be intentionality in naming forms of oppression and committing to action to dislodge. EDI efforts also require accountability. By that I mean who is responsible to ensuring diverse people who are brought into spaces are mentored, given the resources to succeed, and who is responsible to ensure the change in polices occur. So, EDI should initiatives must be accompanied by meaningful change in universities in leadership, policies, practices and student, staff and faculty must be able to see and experience the change.

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