

A Conversation of Many Voices: Critiques and Visions of Teacher Education

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It's on the horizon again, another looming "crisis" in teacher education. These predicaments don't seem to go away or get resolved. A state of perpetual professional calamity seems to threaten, characterize, and inform the teacher education endeavor. Whether the decade is the 1930's with Teachers College Dean William Russell's call for a "new charter for teacher education" (Russell, 1936), the 1960's with Koerner's and Conant's respective critiques of teacher preparation (Conant, 1963; Koerner, 1963), or the 1980's with the uproar initiated by *Nation at Risk* (1983), teacher education has been inundated by multiple and persistent criticisms. Some claim schools of education offer preparation that overemphasizes theory and inadequately addresses the practical realities of contemporary classrooms. Others argue that these centers of professional preparation lack intellectual substance and focus instead on pedagogical pedantry. Still others maintain that teacher educators engage in a form of leftist-liberal indoctrination. And finally, some assert that most university-based teacher preparation involves too many regulatory hurdles, discouraging the best college students from pursuing this profession. With most of these criticisms comes the charge that teacher education is at best ineffectual, and at worst harmful and insidiously ideological.

In contrast to these mostly external critics, people within schools, colleges, and departments of education argue that our current public schools embrace a 19th century understanding of student learning; that our public schools' promise of equal opportunity has yet to be delivered; that schools, as work places, discourage innovation and collaboration; and that the current and outdated factory model of schooling needs to be reformed so as to prepare

As this editorial goes to press, Arthur Levine, outgoing president of Teachers College, will soon issue a report, *Educating Teachers*, examining the problems and pitfalls of teacher education. Early accounts from Levine's study indicate that nine out of ten public school administrators view newly licensed teachers as inadequately prepared. Furthermore, according to the initial analysis, teacher preparation is seen as an institutional "cash cow" by universities, and one result is that professional preparation suffers (Winter, 2005).

Finally, a committee has been convened by the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academies of Science to undertake a study of teacher preparation programs in the United States. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences in response to a congressionally mandated request, the committee is charged with a multi-pronged task. Its charge includes the development of a conceptual and methodological framework; a review and synthesis of the existing research literature and available data sources on the preparation, and characteristics of teacher education candidates; and the specification of additional research and data needed to inform future efforts in teacher preparation policy and research (National Research Council, 2005). In Fall 2007, the committee will issue its final

dispositions theory...” (Leo, 2005). Leo asserts that schools of education are in the business of “imposing groupthink” by focusing on teacher candidates’ dispositions. He grounds his arguments in a Fordham Foundation sponsored commentary by William Damon, one in which Damon decries the NCATE sponsored dispositional orientation as allowing schools of education “unbounded power over what candidates may think and do” (Damon, 2005, p. 3). The Fordham Foundation introduces Damon’s publication on its website by suggesting that his argument gives credence to “(understandable) charges of ideological arm-twisting and Orwellian mind-control” (Fordham Foundation, 2006). George Will makes a similar argument regarding dispositions to justify eliminating schools of education all together (Will, 2006).

In a summer 2005 issue of the *NY Times Education Supplement*, Anemona Hartocollis reported on the rather dismal state of professional teacher preparation, one in which theoretical flights of fancy take priority over practical preparation (Hartocollis, 2005). Bemoaning this state of practical inadequacy, Hartocollis offers Diane Ravitch’s commentary as both prognosis and cure when she includes the following quotation from Ravitch:

“There is a disconnect of professors of education just not being capable of equipping

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professors of education to attend to the very real demands of public school teaching and to prepare teachers accordingly.

When we look to the research on teacher education, we don't find clear solutions to the problems of teacher education. As is the case for teacher education programs and practices, research on teacher education has been the target of criticism over the years, both by scholars within the field and external critics. In their chapter in the first *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, for example, Sam Yarger and Philip Smith (1990) noted that "there are major gaps in what has been studied and in recommendations regarding what should be studied about the teacher education process" (1990, p.

preparation programs and teacher candidates' learning, empirical evidence demonstrating the link between teacher candidates' learning and their practices in actual classrooms, and empirical evidence demonstrating the link between graduates' practices and what and how much their pupils learn. Individually, each of these links is complex and challenging to estimate. When they are combined, the challenges are multiplied.... (p. 303)

Others have argued that limitations in the

forum where these issues could be pursued across ideological, political, and educational divides.

methodological or theoretical approach will be able to provide all that is needed to understand how and why teacher education influences educational outcomes” (Zeichner, 2005, p. 743).

Alternative views of teacher education and alternative methodological approaches for studying teacher education need to be disseminated and discussed. What we need, as a profession, now more than ever, is a shared place for this dialogue and critical examination – a place that is inclusive of the broad range of views, visions, and enactments. We see *JTE* as a place that provides, in part, such a forum for these sorts of exchanges.

Inaugural Issue, Upcoming Themes and Forum

And so as incoming editors we thought what better way to introduce our vision for a multi-voiced forum on teacher education than by asking a variety of scholars and experts to address one of the perennial questions of our profession: What should beginning teachers know and be able to do? We asked sixteen scholars to address that question, and the first section in our inaugural issue is devoted to their responses. We sought a range of individuals known for their varied and opposing points of view. We also asked three scholars in the field of teacher education to address the following question: Given the variety of teacher education goals and the reality of early twenty-first century schooling—what should those in the field of teacher education do in their programs of teacher education? Linda Darling-Hammond, Suzanne Wilson, and Ken Zeichner responded. We are quite pleased with the responses provided by the invited scholars, and we hope their commentaries and critiques will engage you as well as enliven our profession’s debate and further the conversation.

As first readers of the following pieces we have come to see the education of future teachers anew. In the first article in this issue Mary Kennedy calls into question the predominant teacher education “vision”: Her essay challenged and engaged us. The pieces that follow hers are

equally provocative, as each offers a unique critique and challenge to the teacher education community. We wish to thank our invited authors for sharing their bold visions—William Ayers, Robert Bain & Jeffrey Mirel, Nancy Commins & Ofelia Miramontes, Linda Darling-Hammond, Lisa Delpit, Carl Grant & Maureen Gillette, Sam Intrator, David Imig & Scott Imig, Mary Kennedy, Valerie Otero, Sandra Stotsky, Bill Tate & Elizabeth Malancharuvil Berkes, Suzanne Wilson, and Ken Zeichner. We also thank the anonymous reviewers who provided valuable commentary that strengthened each of the essays presented in this issue.

Our second issue, which is also a thematic issue, builds off the inaugural theme as it examines from multiple research perspectives the first years of teaching. We then continue the well-established practice of *JTE* of alternating thematic issues and open topic issues. We encourage readers to peruse the call for manuscripts in this issue, which invites examinations of the impact of *No Child Left Behind* on teacher education research, policy, and practice and highlights our desire for manuscripts that “take controversial stands, challenge orthodoxy, and stimulate thoughtful reflection and discourse.”

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