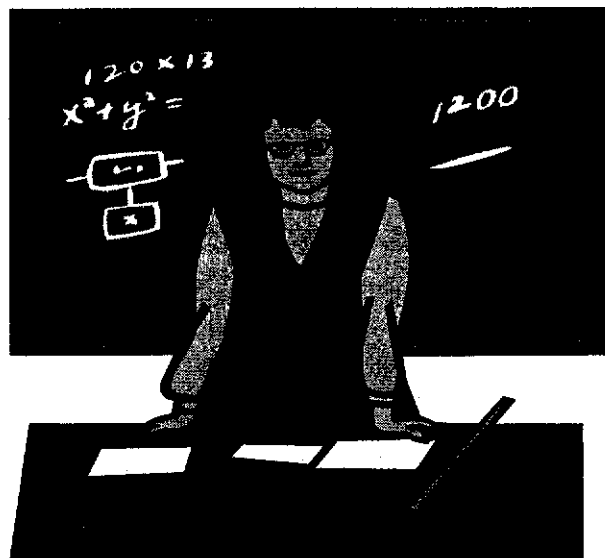


Improving Teacher Preparation



Archived Information

Promising Practices: New Ways to Improve Teacher Quality - September 1998

Improving Teacher Preparation

Teacher education has long been considered weak among higher education degree programs, one that lacks high standards and strong contacts with the field. Now, however, teacher education programs are being improved in many colleges and universities through a variety of efforts. These include: revised, challenging standards for accreditation of teacher education; the growth of professional development schools; and emphasis on a deeper knowledge base for prospective teachers as well as demonstration of competence. However, much remains to be done.

A sense of urgency accompanies these efforts because of the need to prepare more teachers in a shorter period than during any other time in our history. Currently, the more than 1,025 teacher education programs graduate about 100,000 potential teacher candidates each year, but the nation's schools will need to hire two million teachers within the decade to replace those retiring or to meet the needs of expanding enrollments. That means that these programs may supply only one-half of the teachers who will be needed.

Even more important, critics of teacher education and reformers of public schooling agree that the preparation of teachers must be substantially stronger. If students are expected to know more and be able to apply their knowledge skillfully, then teachers must be models of such learning.

At the beginning of the 1990s, John Goodlad, head of the National Network for Educational Renewal, commented that teacher education had been an unstudied problem for three decades. That is not true anymore. His network engages two dozen institutions in restructuring teacher education. The Holmes Partnership, a consortium of research-based institutions, has proposed reforms of teacher preparation and emphasized links between universities and schools by using public schools as professional practice sites. It has chastised its own members for contributing to the problems of quality in teacher education by emphasizing research and graduate programs and neglecting the preparation of new teachers.

Accreditation by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is one link in the continuum to bring about standards-based reform of the teaching profession. In 1995 the Council called for various approaches to create new rigorous standards: a coherent program of studies for each student rather than the typical hodgepodge; a firm foundation in the liberal arts and teaching disciplines; programs that prepare teachers for the higher content standards set for students; programs that prepare teachers for classroom diversity and for new technologies; and the use of performance-based standards rather than "seat time" in classes to determine the readiness of candidates to teach.

About 500 teacher education programs now seek NCATE approval. NCATE's standards correlate with those developed for the next check on quality by the Interstate Consortium for Licensing of Teachers (INTASC)--and with those for accomplished teaching as defined by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

Alverno College

"The most important thing that I've gotten from Alverno is the constant questioning. You question yourself, you question others, you seek information. You do all of these things to better yourself and your profession."

Alverno College graduate

A commuter college that historically has served first-generation college students, Alverno College engages its potential teachers in a highly non-traditional program. When it adopted its "ability-based curriculum" in the 1980s, it was unique among colleges and universities. As performance-based standards for students and for teachers--standards that require them to demonstrate they know how to use what they have learned--became important to education improvement, Alverno College became the campus to study and look to for leadership.

With fewer than 500 students (including a small number of graduate students), the Division of Education at Alverno College is able to provide the personal attention needed in its ability-based program. The pre-service program complies with the collegewide ability-based curriculum adopted in the early 1970s. This curriculum specifies eight general abilities in which students must demonstrate competency:

- Communication
- Analysis--an ability to be a clear thinker, fusing "experience, reason, and training into considered judgment"
- Problem solving
- Values within decision making--an ability to reflect and to habitually seek to understand the moral dimensions of decisions and to accept responsibility for the consequences of actions
- Social interaction--an understanding of how to get things done in committees, task forces, team projects and other group efforts
- Global perspectives--an ability to articulate interconnections between and among diverse opinions, ideas and beliefs about global issues
- Effective citizenship--an ability to make informed choices and develop strategies for collaborative involvement in community issues
- Aesthetic responsiveness--an ability to make informed responses to artistic works which are grounded in knowledge of the theoretical, historical, and cultural context

This radical departure from traditional credit for "seat time" in classes in order to graduate meant a total change in curriculum and assessment policies at the tiny college. The faculty established different levels of abilities for each of the curriculum areas. For example, entering students would be expected to meet the minimum levels of competency but develop more sophisticated levels of communication or problem solving as they move up through the college.

Teacher education students must achieve acceptable levels in an additional set of professional abilities. These include such areas as integrating content knowledge with teaching pedagogy, diagnosing individual student needs, and managing resources effectively.

Alverno teacher education candidates receive no grades. However, each course has specific goals in the context of the abilities students are to develop as they progress throughout the program. The program

depends on performance-based assessments in which students must show what they have learned. A matrix prepared each semester shows a student what level of abilities has been attained, based on such proof as essays, letters, position papers, case study analyses, observations of both master teachers and of students, simulations and development of curriculum materials. Extensive field experiences precede student teaching; Alverno faculty observe and comment on their students in school settings. A panel of faculty and school personnel evaluates student teaching. At graduation, the students receive narrative transcripts prepared by the faculty.

The Alverno faculty are well aware that their students' experiences before college do not prepare them for this approach. However, they model the styles they want students to use, and the program emphasizes student self-assessment and reflection.

A recent study of graduates of the elementary education program by Ken Zeichner of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, found them to be much more self-assured and confident of their preparation to teach the knowledge and skills of their disciplines than graduates of other programs. Their confidence level was at 93.5 percent compared to only 33.6 percent of the comparison group. About 80 to 90 percent of the graduates obtain immediate teaching jobs.⁽¹⁴⁾

Forty percent are hired by the Milwaukee Public Schools, which enrolls 78 percent minority students. Alverno College prepares 25 percent more minority teacher candidates than any other campus in the Milwaukee area.⁽¹⁵⁾ In addition, the faculty work closely with the city schools on professional development and issues such as technology and performance assessments.

The Alverno faculty carefully choose the schools and teachers with whom they place their students. As one principal interviewed by Zeichner noted, "What they try to do, I think, is to really look at the cooperating teachers and match them with the most appropriate person...Every time they've called me they've identified the teachers whom they want."

The standards-based curriculum and the personal guidance given Alverno students are rare in teacher education programs, but the result is what many policy makers and administrators say they want. According to Zeichner, "This program produces poised and confident teachers who employ teaching strategies that are rich in learner-centered and learning-centered practices, and who perceive themselves and are perceived by others as successful and innovative teachers in a variety of settings...."⁽¹⁶⁾

University of Cincinnati *Cincinnati Initiative for Teacher Education*

"We are engaged in a ground-breaking partnership. Not only are we revamping teacher training, we are bridging the gap that has traditionally existed between practicing teachers and the colleges of education."

Cincinnati teacher union leader

In the late 1980s, a few teachers from Cincinnati and faculty from the University of Cincinnati met informally to talk about what it would mean to transform teacher education. Inspired by its membership

in the Holmes Group, the College of Education dean encouraged the university faculty to think boldly about changing teacher preparation. Over the next three years teachers and faculty worked together to create a vision, then to redesign the university's programs as a collaboration between the public schools and the campus. This became the Cincinnati Initiative for Teacher Education (CITE).

CITE relies on several principles:

- Two degrees, two majors. Teacher candidates must be competent in both knowledge of the academic disciplines and of the profession of teaching itself. Students enroll jointly in the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education. By the third year, while taking courses for a major in a subject area, students enroll in their first professional education courses. In their fourth year, students finish up work in general education and their majors, and engage in field experiences at the professional practice schools that prepare them for the following year's internship.
- Professional practice schools. Practicum and internship placements are made in competitively selected schools where the faculty are committed to their own continuing professional development as well as to preparing new teachers.
- "Pattern" language. The patterns make up the knowledge base used to educate prospective teachers--the core skills, values and attitudes which teachers and college faculty agreed are critical to teaching and learning. The pattern language includes almost 90 terms, such as professional development schools, learning in groups, multi-disciplinary teaching teams and "community of learners."
- Fifth-year internship. This is the joint responsibility of campus-based and school-based faculty. The fifth-year student is placed in a half-time paid teaching position and attends seminars and other experiences designed to bring all of the program themes together.
- Cohorts. Cohort groups of both university faculty and teacher education students move through the preparation program together.

The nine professional practice schools selected to participate in the CITE program organize as teams that include a lead teacher mentor, three or four career teachers, an equal number of interns, and a campus-based faculty member. The experiences of interns and their teachers, rather than traditional courses, form the basis for coordinated seminars that are part of the fifth-year program. Their roles in CITE allow practicing teachers to become learners, too, and to build networks within their schools and across schools. These partnerships sustain school reform.

Teachers on the teams in the professional schools find the benefits of leadership opportunities far more important than the stipends they receive. According to a presentation by Cincinnati teachers and faculty at the 1995 annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, "they benefit from the professional team collaboration, the interns' innovative ideas and fresh enthusiasm, and the empowerment of directly contributing to the professional development of future colleagues and of the profession."⁽¹⁷⁾

When the planners look back on what they have accomplished, the contrasts are clear. Under the university's old system, teacher candidates earned a bachelor's degree in education in a four-year program, earned no graduate credits, spent only three quarters in field work, and earned 30 to 60 credits in a subject matter discipline. Student teaching was spent with a cooperating teacher for 10 weeks.

Under CITE, students are in the program for five years, earn a B.S. in education and a bachelor's degree in a discipline, earn 18 graduate credits, spend five to six quarters in field work, and earn up to 90 credits in a subject matter. They also spend 36 weeks in a Professional Practice School as a student teacher.

The first graduates of the program began teaching in 1995-96. Their placement rate was about 90 percent according to the directors of CITE--considerably higher than that of graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs in the state.

University of Texas/El Paso

"One of the exciting things about all this work is trying to keep a vision out in front of you...that has to do with kids doing better in schools. Then you figure out that all the pieces have to be aligned."

Dean, College of Education

Isolated along the Mexican border and the source of 70 percent of the beginning teachers for a wide area of Texas and New Mexico,⁽¹⁸⁾ the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and its College of Education have a special relationship with the community. The teacher education program is so closely tied to community groups and to a selection of professional development schools in surrounding school districts that the college's dean likens it to a teaching hospital. Thus, the vision and direction of the teacher education program have helped to reform schools, particularly with technology.

As a member of John Goodlad's National Network for Education Renewal, an effort to dramatically revamp teacher education, the college has wholeheartedly revised its programs. It has gained status in the university community and garnered technology and math and science federal grants that are bringing resources to the college and the schools, which have a largely Hispanic enrollment. The interdisciplinary liberal arts degree for elementary teachers and academic discipline degrees for secondary teachers are now required under state regulations. This change has spread responsibility for educating teachers to the whole university. The arts and sciences faculty are as involved in teacher preparation as is the faculty of the College of Education.

At the same time, the college has moved to a clinical field-based model of teacher preparation with a twist--cohorts of university students stay in the same partnership schools for long periods of time. These 18 schools are committed to school reform, redesigning professional development, integrating technology, and building greater outreach to their neighborhoods.

The teacher preparation program at UTEP, enrolling about 700 students a year, has several other unique features:

- Pre-service teacher education is collaboratively designed and managed. Public school personnel, university faculty, the area Education Service Center (a state-funded regional center) and community members design, implement, and evaluate the restructured teacher education program.
- The integration of technology and effective teaching practices receives high priority. All

professional development classrooms and university teacher education laboratories have multi-media work stations, and the Education Service Center links three rural districts and the university.

- The teacher education program includes a community component. Pre-service teachers and those seeking certification as counselors or administrators must spend time visiting with families at their homes and at activities sponsored by agencies. One aspiring teacher, for example, tells of visiting a student's home and being taught how to make tortillas by the student's mother. Readings and seminars on parent and community involvement complement the visits.

The college's reputation has earned it a state grant as a Center for Professional Development and Technology, as well as a five-year Challenge Grant in Educational Technology from the U.S. Department of Education. It also has a grant from the National Science Foundation to prepare minority teachers for math and science classrooms.

A major community involvement effort was spearheaded by the university president, resulting in a community collaboration to turn around the achievement of school children in the area. The El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence includes business and local government leaders, UTEP and the El Paso Community College, superintendents from the three surrounding public school districts, and a grass roots community organization. It is this group that is significantly involved in redesigning and evaluating the teacher preparation program and that helps provide field-based experiences for prospective teachers.

A recent University Accreditation Report from the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities selected the College of Education for commendation, saying that it has dealt with the challenges facing teacher education in an "outstanding manner," particularly in the way it has forged new relationships with other colleges within UTEP and with local school districts and community agencies.

Characteristics of Promising Teacher Education Programs

- The president and board of a college or university give status and support to teacher education programs and emphasize quality through rigorous accreditation. The programs involve subject-matter disciplines in the preparation of teachers.
- The teacher preparation program recruits teacher candidates of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities who have the potential to be excellent teachers.
- The teacher education program is coherent in its sequential offerings and emphasizes content knowledge as well as pedagogy relevant to teaching a specific subject (known as content-specific pedagogy); ideally, it provides a final fifth year of practical, supervised experience combined with class work or substantial student teaching experience far beyond the too-usual month or two in a loosely supervised assignment.
- The program encourages close two-way links between campuses and schools. These links provide status to practicing teachers and rich environments for preparation of pre-service students. They give prospective teachers positive opportunities to work with parents and community, civic,

business and youth organizations that support children and families.

- The program incorporates assessments of future teachers that reveal how well they know their content and how well they can teach it to students. These assessments emphasize understanding the ways that children learn and the latest models of curriculum and student evaluations.
- The program prepares candidates to work in multicultural settings and with diverse learners.

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[Recruiting Talented and Diverse People Into the Teaching Profession]
[Raising Licensing and Certification Standards]

