

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

Hilda Borko, Daniel Liston, & Jennifer A. Whitcombⁱ

University of Colorado at Boulder

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yet to be delivered; that schools, as work places, discourage innovation and collaboration; and that the current and outdated factory model of schooling needs to be reformed so as to prepare

students for productive lives in a world characterized by rapid and accelerating change, and a technologically integrated global economy. These internal voices maintain that public schools need to better reflect our current understanding of learning and address the pressing needs of our unequal and unjust social order. Recognizing the teacher's critical role in shaping students' educational experiences, they argue for preparing beginning teachers to teach in reformed and socially just ways. In addition, those inside schools of education turn a critical eye toward teacher preparation, where they note the wide variability in both the content and rigor in teacher education programs, and ways in which the fiscal and organizational realities of institutions of higher education work against coherence and depth in teacher preparation.

The voices within and outside of teacher education are not aligned neatly against each other. Certainly some critics inside our professional schools agree with the external critics and some of the external voices are sympathetic to the obstacles of institutional life. These areas of overlap notwithstanding, it is the case that there are multiple, radically different views of the state of teacher education today. It is time, we think, to engage these varied voices, to have a conversation around these different views of teacher education. But before embarking on this conversation it is informative to look briefly at several recent efforts to more fully examine and respond to the current "crisis."

The Current Climate of Commentary and Critique

Recently, prominent scholars of teacher education have published major tomes on the state of teacher education and teacher education research. *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World*, edited by Linda Darling-Hammond and John Bransford (2005), is the result of work conducted by the National Academy of Education's Committee on Teacher Education (CTE). The volume outlines core concepts and pedagogical strategies that should inform initial teacher

preparation and argues for the need to improve the context within which teacher preparation programs operate, so that beginning teachers, like their students, are optimally prepared to succeed. As such, it frames teaching as a profession that, analogous to medicine and law, now has a rigorously defined knowledge base to inform its curriculum, a growing body of research on effective pedagogical and programmatic approaches, and a pointed argument regarding the organizational and policy changes required to provide quality teacher preparation.

Studying Teacher Education, edited by Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Ken Zeichner (2005), reports on the work of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education. Cochran-Smith, Zeichner, and their colleagues synthesize research on a number of topics of interest to policymakers, teacher educators, and researchers. They examine the contributions of subject matter study, education coursework, and field experiences to desired outcomes of teacher education; the pedagogical approaches used in teacher education; and the impact of efforts to prepare teachers to teach students who are traditionally underserved by the schools. They conclude that although there is evidence for some effective teacher education practices and programs, “the body of teacher education research that directly addresses desirable pupil and other outcomes and the conditions and contexts in which these outcomes are likely to occur is relatively small and inconclusive” (p. 5). The report underscores the need for more rigorous, larger scale, and better funded educational research focused on building an empirical and evidentiary base to guide policy and practice. But the panel also cautions that research alone will not solve many of the persistent problems confronting teacher educators – that “teacher preparation policies and practices can never be decided solely on the basis of empirical evidence divorced from values” (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005, p. 53).

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 report.

These recently completed and ongoing internal and external commentaries appear at a time when the public criticism of schools of education seems, once again, to be on the rise. Recently a *New York Times* editorial decried New York state's diploma mill approach as a bankrupt system of teacher education, and argued that the implementation of new teacher standards would help to rectify the state's bleak professional preparation efforts (NYT-Editorial, 2004). Editorialist John Leo lambasted schools of education as leftist bound, arguing that the "cultural left has a new tool for enforcing political conformity in schools of education. It is called

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 future teachers with the practicalities to be successful.’ . . . The idea of ‘preparing excellent teachers who are excellent in their subject,’ she [Ravitch] says, has been overtaken by other concerns — ‘professors wanting to be respected in the university, and teachers’ colleges wanting to become places where research is done and to be agents of transformational change.’ (p. 2).

According to Hartocollis practice may not make the perfect teacher but it does a better job than either theories of learning or ruminations on social justice. It is time, Hartocollis argues, for

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. 25). More recently, Suzanne Wilson, Robert Floden and Joan Ferrini-Mundy reached a similar conclusion that "Overall, the research base concerning teacher preparation is relatively thin" (2001, p. i). Furthermore, although they found over 300 published research reports that addressed the five questions considered in their report, only 57 of the studies met their criteria for rigorous empirical research. In his remarks at the White House Conference on Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers, Grover Whitehurst (2002) stated: "Research on teacher preparation and professional development is a long way from the stage of converging evidence and professional consensus. Several approaches to studying the topic are used, and like the proverbial blind men examining different parts of an elephant, each generates a different perspective."

Many scholars have also pointed out that rigorous research on teacher education is difficult and expensive to conduct. As Cochran-Smith (2005) noted in a recent editorial in this journal:

To get from teacher education to impact on pupils' learning requires a chain of evidence with several critical links: empirical evidence demonstrating the link between teacher

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 existing body of research include inadequate theoretical grounding, imprecision and inconsistency in language, insufficient descriptions of methods of data collection and analysis, inadequate measures of teacher knowledge and performance, lack of attention to the contexts of teacher education, a very limited set of teacher and student outcomes, and limited attention to alternative approaches to teacher preparation (Yarger & Smith, 1990; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001; Zeichner, 2005). It appears that both the research on and the practice within teacher preparation require further attention.

Our Editorial Vision: Fostering A Multi-voiced Forum

The coming years promise to be challenging ones in teacher education. Again and again we hear both credible and questionable voices argue that teacher education simply must change. There are many and more varied professional preparation alternatives than in the past. Despite this variability, few of the criticisms launched against teacher preparation are new or novel. Critics cited in our opening paragraph along with others such as Geraldine Joncich Clifford and James Guthrie (1988), Harry Judge (1982), and Rita Kramer (1991) have summarized and underscored most of these sentiments. Certainly the critiques and disagreements are ideologically charged, value based, and politically directed: Most important practical, professional and policy debates are. However, professional integrity and institutional viability demand further attention to these critiques. As a profession, over the years we have needed a substantial and consistent

forum where these issues could be pursued across ideological, political, and educational divides. During Cochran-Smith's editorship, she used *JTE* as a forum for conversations about these issues. As in-coming editors we intend to continue and broaden these conversations in the *Journal's* future pages. We hope that a forum of this sort might help inform the debates about how best to prepare our future teachers and further engage, educate, and sustain our current ones. We do not believe we can solve these conundrums as they entail irreducible and at times conflicting moral, educational, and political visions. But we can, as a profession and as critics, articulate better the normative and evidentiary bases for our preferred visions and respond more directly to the criticisms that are raised. As the new editors we will encourage—whenever possible—further conversation and debate around these important issues. In addition to providing a forum for discussion of substantive issues related to the preparation and ongoing professional development of teachers, we would also like to help move the field forward by fostering critical examination of the strengths and limitations of multiple genres of research on teacher education and learning to teach.

We want to be clear. Just as we recognize multiple and defensible approaches to educating our children, we neither believe nor desire a singular approach to teacher education or teacher education research. Individually E. D. Hirsch, Deborah Meier, Bob Moses, Vivian Gussin Paley, Tom Romberg, and Geoffrey Saxon do not hold the exclusive rights to preferred educational visions for our public schools' children. In a similar vein, the views Linda Darling-Hammond, Chester Finn, Jeannie Oakes, and Frank Murray hold for teacher education cannot delimit the only defensible teacher education stories. And, as Ken Zeichner argued in the concluding chapter of *Studying Teacher Education*, "Given the complexity of teacher education and its connections to various aspects of teacher quality and student learning, no single

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.”

As editors of *JTE* we are given the opportunity to organize a session at each annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE). After reviewing several hundred manuscripts during the first year of our editorial responsibilities, we came to the conclusion that, as a field, we can do a better job conducting and reporting research on our own practice. Based on this conclusion, and in keeping with our desire to foster ongoing conversations about teacher education research, we organized a session entitled *Enhancing the Scholarship of Teacher Educator’s Practice* for the 2006 annual meeting. We invited three prominent teacher education scholars—Jean Clandinin, John Loughran, and Ken Zeichner—to share their perspectives on improving the quality and impact of practitioner inquiry within

teacher education. We hope that the insights they offered in that session will stimulate further attention to these issues within the pages of the *Journal*.

Signing On with Gratitude

Finally, as we sign on as editors, we wish to thank Marilyn Cochran-Smith and her team at Boston College for her leadership over the last thirty issues: Under Cochran-Smith's editorship, the *Journal* has been an important voice to practitioners, researchers, and policy makers interested in quality teacher education. We also wish to thank the following individuals for their guidance and support during the transition period from Boston College to the University of Colorado at Boulder: Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Kevin Koziol and Moira Rafferty at Boston College helped us understand all aspects of our editorial responsibilities; Judy Beck at AACTE graciously facilitated our introductions to Boston College and to SAGE Publications and to the AACTE staff; Catherine Rossbach and Jacquelyn Rawson at SAGE supported our learning details of the *Journal's* production and marketing; the staff at Berkeley Electronic Press (BEPress) responded swiftly to our queries and requests as we moved the *Journal* to an on-line review system; and finally Dean Lorrie Shepard at the University of Colorado, Boulder provided generous support so that CU Boulder can become the new institutional home for *JTE*.

We look forward to carrying forward and extending the tradition of *JTE* as an essential forum for scholarship of teacher education.

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