

Too Little or Too Much:

Teacher Preparation and the First Years of Teaching

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Exhilarated and exhausted, hopeful and cynical, fulfilled and dejected—these adjectives depict the emotional spectrum characterizing teachers’ first year experiences. Narratives of teachers’ initial years speak to the gritty reality of “really learning to teach.” Their stories tell of the challenges experienced as they come to understand the depth and texture of their students’ lives and their unique developmental needs. They work to develop humane, yet efficient, routines to manage the daily business of classroom and school life. They struggle to design engaging curriculum and to build knowledge of rigorous and fair standards for student work. They try to fend off fatigue, seeking to balance career demands with activities and connections that rejuvenate. They grapple with the absurdities and paradoxes of school bureaucracies, choosing when to critique and resist ill-framed policies and practices. They stumble in some interactions with colleagues, administrators, and parents. They wonder why their trying work and hard won accomplishments are viewed with such low regard by the general public. In short, narratives of first years pivot between epiphany and disillusionment (e.g., Johnston, 2002; Kane, 1991; Michie 1999).

The challenges brought to life in these narratives are persistently documented in the research literature (Fuller, 1969; Veenman, 1984; Roehrig, Pressley, & Talotta, 2002). Difficulties in the first years of teaching have implications for both practice and policy, particularly because the estimated financial cost of teacher turnover is \$2.6 billion

annually (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). Furthermore, while we expect most first year teachers will encounter some difficulties, there is emerging evidence that those prepared in powerful teacher preparation programs seem to manage the vicissitudes more adeptly than others (Darling-Hammond, 2006) and that quality induction programs matter (Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003; Molner-Kelly, 2004; Johnson, et al. 2004). With these realities in mind, what can and should we expect of teacher education? Is teacher education doing too little or too much to prepare teachers for the first years of teaching? To educate and support beginning teachers we need to know about their development and the contexts in which it takes place.

### The First Years

Studies of new teachers' development outline typical stages (e.g., Berliner, 1994; Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Huberman, 1989). Whether beginnings are easy or painful, survival remains a prominent theme for the initial months, as new teachers resolve discipline and management problems. The intense survival stage gives way, often by the middle of the first year, to a focus on curriculum, teaching practices, and eventually student learning. Most studies present a progression toward mastery or expertise, achieved some time in the fourth year of teaching or beyond.<sup>ii</sup>

More recent frameworks to conceptualize teacher learning and development draw upon the notions of *adaptive expertise* (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005), *progressive differentiation* (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005), and a *professional learning continuum* (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Teachers as “adaptive experts” frames expertise along two dimensions--efficiency and innovation. That is, expertise involves both the ability to “perform particular tasks without having to devote too many

attentional resources to achieve them” and the ability to “move beyond existing routines...to rethink key ideas, practices, and even values in order to” respond to novel situations (Hammerness, et al., 2005, p. 358-359). Similarly, Snow and her colleagues’ (2005) conception of “progressive differentiation” outlines five levels of knowledge teachers draw upon (declarative, situated procedural, stable procedural, expert/adaptive, and reflective/analyzed). They caution that these five levels “should not be thought of as ‘stages’ separated from one another by sharp discontinuities” (p. 9). Rather, different levels are more prominent at different points in the development from preservice to master teacher. Preservice teachers, for instance, draw more upon declarative knowledge than do either novice or master teachers.

Feiman-Nemser’s (2001) proposal for a professional learning continuum suggests a curricular framework to foster the development of adaptive experts. Her continuum delineates the central tasks of learning to teach in the preservice, induction, and continued professional development phases. For example, teacher candidates’ five central tasks include: analyze beliefs and form new visions, develop subject matter knowledge for teaching, develop understandings of learners and learning, develop a beginning repertoire, and develop the tools to study teaching. Novice teachers in the first three years of teaching build upon teacher preparation experiences to accomplish a different set of tasks: learn their particular context, design a responsive instructional program, create a classroom learning community, enact a beginning repertoire, and develop a professional identity. While others might define the central tasks in slightly different terms or place them in a different order, this continuum stirs conversation about a developmental progression that focuses on core practices and understandings necessary to teach all

children. Feiman-Nemser's discussion of a professional learning continuum also suggests that learning these central tasks takes place in different contexts and with different supports. As such, it underscores that "no single institution has the expertise, authority, or financial resources to create the necessary structures and learning opportunities" (p. 1037) to foster a teacher's complete development along this continuum.

### Teacher Education and the First Years of Teaching

Given what we know about the nature of new teachers' learning and development, how might teacher education respond to the challenges of the first years of teaching? To address this question, we need some understanding of the sources of beginning teachers' struggles. We offer three common explanations: First, new teachers say the theoretical grounding learned in teacher preparation does not equip them sufficiently for the demands of daily classroom life; second, they wrestle with the emotional intensity of teaching; and third, they often teach in workplaces that are not adequately organized to support their learning.

#### The problem of theory.

One explanation for the difficulties beginning teachers experience is that the curriculum in university-based teacher preparation programs does not prepare them for the specific tasks they must accomplish. This criticism goes beyond the typical concerns with classroom management; the basic argument is that teacher preparation programs devote too much attention to theory and not enough to the practical skills of teaching. A variation of this argument is that teacher educators teach the wrong theory.

Consider the dilemmas new teachers face with curriculum. These teachers, like their veteran colleagues, have responsibility for daily decisions about what and how to

teach. District policies on standards, curriculum, and induction play a role in what materials and supports are available to beginning teachers (Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002). Yet, even when these resources are plentiful and strong, many beginning teachers report spending significant time finding materials, understanding and adapting district-adopted curricula, and developing purposeful lessons (Johnson et al., 2004). They leave teacher preparation with an understanding of the democratic purposes of education, learning theory, a curricular vision (Darling-Hammond, Banks, Zumwalt, Gomez, Sherin, Griesdorn, & Finn, 2005), and a basic repertoire of teaching strategies, but they often need support drawing upon this foundational knowledge to plan and implement curriculum within their particular classrooms. While some districts anticipate introducing new teachers to their expectations, curriculum, and assessment systems, other administrators assert they would prefer to hire teachers already familiar with their local context. Some extend this preference to its bureaucratic conclusion by arguing to sidestep university-based preparation so they may hire and train teachers exclusively within their particular curriculum programs.

A different framing argues that teacher preparation programs teach the wrong theory. For example, as this editorial went to press, the Commissioner of Education in Colorado announced the formation of a “directorate” to review teacher preparation curriculum regarding elementary reading instruction (Morson, 2006). The Commissioner’s action was spurred, in part, by local district superintendents’ complaints about reading instruction and in part by a recent study conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, 2006). The NCTQ study reviewed 222 syllabi from required

reading courses at 72 randomly selected teacher education programs throughout the country to determine whether teacher candidates are being taught the science of reading. The evaluation criteria for syllabi draw heavily upon the *National Reading Panel Report* (NICHD, 2000), which outlines five components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, guided oral fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Finding that only 15% of institutions in their sample had courses that included all five components, the NCTQ report concludes that too many elementary teachers leave teacher preparation without important knowledge about the science of reading. In short, candidates exit programs having learned the “wrong” theory.

#### Emotional turbulence.

A second explanation for first-year teachers’ struggles relates to the emotional intensity and stress of the beginning years. Many factors shape new teachers’ emotional experiences. Even when they are given reasonable teaching assignments, the sheer quantity of the typical teacher’s workload is daunting. Preparing standards-based units and lessons when most, if not all, curricula are unfamiliar; marking papers and assigning grades; attending meetings; responding to parents and guardians; completing required paperwork; and fulfilling other “duties” make for long days, evenings, and weekends. Unlike experienced teachers, new teachers typically have not yet honed efficient and consistent approaches to routine tasks so that they can focus their attention on matters more deserving; thus, every aspect of a teacher’s workload is time-consuming and, cumulatively it’s exhausting. Second, the uncertainty and complexity endemic to teaching often stir anxiety. Given that teaching involves managing dilemmas and making hundreds of small decisions each day, significant uncertainty attends teachers’ daily tasks. New

teachers are still integrating and consolidating their knowledge of teaching and learning, and they lack the wisdom of experience held by veteran teachers to trust their choices.

Third, moments of disillusionment often punctuate the first year. Individuals choose teaching on the basis of powerful visions, ideals, or beliefs about what teaching will be like and the role they will play in learners' lives. These visions, often elaborated during teacher preparation, are not easily realized in many contemporary school settings. When the gap between vision and practice remains wide and appears insurmountable, despair sets in (Hammerness, 2006; Liston, 2000). Fourth, conflict erupts at the interpersonal and the public level. The sting of conflicts with students, colleagues, or parents often catches new teachers off guard. Additionally, because public education is a contested enterprise, new teachers seem surprised that they must defend their decisions, practices, and the profession itself in many forums.

Finally, though the above examples dwell on the disheartening, the emotionally charged moments when new teachers build rapport with students and when students engage and "get it" are equally intense; they are often what buoy teachers along in the first year. The emotional texture of the beginning years has an impact on whether teachers stay in teaching and what kind of teachers they become. For example, the feelings that attend small moments of success are related to a sense of efficacy, which in turn is associated with a teacher's effectiveness and commitment to teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Conversely, emotional exhaustion has been associated with depersonalization and/or cynicism, factors associated with burnout and attrition.

Workplaces inadequately support teacher learning.

A third explanation for challenges in the first years has to do with whether beginning teachers land in workplaces that support their development and learning. Research on induction and professional development shows organizational contexts vary, and some are much better places for new teachers to continue their development. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, led by Susan Moore Johnson and colleagues (2004), outlines the following features of schools that are organized for teacher and student learning: They have principals who are instructional leaders and who develop personal relationships with new teachers; they give new teachers appropriate and reasonable assignments; they provide sufficient supplies and equipment to support student learning; they have reasonable and consistent policies and infrastructure; they use teachers' time well; they establish school wide standards for student behavior; they provide coordinated student support services; and they build bridges with parents. In addition to these features of administrative support, Johnson and her colleagues found that schools with an *integrated professional culture* are also crucial to beginning teachers' development and retention. They describe such cultures in the following way,

There are no separate camps of veterans and novices; instead, new teachers have ongoing opportunities to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of their experienced colleagues...[M]entoring is organized to benefit both the novice and the experienced teachers, and structures are in place that further facilitate teacher interaction and reinforce interdependence. (p. 159)

Many beginning teachers do not find themselves in workplaces that are organized to support their learning; more importantly, for many this is a critical factor in whether they stay at a particular school or in teaching as a career. For example, in the Next



Generation study, of the fifty teachers in their sample, only thirteen (26%) were described as “settled stayers,” that is “teachers who remained in their original school...because they found opportunities for growth and development, and with increasing competence felt more effective and confident in the classroom” (pp. 116-117). In a separate analysis of workplace features, they found that only seventeen of the fifty taught in contexts that were integrated professional cultures. Of these seventeen, “fourteen (82%) stayed in those schools after the first year of our study” (p. 160). Thus, integrated professional cultures are less common, but they appear to make a significant difference.

#### How Might Teacher Education Programs Respond

Having offered three explanations for why beginning teachers struggle (and knowing that others can be constructed), we return to our central questions: What can and should we expect of teacher preparation as we look to the first years of teaching? Is teacher education doing too little or too much to prepare teachers for the first years of teaching? We offer three ways teacher education can do more to prepare candidates for the first years.

##### Speak out and reach out.

Program graduates, building and district administrators, and critics of teacher education have much to say about the substantive and practical contributions of pre-service teacher education. For example, they are quick to point out gaps in preparation, particularly when they believe that theoretical understandings have trumped learning practical skills, or that important knowledge has not been addressed. Teacher educators need to speak out and reach out to those voicing such concerns. This is especially important when critics’ proposals will lead to an overly technical or narrow construal of

teacher preparation. Over the last thirty years scholars have articulated a knowledge base for what teachers should know and models for how they learn to teach (Borko & Putnam, 1996; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Shulman, 1987; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). When critiques are put forward, teacher educators need to speak out and present the evidentiary base for the knowledge and skills candidates learn in our programs and for how individuals learn to teach.

For example, in response to the NCTQ study finding that most elementary teacher candidates do not learn the science of reading, teacher educators should speak out about what *is* taught in reading courses and the broad research base informing that curriculum (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Few in the reading community discount the *National Reading Panel (NRP) Report* evidence supporting the five components of effective reading instruction. However, some scholarly appraisals of the *Report* argue that the criteria used to include studies were too stringent; as a result, it excluded important empirical evidence about how children learn to read and write, and classroom practices that support literacy development (e.g., Pressley, 2002). As such, while the findings of the *NRP Report* are relevant, they address only some aspects of literacy development and therefore are an incomplete resource to define the knowledge base for literacy instruction. Many literacy educators are not resistant to the findings of the *NRP Report*, rather they ground their syllabi in a more comprehensive or balanced view of literacy development and instruction (International Reading Association, 2003; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

As a field, however, we also need to listen to our critics. The science of reading should have an important, though not exclusive, place in elementary teacher preparation for reading. The instructional practices advocated in the *NRP Report* are part of an

effective reading program, yet many are not implemented in today's primary classrooms. Pressley and his colleagues observed thousands of hours in grade k-3 classrooms and seldom found instruction that balanced both word-level and high-level comprehension and composition skills (Pressley, 2002; Pressley, et al., 2001). These criticisms, it appears, are not wholly unwarranted. Thus, external examinations such as the NCTQ study may also be occasions to reach out and take a critical hard look at the content of our programs. While reaching out to external critics is important, listening attentively to program graduates and the principals and district administrators who hire them is arguably even more crucial. University sponsored teacher education programs will not continue to exist if they ignore these voices. That should be clear by now.

Attend to the emotional dimension of learning to teach.

A second recommendation addresses the role preservice teacher education plays in preparing candidates for the emotional vicissitudes of the beginning years. Attending to emotional dimensions of teaching typically has not been part of the purview of teacher preparation. Given the way emotions color and temper the first-year experiences and the reality that the basic features of beginning teaching positions that contribute to feelings of being overwhelmed are not likely to change swiftly, teacher educators should consider this aspect of candidates' development more explicitly. Teacher preparation programs must do a better job preparing candidates for the emotional intensity that awaits them in their first years.

First, preparing candidates who experience a sense of efficacy in their beginning year is crucial; thus, attention to developing teacher candidates' basic repertoire of practical skills may also enhance their emotional well being. Second, many candidates

have not developed conflict resolution skills before teacher preparation. Teacher educators can prepare candidates for the sting of conflict by explicitly enhancing conflict resolution skills—both as a tool to build classroom learning communities and as a professional skill needed to collaborate with colleagues and other constituencies. Third, as teacher educators we need to be more thoughtful about and attentive to the inevitable paradoxes that accompany teaching. Teaching entails living in the gap between the ideal and the real. We need to foreshadow, substantively examine, and reflect on the gap between schools’ realities and candidates’ hopes and aspirations (fed, in part, by teacher education faculty). Doing so may well help our candidates (and ourselves) understand the internal and external tensions of teaching. It may also help our candidates better plan for and problem-solve ways to make meaningful incremental progress toward realizing their visions. Finally, teacher educators should consider models of professional development that focus on teacher formation, cultivating teachers’ emotional balance, and creating contemplative spaces. There is a growing body of professional development work and some evidence that supports further attention to teacher candidates’ and practicing teachers’ social and emotional development.<sup>iii</sup>

Build linkages across the different contexts for learning to teach.

Contexts do indeed matter, and some are better organized to support teacher learning than others. Schools of Education can do more to build linkages across the preservice and induction contexts for learning to teach and to nurture professional communities. This effort starts by taking a careful look at our programs to ensure that they model the norms and practices of a learning community. We suspect many teacher educators can do more to foster candidates’ abilities to collaborate and be collegial.

Second, using technology resources, they can establish virtual networks that allow program candidates and graduates to stay connected to one another and to teacher education faculty. Such networks may be critical for those candidates whose workplaces are less collegial. A different way to build linkages involves working with districts to develop common assessment frameworks to evaluate performances in student teaching and induction experiences. The development of shared protocols and assessments is an activity that not only provides continuity for candidates as they transition into full-time teaching, but also it helps build understanding across higher education and districts about what constitutes good teaching.

Finally, a range of successful partnership models suggests that when universities and districts work in concert during preservice and induction, new teachers not only develop, they thrive (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The most elaborate approach for these linkages involves university and school partnerships that provide internship experiences modeled upon medical residencies (NCTAF, 1996). Internships, when done well, provide continuity with preservice experiences (e.g., same district or even same school context), effective mentoring, and the opportunity for new teachers to take on gradually more complex teaching responsibilities.

The significant resources and institutional commitments required to build such programs present a potential barrier. Currently, in many internship-based programs, beginning teachers bear the cost by taking salary reductions in order to fund an enhanced level of support during their initial year. We urge Schools of Education to work with districts to develop new funding models that redirect resources spent on student teaching supervision, hiring, and induction coaching to support internships and to develop strong

partnerships. The Alliance for Education's estimate that teacher turnover costs \$2.6 billion annually suggests that this is a revenue source that might be tapped to redesign and improve the contexts for learning to teach.

### Too Little or Too Much?

Several years ago, during a meeting with district superintendents and education school deans, a superintendent remarked, "I want to hire first-year teachers who look like third-year teachers." One dean quipped in reply, "Then, hire third-year teachers." This exchange captures one of the central dilemmas of teacher preparation: How much is enough? Do we have reasonable, shared understandings for what preservice preparation can and should accomplish? While national standards (e.g., NCATE, INTASC, and NBPTS) suggest that we do, the on-the-ground judgments of teacher candidates, teacher educators, and those who hire and support new teachers suggest that discrepancies in expectations persist.

We think teacher educators and Schools of Education can and should do more to prepare candidates for the vicissitudes of the beginning years. This will begin with dialogue, examination of exemplary efforts, and critical appraisal of our teacher education programs and practices. We hope our argument for why beginning teachers' experience challenges and our recommendations to teacher educators will spur such efforts.

The articles in this issue, which we now highlight, further explore this critical issue in teacher education. Watson and colleagues' "Investigating Early Career Urban Teachers' Perspectives on and Experiences in Professional Development" presents a study examining urban early career teachers' experiences with professional development

during their first years of teaching. All teachers were graduates of a “specialized teacher education program” that prepares urban teachers, and the professional development was offered either through that program’s Urban Educator Network (UEN) or their schools. The authors offer suggestions for how universities might build strong linkages that support program graduates to develop long and rewarding careers. Pardo's study, “The Role of Context in Learning to Teach Writing: What Beginning Urban Teachers Need to Know” examines the impact of three beginning teachers' varied knowledge sources and instructional contexts on their writing instruction. “Effective Teaching/Effective Urban Teaching: Grappling with Definitions, Grappling with Difference” by Anderson and Olsen consider the contrasts between novice teachers’ definitions/descriptions of effective teaching and effective urban teaching. They stress the responsibility teacher preparation bears to ensure that beginning teachers both view individual students in non-stereotypical ways and consider the unique needs of each student. Taking the critiques of teacher preparation programs head-on, Good & colleagues’ report on a multi-year study examining whether first year teachers’ practices meet modern normative expectations and whether the type of teacher preparation program affects first-year teaching practices. Finally, Hammerness’ essay book review argues beginning teachers make the decision to teach on multiple occasions. She examines a series of books that illuminate the concerns of beginning teachers and the conditions that are important in fostering their development and decision to choose to continue teaching.

In closing, the beginning years are crucial in a teacher’s development. We hope our commentary and the issue’s articles shed light on the persistent dilemmas associated with them.

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<sup>i</sup> As an editorial team, we write editorials collaboratively. To reflect the nature of this joint work, we rotate order of authors with each journal issue.

<sup>ii</sup> Critical assessments of stage theories of teacher learning maintain that they are too linear and that they underplay the role of context in teacher development (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Grossman, 1992).

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, the Cultivating Emotional Balance research project sponsored by the Mind and Life Institute <http://www.mindandlife.org/ceb.program.html> or the Courage to Teach programs offered by the Center for Courage and Renewal <http://www.couragerenewal.org/?q=programs/professions>.