

Conversations That Renew

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As this editorial goes to press, we are in the final push of the spring semester, heading into graduation season where we celebrate our students moving out into the profession as full-fledged members. Our stacks of summer reading and plans for summer writing and syllabi retooling lie before us.... As this issue arrives in your mailbox, summer has just ended and our recent graduates are preparing for their first days of school. Now the burst of energy to launch the fall semester is upon us, as is the earnest work of building programs, day by day. We hope that you made good headway in your list of reading, and that you found a few productive tangents to explore as well. We hope you took risks in refining or developing syllabi. While summer reading and writing often revitalize us as individuals, it is the shared work of ongoing renewal to which we all contribute during the academic year.

In recent years, the term “program renewal” has tended to emphasize analyses of exit surveys, employer surveys, admission demographics, and other assessments collected to evaluate a program’s impact. This review of data should inform goals for program improvement. While we support data-driven analyses, the essence of program renewal lies, we find, in the conversations we are willing to enter into and sustain with our colleagues. Renewal, for us, is primarily about developing shared understandings of our intellectual commitments and our visions of good teaching, and grappling with the daily struggles to enact them. We believe that dialogue is the medium through which program mission and coherence are forged. In this editorial, we offer three themes that faculty might choose to wrestle with during the academic

year. The themes we pose focus upon thorny dilemmas in teacher education. Though we readily acknowledge these are not the only substantive issues that might initiate sustained discussion, we selected them because they reconnect us with values that inspired many of us who chose teacher education as our life's work. For each theme, we offer a brief commentary as well as questions and readings to jumpstart what we hope will be a vigorous exchange of views on important issues and how these relate to the daily work of preparing teachers.ⁱⁱ In the relentless pace of a typical semester, we hope you are able to carve out space with colleagues to engage in conversations that renew your commitments to robust and inspiring teacher preparation.

Teaching With Integrity in the Context of Accountability & Standardization

The dominant presence of achievement tests to measure the effectiveness of teachers, schools, and, by extension, teacher preparation programs will not likely diminish in the coming years. As our program graduates tell us, standardized tests and curricula influence many aspects of their work. For example, in many districts, particularly urban ones with high student mobility rates, administrators increasingly choose to adopt common, sometimes scripted, curricula and to develop pacing charts or benchmark assessments to keep teachers focused on student learning and keep children “on track”. There are some who challenge tests and standardized curricula on the grounds that they unduly narrow conceptions of learning and deskill teachers. Others express concern that large-scale tests do not adequately assess the knowledge and skills of English language learners and may push low-scoring adolescents out of school. Districts’ pragmatic decisions to define and align curricula have potential to bring coherence to large systems while at the same time allowing teachers some measure of independence with regard to how they teach specific content. But this balance is not always achieved. Though we find laudable the goal of equity that drives the current testing regime and concomitant press for standardization, the

unintended consequences of an overemphasis on tests raise critical questions for beginning teachers and teacher educators. This testing landscape creates dilemmas for our work in preparing teachers.

Our candidates will work in settings where testing and standardized curricula are defining features of teachers' and students' worlds. We ought to be raising questions about how we help our candidates develop conceptual understandings of and practical tools for assessment. Are we asking whether they understand critical distinctions between and relationships among classroom-based and large-scale assessments? Are they prepared to select, adapt, and design classroom assessments that can inform instruction and support student learning? Do our candidates learn pedagogies to prepare responsibly K-12 students for large-scale assessments and to challenge mandates that make test-prep *the* curriculum? Should our graduates be able to advocate for children and youth who are ill-served by standardized curricula? And if so, how well do they develop advocacy skills while in teacher preparation? Do the assessments we use model best practices? Addressing these important questions points teacher educators to both curricular and programmatic concerns. In order to serve our candidates well we must ensure they have the concepts and tools they will need after they leave us.

While candidates need knowledge of assessment concepts and practical tools, such knowledge should resonate with the candidate's larger sense of his/her teacher identity. All too often teacher educators and beginning teachers can be quite critical of the acclaimed regimes of testing – and for good reasons. It seems that the pendulum has swung from a commitment to teachers' professional autonomy and discerning judgment back to teacher-proof curricula in instructional settings. Neither conception of the teacher's role provides sufficient insight into how teachers create educative experiences in today's classrooms. Neither conception, in its

idealized form, is a truly wise course of action. How do we ground ourselves and help our beginning teachers to be grounded as we attempt to navigate together the tensions between professional autonomy and educational accountability?

We can think of no better resource than Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* – on this its tenth anniversary since initial publication. In Palmer's work he affirms and explores the integral wholeness of both student and teacher, and maintains that good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. Good teachers, in Palmer's sense, are grounded in a secure sense of their own selves and their integrity. Palmer does not ask his reader to sign up for any particular educational or ideological camp. He's not attempting to lure teachers toward a progressive, conservative, or radical educational agenda. His work, and we believe our work with experienced and beginning teachers, asks us to consider the current and past educational realities, our role in the current settings, and our "souls' calling." The intersection of a teacher's role and soul is the terrain that Palmer mines. And he is one of the few educators calling us into the heart of teaching. In these daunting times, our candidates need teacher educators who take Palmer's call and support our candidates' pursuit of their educational identities and integrity. Without a strong sense of self, our candidates will struggle unduly to act wisely and with integrity, particularly when handed curricula or assessments that run counter to their beliefs and understandings of what experiences are educative for their students.

Suggested Readings

- Calkins, L., Montgomery, K., & Santman, D., with Falk, B. (1998). *A teacher's guide to standardized reading tests: Knowledge is power.*
- Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control learning.*

- Palmer, P. (2007). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*.
- Shepard, L., Hammerness, K., Darling-Hammond, L., & Rust, F., with Baratz, J., Gordon, E., Gutierrez, K., & Pacheco, A. (2005). Assessment. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.). *Preparing teachers for a changing world*.
- Wilson, M. (Ed.). (2004). Towards coherence between classroom assessment and accountability. *The 103rd yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*.

Placing Marginalized Learners at the Center of our Work

That public schools in the United States have not adequately served students of color, recent arrivals, and students living in low-income homes and communities is well documented. No Child Left Behind's requirement to disaggregate student achievement data by race, class, and language has made the achievement gap front-page news. Indeed, efforts to redress historic inequalities in our school system characterize most reforms over the last half century, including, for example, recent efforts to bolster math and science achievement, to ensure all children have a "highly qualified" teacher, and to redesign high schools. Those concerned with education from the left, right, and center of the political spectrum claim the moral high ground of seeking to ensure access to educational opportunity for *all* learners, particularly those who have been on the margins. Yet the framing of how to promote access varies widely. More important, the public debate over policy mechanisms to respond to the achievement gap seems removed from the daily lives of classroom teachers and the students they serve. While a commitment to social justice is central to the mission and conceptual framework of many teacher education programs, new teachers, especially those in urban school districts, continue to find their initial teacher education experiences inadequate when they move on to teach in low-resource schools and with students whose sociocultural backgrounds differ substantially from their own.

Faculty should consider the extent to which teacher education programs prepare candidates, in practical ways, to place historically marginalized learners at the center of their work. For example, do our candidates learn to design lessons and classroom assessments that invite and inspire K-12 students to understand and change their world(s)? Do our candidates learn to teach in ways that give children access to academic disciplines? Do our candidates learn to communicate with their students' parents and guardians in authentic and productive ways? What are we doing to ensure our candidates have the knowledge and abilities to resist and subvert a culture of low expectations? These are reasonable and practical questions that need to be addressed if we are going to pursue our commitments to all learners – especially those who are underserved.

Another helpful route for pursuing our professed commitment to social justice would be for teacher educators to explore the curriculum, instructional strategies, and reform notions of acclaimed social justice K-12 programs. We can't think of a better place to start than with Robert Moses' powerful math reform movement outlined in *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (Moses & Cobb, 2001). In that text Moses and Cobb argue for algebra as an educational and civil right for all students. They describe a community activist understanding of educational change, an experientially-based math curriculum, and a high-expectations and skills-grounded approach to mathematical learning. Moses and Cobb illustrate how the struggle for algebra education for poor brown, black and white youth is the voting rights issue of our time. In order to participate in our civic society individuals must have the right to vote: In order to participate in our knowledge-driven economy all kids need the tools and paths made available by algebraic understanding. Like Lisa Delpit, Moses challenges teacher educators who hold steadfastly to a "progressive" view of curriculum and teaching. He depicts and argues

for a view of educational change, curriculum creation, and instructional strategies that both affirms and challenges many of our field's cherished beliefs and ideals. It's time we push, prod, and cajole our own identities as educators and teacher educators attempting, perhaps, to weave together an integrity that serves each of us, our profession, and our candidates much more formidably than our current view.

Suggested Readings

- Boler, M. (Ed.). (2004). *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence.*
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Evaluating “No Child Left Behind.”
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms.*
- Moje, E. (2007). *Developing socially just subject-matter instruction: A review of the literature on disciplinary literacy teaching.*
- Moses, R., & Cobb, C. (2001). *Radical equations Civil rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project.*

Preparing Candidates for the Inevitable Uncertainties of Teaching and Learning

Somewhere in the middle of the first semester many of our candidates come to the uncomfortable realization that teaching is not as straightforward as they initially thought. The complexity and uncertainty of classroom life and the cognitive demands of the work become plain. Teaching is a series of many choices—some predictable, some pivotal. Teacher educators must prepare candidates to perceive and interpret the wide variation that typifies teaching and learning situations and to manage the dilemmas that arise. Thus, developing candidates'

professional pedagogical judgment and reflective practice have long been central tasks of teacher preparation.

In 1978 Elstein, Shulman, and Sprafka's path-breaking study of medical problem solving inspired important conversations and research comparing doctors' and teachers' decision making. Their work contributed to a larger discussion among educators about whether and how teaching is a profession on par with more established professions such as medicine or law. Arguments promoting teaching as a profession have sought to demonstrate that teaching, like medicine, has an established knowledge base that informs teachers' practical decisions and actions. Research in the 1980s and 1990s began to explicate the research knowledge base for teacher education. *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World* (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) represents, on many levels, a culmination of this effort.

More recent comparisons between teaching and medicine have encouraged, or mandated, educators to take a page out of medical practice by engaging in evidence-based decision making. The argument goes something like this: Just as doctors make diagnoses and recommend therapies based on data from clinical trials, educators ought to choose curriculum and interventions that have been proven effective through rigorous empirical methods. We find this to be a reductive view of how doctors think and solve medical problems, for it ignores the critical roles intuition and emotion play in a doctor's ability to understand a situation and draw upon knowledge learned to choose an appropriate course of action.

Two recent depictions of medical practitioners' thinking illustrate the relationships among scientific knowledge, experience, and emotion that characterize medical practice. Atul Gawande's *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science* (2002) and Jerome Groopman's *How Doctors Think* (2007) offer a "window into the medical mind" (Groopman,

2007, p. 24). Both works depict medicine as an uncertain science, as they explore how doctors grapple with and respond to the natural variation they will encounter in their patients. Gawande chronicles his residency, revealing through narrative his learning to practice “the medicine that one cannot find explained in textbooks” (p. 8). Organized around three themes—fallibility, mystery, and uncertainty—Gawande renders vividly “what happens when the simplicities of science come up against the complexities of individual lives” (p. 8). Groopman is particularly astute in his discussion of various cognitive traps physicians may fall into when treating patients (e.g., confirmation bias). He also explores how the pharmaceutical and insurance industries shape doctors’ diagnostic decisions. Groopman argues for the centrality of the physician listening to the patient and the role of enhanced communication in ensuring that physicians get the diagnosis right.

Taken together, these two books are a provocative read for teacher educators concerned with the intersection among knowledge, experience, and emotion in the development of sound pedagogical judgment. Medical preparation has been held up as a model for teacher education, in part because it is a higher-status profession. To what extent, though, is medical preparation a sound model for teacher preparation? The practice of medicine and teaching bear important similarities, particularly as both involve sizing up situations quickly and choosing courses of action with incomplete information. Both healing and learning are intensely personal and idiosyncratic processes. Thus, examining the thought processes, work contexts, and professional preparation of doctors provides a productive comparison for understanding the possibilities and limitations of initial teacher preparation and induction. For example, discussions of how doctors learn to balance heuristics with skepticism as they deliberate over routine and unfamiliar situations can help teacher educators consider those heuristics for everyday teaching introduced

in teacher preparation. Which heuristics do candidates most readily learn? How do they adapt these in their initial years? Reading about how physicians study their errors raises questions about whether and how teacher candidates learn to analyze their pedagogical failures. To what extent do we as teacher educators discuss our own pedagogical failures with one another? Groopman's emphasis on the critical role of listening in practicing medicine transfers well to teaching. How do we teach candidates to listen to their K-12 students? In sum, these two works, as comparative cases of professional thinking and work, prompt us to think more fully about how emotions, intuition, and the wisdom of practice intersect with science to shape professional judgment and action in classroom settings.

Suggested Readings

- Cuban, L. (2001). *How can I fix it?: Finding solutions and managing dilemmas: An educator's road map.*
- Gawande, A. (2002). *Complications: A surgeon's notes on an imperfect science.*
- Groopman, J. (2007). *How doctors think.*
- Kennedy, M. (2005). *Inside teaching: How classroom life undermines reform.*
- Schulz, K. (2003). *Listening: A framework for teaching across differences.*
- Elstein, A., Shulman, L., & Sprakfa, S. (1990). *Medical problem solving: A ten-year retrospective.*

Conversations That Renew

We believe conversations about thorny dilemmas in teacher education have tremendous potential to simultaneously build and renew our commitments to what matters most in preparing teachers. Without such conversations, coherent actions that lead to quality programs are unlikely to follow. In this editorial we have offered three themes we hope will spark vigorous and

rigorous dialogue among faculty and staff in programs and institutions. These themes—integrity, equality, and uncertainty—orient us toward those ideas and visions that inspired many of us to choose teaching and teacher education as our vocation. We note, however, that conversations about these themes are rare among teacher education faculty, yet they are important to pursue. Engaging these themes helps to make supporting new teachers intellectually demanding and personally fulfilling.

We close by encouraging deans, program directors, and chairs to work within universities to create the necessary conditions for conversations that *renew*. As faculty begin the academic year with “retreats” or “advances” and establish goals and plans for the coming academic year, we urge administrators to inspire faculty to engage in program renewal, not merely program enhancement. Insisting upon regular and sufficient time to meet, providing incentives for collaboration, and forging agendas that address important themes are all small steps leaders can take. It is easy for program meeting time to be consumed with bureaucratic minutia and procedures. We urge leaders to ensure meetings address the intellectual substance of learning to teach. Conversations that renew lead to a shared mission or vision of “good teaching” that can guide programmatic and pedagogical decisions. Through a lively public forum characterized by an open and respectful exchange of ideas as well as norms and mechanisms for making one’s work public, leaders help create a workplace culture in which teacher educators have room to be creative and take risks. Working together to grapple with dilemmas, solve problems, and learn collaboratively may reconnect teacher educators with their own sense of vocation and by extension model living a vocation to our candidates.

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- Kennedy, M. (2005). *Inside teaching: How classroom life undermines reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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ⁱⁱ Some of the readings we suggest are recent publications; others are likely to be familiar to *JTE* readers. We include the latter because we find their perspective and arguments still resonate. We hope that this editorial inspires you to re-read some texts in the company of colleagues.