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Essay review

Successful teacher education programs in the era of reform: An essay review of Studies of Excellence in Teacher Education (3 vols.): Preparation in the Undergraduate Years; Preparation in a Five-Year Program; Preparation at the Graduate Level

L. Darling-Hammond (Ed.); AACTE Publications. Washington, DC, 2000, ISBN 0-9654535-6-1, ISBN 0-9654535-5-3; ISBN 0-9654535-7-X (paper)*

Although teacher education programs are often portrayed historically as the scapegoat for perceived public schooling problems, efforts to further implicate colleges have intensified in recent years. The 21st century was initiated, for example, with the US government mandating the ranking of teacher education programs primarily on the basis of standardized test scores and program completion rates by teacher candidates. The stakes are high, as the government ultimately reserves the right to cut-off federal financial aid to teacher education students in colleges designated by a state as "low performing" institutions (Teacher Preparation Accountability and Evaluation Commission, 2000). On another front, reported prominently on the front page of the *New York Times*, teacher preparation is enthusiastically being by-passed at the collegiate level in favor of local school districts in certain areas of the US offering "their own crash courses that put new teachers in the classroom after as little as three weeks" while noting that this method is superior to existing higher education models (Zernike, 2000, p. 1).[1] A third attack on teacher educators comes from those who believe that a multicultural curricular focus in a teacher preparation program is dumbing down the elementary and secondary school curriculum (see, for example, Stotsky, 1999). All of these examples of external pressures on colleges reflect a reductionist approach to teacher education that suggests that new teachers should simply focus on a repertoire of basic teaching skills undergirded by a one-dimensional notion of classroom pedagogy.

At the same time and in this context, the teacher education community has developed more rigorous standards, primarily through the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (2000). This action of heightened attention to internal accountability of programs mirrors over a decade of multifaceted research and scholarship devoted to improving the quality of teacher preparation (see, for example, Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Fullan, Galluzzo, Morris, & Watson, 1998; Goodlad, 1990; The Holmes Group, 1995; Johnston, Spalding, Paden, & Zifren, 1989; Soltis, 1986; Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996). Goodlad (1999) has lamented that despite such studies "there is little public appreciation of or attention to the research findings that accrue from the ongoing educational inquiry" (p. 329). Into this political environment of external and internal critiques of higher education teacher preparation comes *Studies of Excellence in Teacher Education* from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

Through accessible case studies of seven teacher education programs, *Studies of Excellence in Teacher Education* sets out "to look at teacher education programs that are so noticeably good at what they do that the distinctive practice of their graduates is obvious as soon as an observer sets foot in the classroom" (Darling-Hammond,

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[1] Imig (2000b), president of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), points out that the *New York Times* article (Zernike, 2000) is based primarily on the perceptions of eight conservative school superintendents.

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2000a–c, pp. vi–vii). The case studies are in response to what editor Linda Darling-Hammond (2000a–c) characterizes in her foreword to each volume of the study as the "not well-developed knowledge base about how to prepare teachers" (p. v) to meet new ambitious teaching and learning goals.[2] Since the case studies rely on a descriptive format that in only one instance mentions teacher candidate or K-12 student standardized testing scores,[3] it is doubtful that these studies taken together will satisfy many of the external critics of teacher education. Nevertheless, the depth of the case studies represents a welcome addition to understanding the intricacies of teacher candidate preparation. As Zeichner (1999, p. 9) explained, "The reality of every teacher education program is so complex that it is virtually impossible to communicate that complexity to an outside audience short of the kind of systematic and detailed analysis that case studies provide." Taken collectively, the case studies under review here offer a rich resource for college faculty and administrators along with state and federal educational officials to consider as the education community continues to seek the right mix of policies and procedures for producing competent beginning teachers.

The case studies have three foci, according to Darling-Hammond (2000a–c): (1) documenting "the goals, strategies, content, and processes of teacher education programs that are widely acknowledged as exemplars for preparing prospective teachers to engage in skillful, learner-centered practice," (2) documenting "the capabilities of the prospective teachers who graduate from these programs," and (3) examining "what policies, organizational features, resources and relationships have enabled these programs to be successful" (p. ix). Learner-centered practice can be interpreted in part as a manifestation of constructivism, "the epistemology for virtually all of our teacher preparation courses" nationally (Imig, 2000a, p. 2). Darling-Hammond (1992) has consistently been adamant about the need for a kind of professional accountability to support "practices that are *learner-centered* and *knowledge-based* rather than procedure-oriented and rule-based" (p. 13). Therefore, "where knowledge about appropriate practices exists, it will be used in making decisions" (p. 14). To understand such processes necessitates a research focus on inputs and practices that can inform the work of teacher education faculty and administrators. The case studies that Darling-Hammond has assembled here provide an abundance of knowledge based on an accountability for the success of teacher candidate graduates that can prove useful in faculty deliberations upon program improvement that ought to occur within any teacher preparation institution.

1. Collaborative cultures and shared visions

A common element of the seven institutions–Alverno College, Wheelock College, Trinity University, University of Virginia, Bank Street College of Education, University of California at Berkeley, and University of Southern Maine–is the relatively small size of the units of analysis for the case studies. Reflecting what Goodlad (1990) discovered in his research on teacher education programs is the unspoken theme of smaller is better. A manageable number of faculty and students facilitates an apparent precondition for regular collaboration, internally among faculty and externally with local school partners. The ongoing conversations among all parties involved in teacher preparation at these institutions is indicative of the collaboration necessary for creating programs of high quality. As Hargreaves (1992, p. 230) observed, "Collaborative cultures do not mandate collegial support and partnership: they foster and facilitate it." Collaborative small-scale cultures are the foundational hallmarks of these seven teacher preparation programs.

At Alverno College, faculty "share a common vision of teacher education that is made explicit through an ability-based curriculum" (Zeichner, 2000, p. 12). Faculty who have not valued collaboration nor the program's conceptual orientation usually leave Alverno. At the University of Virginia deep collaboration is observed among English and mathematics faculty and their counterparts in the secondary teacher education program (Merseth & Koppich, 2000)—a nationally recognized challenge for teacher education programs (see Ross & Bondy, 1996). The University of California, Berkeley's "highly integrated" elementary program is marked by "research faculty [who] participate as instructors and [where] there is an ongoing program of research and evaluation" (Snyder, 2000, pp. 107, 106). For the Bank Street College "collegial work, ongoing inquiry into teaching, and shared curriculum building are staples of…practice" (Darling-Hammond & Macdonald, 2000, p. 9). The success of the Wheelock College program rests significantly upon "shared assumptions and explicit practices of the college and its faculty" (Miller & Silvernail, 2000, p. 68). For the case study institutions, collaboration has led to a coherence of program vision that in turn has resulted in careful advising of teacher candidates throughout their respective programs.

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[2] Darling-Hammond's (1997) work on behalf of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future is a useful source for further understanding the motivation for these current case studies.

[3] Koppich (2000) states that all Trinity graduates have passed the Texas Examination for the Certification of Educators.

In many of the cases collaboration spills over into partnerships with local school staffs. The extended field study model of teacher preparation at the University of Southern Maine "was conceived from the beginning as a collaboration among public school and university educators who had already established a history of trust and mutual respect" (Whitford, Ruscoe, & Fickel, 2000, pp. 212–213). Both Bank Street and Alverno are exemplary in having built strong and lasting relationships with teachers and principals who help provide field experiences consistent with each institution's conceptual framework of teaching and learning. Trinity College is noteworthy for having redesigned its program through a "constituency-building" process with local teachers (Koppich, 2000, p. 11). Continuous collaboration among public school leaders and campus faculty led to Trinity creating the organization Smart Schools for San Antonio's Future. This coalition eventually served as Trinity's basis for moving to a professional development school approach to teacher preparation (see The Holmes Group, 1990). Strong relationships with local schools for all the case study institutions is further reflected in the assessments of their graduates by eventual employers. School district personnel consistently report that graduates of these programs tend to come better prepared and are more confident in their teaching abilities than the graduates employers may be supervising from other institutions. Graduates of each of the seven case study colleges report significantly higher perceptions about their levels of preparation as a beginning teacher than their counterparts at other institutions.[4]

2. Developmental orientation

What is perhaps one of the more striking curricular commonalties among many of the case study institutions is a pervasive emphasis on the developmental needs of children and youth. Different than an isolated survey course or two in developmental psychology or educational psychology, an emphasis on human development for both teacher candidates and the K-12 student is an interwoven critical element throughout the teacher education program. At Bank Street "the view that a teacher's personal development is connected to her capacity to support children's development is reflected in the admissions process as well as in the courses and field experiences" (Darling-Hammond & Macdonald, 2000, p. 24). The essence of the University of California, Berkeley, program is helping teacher candidates "become teachers who bring to their classes an ability to mesh the developmental needs of children with the cognitive demands of the curriculum" (Snyder, 2000, p. 98). Located in an institution where the highest number of students major in human development, the Wheelock teacher preparation program is "firmly rooted in a developmental point of view" (Miller & Silvernail, 2000, p. 69). Trinity requires sophomore and junior level courses that integrate social knowledge of youth into developmental psychology. The University of Southern Maine internship program uses a "shared assignment" approach between field experiences and course work so that each teacher candidate "collects information and writes about the child in the family, the child in the school, the child as learner, and the child in a developmental perspective" (Whitford, Ruscoe, & Fickel, 2000, p. 194). The University of Virginia program sees itself as child-centered for the goal of helping future teachers "understand the criticality of diagnosing student learning needs and tailoring instruction accordingly" (Merseth & Koppich, 2000, p. 79).

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[4] Survey data gathering and analysis were conducted by the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching.

Developmental emphases are reoccurring curricular themes consciously scaffolded particularly throughout the curriculum at Bank Street, Wheelock, and University of California, Berkeley. The curriculum here moves beyond standard psychological explanations of learning to incorporate moral and social understandings of child and adolescent development and learning. Reflecting a growing knowledge base connecting learning theory with issues of cultural diversity (see Gay, 2000; Murrell, 1999), multicultural concepts are not only presented from a traditional social foundations orientation but brought back to bear on the developmental needs of public school students. Field experiences are a continuing opportunity to tie together the comprehensive developmental perspective of these programs. Wheelock preservice teachers, for example, move toward becoming "expert observers of children and their development" (Miller & Silvernail, 2000, p. 81). Faculty at Bank Street, Wheelock, and University of California, Berkeley, are noteworthy for the way in which they have explicitly structured their field experiences to connect theoretical perspectives of an expansive definition of development with close study of individual and small groups of students in classroom settings.

3. Multicultural perspectives

Multicultural education is emphasized in varying degrees within most of the case studies. One end of the spectrum finds Southern Maine where nothing in the case study suggests a curricular inclusion of race, class, and gender. At Trinity College a multicultural perspective is observed primarily through the selection of professional development schools with low-income, culturally diverse student populations. Secondary English instructional methodology at the University of Virginia includes substantial attention in readings and assignments that "explore issues of race, class, and multiculturalism from multiple perspectives" (Merseth & Koppich, 2000, p. 73). Compared to the other institutions under study here, the approaches at Trinity and Virginia, while commendable, are more modest than the comprehensive exploration of multicultural issues described throughout the programs at some of the other case study institutions.

University of California, Berkeley, for example, offers two courses in coordination with field experiences: "Education in the Inner Cities" and "Teaching Linguistic and Cultural Minority Students." In tandem with internships the courses serve to address the teacher's role juxtaposed to "the gnarly issues of race, class, and first- and second-language development" (Snyder, 2000, p. 118). The goal here is for future teachers "to begin to access and understand their own stereotypes and prejudices in a non-threatening environment" (p. 114) as they eventually develop curriculum for public school students. Understanding themselves as "co-learners" with their education students, University of California, Berkeley, faculty expose themselves and their students to the dynamics of multicultural issues while maintaining the program's focus on creating developmentally defensible learner-centered environments for K-12 children. As they prepare teacher candidates in anti-bias work, "faculty struggle personally and with their students with the charged tensions posed by [multicultural] issues in this society as they surface in classrooms" (p. 144). Thus, when faculty think about the program's developmental orientation, they understand that development "is neither psychologistic nor culture-free" (p. 147).

Like University of California, Berkeley, the Wheelock faculty overlay their developmental orientation with a clear focus on multiculturalism in both course work and field experiences. From the beginning of their studies Wheelock preservice teachers are placed in culturally diverse settings "to challenge them to look at their assumptions about race and class" (Miller & Silvernail, 2000, p. 76). Coupled with the first-year course "Multicultural Teaching and Learning Styles," teacher candidates by the end of their freshman year have experienced "some powerful changes [and have] discovered that a desire to work with children was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for success" (p. 78). During the second year of the program Wheelock students are expected to place multicultural issues in the context of a "student-centered, family-focused, community based education" (p. 80). The vast majority of Wheelock graduates elicit significantly more confidence than most graduates of other teacher education programs nationally in their ability to teach from a multicultural perspective as beginning teachers.

Alverno faculty integrate multicultural concepts throughout the curriculum by taking an approach that prioritizes curriculum transformation and social action, mirroring James Banks's (1993) typography. The case study provides amplification of this view from an Alverno faculty statement published in the college's teacher education handbook for its students:

> The view of diversity your faculty wants you to develop goes beyond having a background knowledge of cultures to *developing a proactive stance*, which includes looking at the role that culture plays in society and its institutions, such as schools. It means *working actively to negate stereotypes* and *taking actions* that move toward full inclusion of all learners. You will do this by reviewing literature for bias, by *examining your own teaching performance for actions that neglect one group or individual*, and by planning for the *infusion of diversity throughout the curriculum*. (emphases added) (cited in Zeichner, 2000, p. 25)

Alverno teacher candidates are challenged not only on campus but by the college's requirement that each student have field experiences in the Milwaukee schools with culturally diverse populations. Since field experiences in diverse settings alone do not promise to instill in students a sympathetic and action-oriented stance toward racial and class discrimination (Brown & Kysilka, 1994; Grant & Secada, 1990; Rios, 1991), the overt attention to multicultural topics is critical. Interviews with Alverno students suggest that inner-city school field experiences help white preservice teachers begin to overcome negative stereotypes they may have held about schools that are populated significantly with students of color. Alverno achieves this goal in part by framing the multicultural imperative within the larger context of school reform.

In the context of issues about equity and democratic practices, the Bank Street program infuses multicultural concepts throughout its program. Bank Street faculty strive to find field sites where student teachers can have experiences in "democratic forms of community in which antiracist and egalitarian norms are pursued," envisioning the classroom as a micro-society "where participation, representation, and the common good are core values" (Darling-Hammond & Macdonald, 2000, p. 26). Teacher candidates conduct analyses of interactions between various types of families and the organization of the school with special attention to families of color. Multicultural topics are further framed in conversation from a social reconstructionist perspective in an environment that supports Bank Street students in their "willingness to confront uncomfortable social issues, even when answers are not readily available" (p. 49).

4. Conclusion

Reading all seven cases can provide readers with vital information for dialogues with colleagues involved in the reform of teaching and teacher education. Although no one case review provides "answers" to thorny institutional reform considerations, each offers insights into processes that contribute to improvements in the preparation of teachers. Each institution has elements worthy of emulation in teacher education that are beyond the scope of this review. Especially commendable are the Bank Street, Alverno, Wheelock, and University of California, Berkeley case studies, from which the reader gains an increased knowledge of the complexity of the processes and dilemmas of program design and maintenance.

Some problems do exist. On a topic of considerable interest to teacher educators, the Bank Street study was the only one to discuss the challenges teacher educators have in finding suitable field sites and counseling students out of a program when teacher candidate and program goals are not a good fit. The University of Virginia and Southern Maine case studies, and to a lesser degree the Trinity study, suffer primarily from an approach that is sometimes disproportionately skewed toward testimonials rather than upon an interrogation of program deliberations and processes. Ideologically, Trinity apparently does well in producing preservice teachers who can work in schools subscribing to E.D. Hirsch's Core Curriculum or uncritically support a school modeled after the North American Free Trade Agreement—both of which can hold potentially negative results for a curriculum that might value transformative multicultural education (see, for example, Spring, 1998; Vavrus, 2001). Trinity and Southern Maine rely heavily on an internship model that appears primarily to reflect the norms of local school districts without a discussion of what values are being instilled into prospective teachers. Practitioner knowledge is presented as an unquestioned asset without a real description of the kind of practitioner those institutions are seeking.[5] It is unclear whether some of these concerns are a function of how those cases were reported or simply not topics of discussion within those programs.

The case studies have unfortunately been divided into three small volumes according to undergraduate, five-year, and graduate level programs. A complete reading of the case studies suggests that the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future could have combined all the studies into one volume; some readers may mistakenly assume that certain case studies will only apply to specific teacher preparation structures and timing of preparation. Taken holistically, however, the seven case studies offer powerful insights into the processes and outcomes of productive and reflective teacher education programs, regardless of the level of preparation. With this in mind, the serious reader is encouraged to read the three volumes as one.

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[5] Murrel (1998), for example, has found that the design and organizational framework in professional development schools

1. inhibits the questioning of the underlying political questions and socio-cultural dynamics that produce inequalities in schooling;
2. inhibits the development of conceptually rich, culturally aware, and politically astute definitions of equity, diversity, and quality schooling;
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