

## New Partnerships for the Education of Educators

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**Z**hixin Su recently completed an examination of teacher education reform proposals made during the past hundred years.<sup>1</sup> She observed that they generally recommend that teacher education feature four characteristics: (1) the best possible general education, (2) an academic major — except that it is not clear what a prospective elementary teacher should study, (3) as few education courses as possible, and (4) a program which emphasizes mentoring arrangements. These traditional panaceas for the education of educators have been repeated decade after decade by advocates who seemingly are unaware that their ideas are not new nor cognizant of the way these same proposals have contributed to the system about which they are complaining.

In the following discussion, I will describe briefly some of the problems with these reform proposals, including with that description a broad picture of typical current programs. Then, by way of contrast, I will describe an evolving school/university partnership-based program and conclude by offering some generalizations for consideration by those who are concerned with improving the quality of education for educators.

### General Education

Teachers (and all other members of society) need a sound general education. However, one would have to be oblivious of the world to be unaware of the stinging criticism of American general education efforts in high school and undergraduate institutions (Boyer has done a good job of taking on both institutions during the '80s).<sup>2,3</sup> The question here isn't whether a good general education is needed — but how it tends to be provided. Generally speaking, high school students and undergraduate freshmen and sophomores obtain their doses of "culture" in a series of unrelated courses. Young college students often take their medicine from low-ranking instructors who talk to them in large lecture halls to create efficiencies

that allow universities to support the more important activities of research and graduate studies.

Of more direct concern for would-be educators, undergraduates are rarely, if ever, helped to understand the vital connections between what they are learning and the professional career they envision. That is, for example, in the process of gaining an understanding of history, students seldom consider how one learns about history nor are they apt to see educational institutions, leaders, or ideas as part of that history. With reductionist logic, such matters are left to professional foundation courses, if they are given any attention at all. Also, the typical structure of general education programs conveys the message to aspiring educators that a general education is something which is achieved by the time one has completed the sophomore year and thus to be put behind for more serious and rewarding endeavors during the rest of one's life. Given an easily defended notion that a teacher must be a life-long learner, a person whose thirst for knowledge is never satisfied, this compartmentalizing of general education is particularly disabling.

### Academic Major

The second solution has been to insist on an academic major. Academicians and lay "experts" alike stress the subject matter major as the means of assuring that prospective teachers really know what they will be teaching! Again ignored are the critical examinations of undergraduate education which raise strong challenges about the efficacy of current programs. In the rush to legitimate the educator's preparation — to make it tough — little attention is paid to whether the major is a series of unrelated credits reflecting premature specialization in a narrow alley of broad disciplines. While an English teacher clearly must be well-informed about the study of English, a person completing an English major may be simply an expert in English literature with little under-



standing of rhetoric, linguistics, speaking, listening, American or world literature — which he or she will likely be expected to help students learn. As was the case in their general education courses, students will not have examined how one learns about matters in their major field. Kerr has written in various ways about this problem. She notes that teachers are required to “understand subject disciplines as modes of interpretation” so they can help students learn to inquire into the discipline.<sup>4</sup> By way of example, she suggests that

... when teachers on the lowest level of schooling are introducing their students to elementary Newtonian physics, it is unacceptable to merely report “the facts” about the physical world, such as bigger children need to sit closer to the center of the plank if they want to teeter-totter with smaller children. Rather, the teacher is responsible for presenting physics as a way of inquiring that has generated such beliefs and that those beliefs are held for particular kinds of reasons.<sup>5</sup>

If the academic majors and general education prospective educators obtain fail to develop these kinds of knowledge and thinking abilities, teachers will fall short of meeting the needs of their students. Thus, the first concern about the offering of an academic major as a “solution” to improving teacher education is that the major may well not have the ingredients needed by the prospective teacher who must “know” the discipline in some unique ways in order to help others learn it.

A second, related observation about the academic major as a cure for what ails educator preparation is that such requirements already exist. Goodlad has pointed out that California, for example, has had such a requirement for secondary teachers for over 70 years.<sup>6</sup> The long existence of this requirement and the continuing concern about lack of scholarly competence seem to suggest that it is not enough to merely require an academic major without giving attention to the particular needs of prospective teachers completing such a major. Moreover, the general disdain of academic departments for the task of preparing teachers and “educationists” will have to be overcome if either the general education or specialized subject matter study by prospective educators is going to be improved. [If anyone doubts the existence of this ‘disdain,’ talk with faculty in an academic discipline about the importance they are apt to place on the knowledge a prospective new colleague has about preparing public school teachers within their field when they are engaged in searching for an addition to their faculty.]

### Education Courses: Limiting Their Number

A good general education and a well-designed academic major should be helpful to prospective teachers. There are serious concerns about whether they exist in the kind and quality which will be most helpful. Given similar concerns about the nature of “education” courses, the traditional reformers have called not for more of them (as is the case with general education) or for improvement of them — but for severely limiting the number of them. Instead of asking whether students come from college understanding the moral imperatives of their profession, how to assist students in learning or any other professional quality, reformers relate anecdotes of “mickey mouse” methods classes and limit the number of hours of professional courses students need or can take in order to be teachers. On the one hand, it needs to be recognized that, as was the case with academic majors, such limitations have been common for many years in many states. Still, teachers’ problems in the classroom continue to be related to the understandings they have of their roles, their skills in carrying out the art and science of helping all students learn, and their ability to reflect productively about their own practices — not just in their knowledge of subject matter. On the other hand, the persistence of criticism about professional coursework seems to dictate the need for radical changes in current approaches. Often such courses are taught by the university staff at the bottom of the pecking order. [Interestingly, there is reason to believe that education faculty often have disdain for professional studies similar to that of their arts and science colleagues. If there is doubt of this, check the number of senior education faculty teaching such courses.] Some education courses are taught using methods that make a mockery of the methods they advocate being used (lectures about cooperative learning, for example). Often they are taught in isolation from knowledge of conditions in schools that make them seem particularly irrelevant to new and old teachers alike. The classroom teacher may be faced with students from many cultures, speaking many languages, and approaching schooling with widely different expectations — yet the college classroom may persist in dealing with learning strategies without attention to the interaction of such factors.

### Mentors and Mentoring

For years, reformers have seen the answer to the weaknesses of professional courses as being that of assigning



the prospective educator to more time under an expert mentor. Again, relying on anecdotal evidence from new teachers who say the biggest help to them in becoming teachers was their student teaching experience, longer such experiences are advocated. As a matter of fact, there is substantial reason to believe that mentors and prior experiences by teachers as students in schools do have a profound effect in preserving the status quo in schools. Certainly, the teachers of the current decade tend to do pretty much what teachers have done for the entire century — if one is to believe reports such as those by Goodlad,<sup>7</sup>Sizer,<sup>8</sup> and Boyer.<sup>9</sup> Some have suggested that if professional study in medicine were as unreflective and conserving of tradition as the preparation of educators, we would still be bleeding patients to reduce fever and penicillin would be rediscovered every ten years by reactionaries who would be discredited as “experimenters” by all except the grateful few who were fortunate enough to survive because they received a shot. In spite of the limitations of current mentoring arrangements, the powerfulness of such experiential learning should be a clue to those looking for reform in professional education. The challenge appears to be to improve this powerful tool.

#### Overregulation: Victimizing the Program

In addition to the limitations of these four panaceas, current professional education programs are frequently the victims of overregulation. Multiple agencies build standards for certification and program offering that are sometimes contradictory — and other times just foolish! States require advisory boards, then adopt regulations that are so detailed that the advisory groups quickly recognize they are inauthentic. Much of this overregulation appears to come from lack of communication and trust among interested parties.

School districts view themselves as victims rather than responsible parties when concerns are raised about teacher education. But this may not be justified. They make space available for practicum experiences and accept student teachers with little or no knowledge of the preparation such people have received. For example, during a recent year in one medium-sized west coast district, there were student teachers from eight universities in the state and from universities in five other states, some as many as 2,000 miles away. It is unlikely that the universities really know much about the settings in which their students are completing their programs, and it is certain that the district personnel knew little of the

experiences the students had prior to their internships. Districts also tend to exert little influence over the designation of mentors, most often leaving it to volunteers.

Since the education of educators, like the education of any professional, needs to be a career-long activity, school districts should be engaged in a comprehensive, ongoing educational effort. Increasingly, large amounts of money are being invested in staff development. Frequently, these efforts take the form of supporting the latest snake-oil salesman who comes to town with a package of tricks. Rarely is it a program which is tied logically to pre-service experiences. Equally rarely is such training built around an assumption that the practicing educator is a professional capable of reflective learning. Thus, like the general education, academic major, and mentoring arrangements, the issue is not whether there is continuing education but whether there is a sound base for that which is offered.

#### Summary

A common pattern of professional education is one which stresses general education and an academic major — neither of which are well taught in a fashion relevant for teachers. It de-emphasizes professional coursework, and what it does provide is strongly criticized from all directions. It relies heavily on mentoring arrangements that preserve the current practices and are given stepchild treatment by school districts and universities. States overregulate the process and school districts complain about it but contribute to its problems.

Over the years, the problems with both general and professional education have led for calls to remove professional education from the university setting.<sup>10</sup> Hedges makes the case for removing preparation of elementary teachers based on his 30 years of experience and on many of the same arguments offered above. He speaks with anger about “their hostility toward teacher education . . . [and] their skimming of money intended by state legislators for the training of elementary teachers.”<sup>11</sup> However, it is unlikely that his recreation of the normal school will solve these problems. On the other hand, Riggs<sup>12</sup> expresses the belief that significant improvements are indeed being made in teacher education in response to major national critiques such as those by the Holmes Group and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. Unfortunately, the indicators Riggs chooses, such as higher grade-point averages for teacher candidates and completion of academic majors are not likely to produce the needed improvements in educator quality.



However, a number of places are beginning to make real changes in educating educators, including the University of Hawai'i where the Pre-Service Education of Teachers of Minorities (PEToM) project and a fifth-year project in conjunction with the national Holmes Group are receiving attention by the Hawaii School/University Partnership. This partnership approach in places as diverse as Virginia, Wyoming, Utah, Maine, and Connecticut may eventually help us discover a way out of the repetition of similar solutions which has been characteristic of the twentieth century. I turn my attention next to one such effort — that of the Puget Sound Educational Consortium which involves 14 school districts and the University of Washington.

### New Partnerships at Work

Visualize a university classroom with 22 people: public school teachers, principals, and central office administrators; university professors from curriculum, psychology, and administration departments. They have come together to plan a new approach to teacher training. They know that the effort is to be collaborative and that it is to focus on middle-school teachers. To varying degrees, the individuals in the room are aware of the past four years of cooperative efforts between the school districts and the university. What do you think will happen? If you answered by saying the university faculty would pass out large stacks of xeroxed articles — you were right. If you said the middle-school teachers present would tell the university faculty that the faculty didn't understand the real world teachers worked in — you were right. If you said that the central office administrators would express concern about what all of this was going to cost and whether collective bargaining agreements would allow anything to happen — you were also correct.

As a matter of fact, what occurred in that meeting is all too typical of what occurs in meetings involving people from school and university settings. The remarkable thing about this effort is that by the end of the school year the interactions were far from normal.

During 1988-89, participants addressed three fundamental questions:

- 1 What are the appropriate educational experiences necessary to the development of teacher leaders for middle schools?
- 2 How may the schools of the 14 districts of the

Puget Sound Educational Consortium work in collaboration with the University of Washington and the Washington Education Association to create a Professional Development Center to provide those experiences?

- 3 How may the knowledge gained from such efforts be organized and disseminated?<sup>13</sup>

Consider the activities which were used to answer these questions. Following the initial meeting, the planners conducted two seminars. The first focused on middle-school curriculum and on school change; the second, around the knowledge bases for teaching. All participants were expected to do a considerable amount of background reading for these sessions. They were followed up with a one and one-half day retreat which focused on the writing of a general vision of the mission of the Professional Development Center they were creating.

The development of specific programs and structures for the Center was the focus of attention for most of the year. University and school people met every other week for a full day from November through May. Some of these meetings were held at a university site; others were held in school district and teacher association offices. During these meetings, task groups worked on planning major components of the Center. School-site groups worked on concerns for their individual school context, job-alike groups allowed teachers, principals, and university faculty to plan together, and the entire group of planners were kept abreast of the various subgroups' work. At midyear, 23 teacher leaders were added to the initial group of planners and expanded meetings were held at the school sites. When these additional teacher leaders were added, a major weekend retreat brought them up to speed with the other planners. During this, and subsequent sessions, these teacher leaders have helped define the skills that they will need most as they work in roles as cooperating teachers and field supervisors, and as leaders in the continuing development of their peers. People from the Washington Education Association, the University, and the teacher leaders themselves served as trainers for the various sections involving this group of people. A new culture was being created by the people who would work in it.

As the year moved along, teacher leaders helped to attract students to the pre-service program, the plans for which were emerging. An initial class of 14 students was enrolled.

While this routine was moving forward for the basic planning group, a number of additional groups



required attention. Side meetings were held with officials from the local education associations, with the official advisory group to the University's teacher education program, with key faculty members within the College of Education who were not already involved in the project, and with state department officials. From all these conversations, the common view of the Center as a place characterized by people engaged in critical enquiry began to emerge. Common understandings of the shared responsibilities of school district and university people developed. Fears of regulations were overcome. One-on-one meetings between project leaders and superintendents and deans led to a commitment of continuing dollars for the program. Discussions with other sites around the country engaged in similar efforts helped keep the project in perspective.

Following this series of very intensive efforts, the expanded planning group met again in the spring of 1989. Visualize this follow-up meeting. Now it is taking place in one of the school districts. Each of the four schools is represented by a principal and six or seven teacher leaders. Eight professors, three graduate students, several central office and union representatives are present. A visiting lecturer from Oxford University is providing part of the information. Teachers are asking why they don't have access to even more written articles rather than complaining about the ones being passed to them. The principal indicates that information on action research being shared with the group really has the teachers excited. The university faculty comments that it is important for teacher leaders to be referred to as faculty associates, not teacher associates, so that their identity with the university can clearly be established. A district central office official indicates that he is budgeting a free period for three teachers and \$20,000 for supplies, stipends, and release time, in addition to other money being provided for the Center in his school district. The meeting represents a truly remarkable evolution from the beginning of the effort the previous fall.

More was accomplished during this year's work than the development of effective working relationships. A new program for the education of teachers was forged which will feature the involvement of teacher leaders from the school sites in the seminars provided the interns. It will include an emphasis on continuing as well as pre-service education, with both centered around exemplary middle-school sites. Reflective practice by professionals will be the norm in the school centers where the preservice and continuing instruction will take place. School districts and university will share in the governance and funding

of the educational efforts. Not all concerns about general education and learning about academic disciplines have been overcome, but the communication channels needed to make these changes have been opened.

As noted previously, similar changes are beginning to take place in other partnerships of schools and universities around the United States. Changes are occurring in not only how teachers but also how principals are prepared. While typical principal preparation programs often involve part-time attendance at classes while the student continues major teaching responsibilities, new programs are evolving that concentrate on fulltime participation in professional education. The typical program, if it includes an internship, includes one in addition to regular job responsibilities, and includes assignments such as that of monitoring the bus area, attending athletic events, and checking-in textbooks. New programs are emerging involving fulltime internships with substantially broader responsibilities. While coursework is frequently taught by adjunct professors whose knowledge base is largely that of practical experience and who have a 50 to 60 hour-a-week job in addition to their professorial responsibilities, new programs are emerging with different shared responsibilities between the field and the university. While typical programs seldom help the prospective principals develop thorough knowledge of curriculum and the foundations, new programs are emerging with broader bases in these areas. Cooperative development of programs in locations such as Brigham Young University and the University of Washington (both of which were recognized in 1988 by the American Association of School Administrators as exemplary preparation programs) have made such changes and have shifted from a major focus on coursework to a combination of seminars and intensive field experiences. New attention is given to the selection and role of mentors in working with prospective principals. The cohort of carefully chosen interns typically work at several locations and at several levels, frequently for several school districts, during their year-long experience.

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### Some Generalizations

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From these emerging new partnerships in the education of educators, several generalizations appear possible.

School districts must assume broader responsibility in the education of educators. They must make pre-service and in-service a true priority. This may require them to contribute significantly in salary for the services of people engaged in the pre-service and in-service training of



teachers. The top leadership must express a commitment to pre-service and in-service training much beyond that typically present. Districts must take a major role in the selection of participants: the teacher leaders who will be working with prospective teachers, the mentors for principals, and the interns who are to be engaged in the professional training. Districts must create model sites. It is impossible to train the teachers of the future in the schools of the past. Yet, this persists because of the districts' willingness to place university students wherever it is most convenient — rather than in locations where the best training can occur. Districts must help professional education overcome bureaucratic and legislative impediments, such as specific training requirements which are developed by those too far removed from the field. Finally, districts, as part of their role in the new partnership, must enter collaboratively into demands for higher quality. They can no longer afford to give equal attention in the hiring process to candidates who come from unsatisfactory or marginal training programs and those who come from programs that are responsive to the current needs of professional education.

Universities must also make changes.

- They must change the status of professional studies. No longer can universities continue to treat the regular faculty engaged in teacher and pupil education and the clinical staff as second-class citizens in comparison with those engaged in more "scholarly" pursuits.
- They must assure a foundation for pre-service candidates which does not now exist. That foundation will require a broader general education more specifically tuned to the needs of teachers and an increased understanding of the purposes and moral imperatives of education in our society.
- They must engage in an equal partnership with the school districts. In the process of carrying out that partnership, however, they must not give in on essential issues. For example, they must be certain that they are placing their professional students only where they can be sure that good learning opportunities can be justified. Certainly our colleges of medicine would not place intern surgeons in a barbershop, yet at times our colleges of education know little about the places where they are putting their professional students.

In order to make the new partnership for professional education work, both the university and school districts must exert considerable effort to better understand each other's culture. In spite of repeated admonishments concerning this, substantial lack of understanding exists in both places. Finally, both institutions need to model the kind of behaviors that they want. Professional prepara-

tion of principals and teachers must use the kind of teaching methods and demonstrate the kind of leadership which is expected of the candidates when their programs are complete.

These new behaviors from school districts and universities are urgently needed. Fortunately, there are some signs that the new partnerships necessary to meet these urgent needs are beginning to emerge.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Su, Zhixin. *Teacher Education Reform in the United States, 1890-1986*, Occasional Paper Number 3, 1986, Seattle: Center for Educational Renewal, College of Education, University of Washington.
- 2 Boyer, Ernest L. *High School*, New York: Harper and Row, 1983.
- 3 Boyer, Ernest L. *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, New York: Harper and Row, 1987.
- 4 Kerr, Donna. "Authority and responsibility in public schooling" in John I Goodlad, ed, *The Ecology of School Renewal*, 86th Yearbook, Part 1, Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press, 1987, 34-35.
- 5 *Ibid*, 35.
- 6 Goodlad, John I. "Studying the education of educators: values-driven inquiry" in *Phi Delta Kappan*, 70, 104-111, October 1988.
- 7 Goodlad, John I. *A Place Called School*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984.
- 8Sizer, Theodore R. *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1984.
- 9 Boyer, *op cit*, see Footnote 2.
- 10 Haberman, Martin. "Twenty-three reasons universities can't educate teachers" in *Journal of Teacher Education*, Summer 1971.
- 11 Hedges, William D. "We must remove elementary teacher training from the state universities" in *Phi Delta Kappan*, 70, 623-625, April 1989.
- 12 Riggs, Robert O. "Our nation's new teachers: how has their preparation changed?" in *ERS Spectrum*, 7, 2, Spring 1989.
- 13 McDaniel, Janet and Nathalie Gehrke. "Toward teacher leadership: planning a multi-site professional development center," Seattle: Puget Sound Educational Consortium, University of Washington, June 30, 1989.

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