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ABSTRACT

The potentialities of the beginning teacher can best be realized by a high level of interaction and collaboration with experienced teachers and understanding administrators. When new teachers start their work, the procedural aspects should be minimized and the pedagogical responsibilities emphasized, with immediate support being provided from the best experienced teacher. Peer teachers should be selected because they can help the beginning teacher be effective, and peer teachers should be well trained for the job. Administrative support for the peer teacher-new teacher relationship is important. Knowledge bases used in working with beginning teachers should include what has been learned in research about effective instruction, schools, and classroom management. It is also important that the peer teacher transmit information to the new teacher about what practices will "work" in any given situation. A set of proposals is suggested for action by educators, policymakers, and researchers. (JD)

CROSSING THE BRIDGE: THE FIRST YEARS OF TEACHING

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Introduction

It will be noted immediately that I have deviated somewhat from the title of the paper that was suggested by the planners of this meeting. My reasons for this change center on the belief that "bridging the gap" has an implicit negative connotation; it suggests the necessity to somehow "make up for" a condition. As will be clear from much of the text of this paper, I take a somewhat more optimistic point of view. Therefore, "crossing the bridge," for me, has a more positive tone than "bridging the gap." I would like to believe that we have the necessary knowledge, skill, and will to work with new teachers such that they can cross the bridge that extends from their preservice teacher preparation programs to ongoing educational situations.

The remainder of the paper consists of three sections. In the first I will suggest a starting point for the development of programs aimed at strengthening the professional power of new teachers. In the second are included ways to promote the accomplishment of that increased power with and for new teachers. The final section advances a set of broad-guaged proposals for action by educators, policy makers, and researchers. Each section is begun and organized by a question.

What follows emerges out of almost three decades of experience in educational settings, from classrooms and schools through national agencies, universities, and participation in broad-scale research and development

efforts, including ones aimed at teacher education in preservice, induction, and inservice situations. Some of the content of this paper can be supported by research, other by disciplined observation, and still other by values held by me and by others regarding the role of elementary and secondary education in the United States. In combination, the content is a point of view that may be helpful in thinking of the teacher education aspects of a person's first years of teaching.

What Do We Want to Accomplish with New Teachers ?

As is true for most, if not all, institutional endeavors in a complex society and a period of competing claims for resources, it is difficult to sort out the "ends in view" that are, or might be, widely agreed to by persons inside and outside the institutions. This is certainly true of schools where shrinking enrollments, declining public confidence, and sharply-framed questions about effectiveness are tied, at least implicitly, to reduced funding for schools. As school people, from board members to administrators to teachers, move through the "dailiness" of their business, increasingly caught up in what might be called "band-aid therapy," not to mention the administrivia of taking care of business, they and we too often neglect the long-term goals in favor of the immediately pressing short-term ones.

I agree with the Holmes Group, a newly-formed collection of concerned deans and professors in colleges of education, that teacher education has been left by the wayside in a sort of third-class citizenship status as colleges and universities pursued the more typical higher education goals of research productivity. This group, most members from prestigious, research-intensive universities, holds that teacher education must once again assume a central role in their institutions.

I also agree with the Holmes group in its contention that for teacher education, preservice through induction to inservice, to undergo profound and meaningful changes, it is necessary to institute a vigorous re-examination of what kinds of schools and what sorts of teachers are most desired for this country at this time in our shared history.

Consequently, I will offer a brief characterization of an "ideal" teacher, a picture that provides some substance and a sense of direction for the recommendations that follow in regard to working with new teachers during their first years out of a professional preparation program.

It is important to sort out personal attributes, cognitive and personality variables, over which we have little control once a person is accepted into a school setting as a teacher from the professional skills, knowledge, and values that have been and continue to be more amenable to educational intervention. Much of the current criticism of teachers, new and experienced, focuses on personal attributes such as ability to learn, general intellectual capacity, and the like. I do not believe we should ignore these criticisms. We should, instead, assess carefully their basis in truth. Are teachers in general unaccomplished learners, persons who have not mastered the most basic of communication and numerical skills? I think not. But, we must devise means beyond the most simplistic ones to be able to answer that question with any surety.

Given the possibility that there are numbers of new teachers who are truly characterized as "the least and the dullest" rather than "the best and the brightest," I take a position about the ideal teacher as being someone who can provide evidence that s/he is an accomplished learner, someone who has demonstrated the ability to do what will be expected of students in elementary and secondary schools. Moreover, I look for proof

that the prospective or new teacher has a value toward continuing to learn, as a unique individual in a complicated society as well as a member of an important occupational group in the culture. Evidence to support such claims lie in the arenas of communication skills as well as in college transcripts, in human interactions as well as in diplomas and certificates, in points of view as well as in responses to the National Teacher Examination.

In terms of professional skills, knowledge, and values, the ideal teacher for me is one who has, or is working diligently toward, a firm grasp of basic pedagogical skills. By basic, I mean those teacher behaviors that, without which, little learning can be accomplished by students in classrooms. These include classroom organization and management, diagnosis of individual learner strengths and weaknesses, grouping of students for the purpose of achieving efficiency of instruction (as opposed to "sorting" students according to personal preferences), selection of appropriate instructional resources, maintaining a safe environment for learning, adding to that safety evidence of respect for students, and understanding and responding to curriculum requirements that are in place in the system, the school, and the classroom.

But, these are the most elementary of expectations; ones that are probably accomplished more by training than by education. Beyond them is a set of expectations that are probably more difficult to achieve, less easily measured, and not so readily articulated (or agreed to). I believe strongly that the best teacher is one who is reflective, deliberative, and collaborative. These three words subsume a host of behaviors and values; they provide an orientation to doing the work of teaching as well as force making that orientation a reality.

By reflective, I mean that teacher who takes seriously the need to think systematically and carefully about his or her actions, knowledge, and positions about providing educational opportunity to students. This is someone who looks at student behavior in relation to teacher behavior and not as an unrelated phenomenon that somehow exists outside of the teacher's sphere of influence. This is a teacher who uses a variety of information to think about teaching and learning and schooling. S/he is "with it" in the best sense of the word, aware of subtle as well as dramatic shifts in student attention, classroom climate, responsiveness to instructional materials. This teacher is also aware of the currents in the local community and the broader society, the explicit and implicit new needs for knowledge and skill by students. S/he collects information and uses it. The reflection on the information can be immediate as in the case of abandoning a pre-set lesson on "our Colonial past" when an unusually beautiful butterfly flutters at the window of the classroom. Likewise, the teacher reflects on an accumulation of information about events, test scores, student responsiveness, and so on such that s/he can make critical instructional decisions based on knowledge rather than on a prescribed curriculum, the next page in a textbook, or whim.

The teacher who is deliberative is one who consistently uses the products of reflection. As implied above, this teacher understands the basic and fundamental relationship between good judgment, the demands of the schooling situation, the nature of pedagogy, and the characteristics of the students in the classroom. The outcomes of a deliberative stance about teaching can be seen in many classrooms in these United States as teachers work alone or together to, in some cases, "make the best of a bad lot" or make more positive already satisfying learning places. This may take the form of a new piece of curriculum, a unique means to spark interest of stu-

dents, discover additional resources to support learning, devise particularly relevant ways to reward student accomplishment, and so on. At issue here, of course, is that seldom does any professional deserve professional status by only preserving what is -- almost by definition, a professional is one who moves the profession forward. This is the outcome of deliberation and reflection.

Schools seem to have been constructed, physically as well as organizationally, to prevent collaborative behavior on the part of teachers and administrators. Teachers are isolated from one another by classroom walls, lockstep schedules, restricted (or non-existent) opportunities to interact around issues of teaching and learning, and often reduced to the level of servants of bureaucratic policies and procedures. And yet, it is quite clear that the most effective schools and the most effective teachers are characterized by a high level of interaction and collaboration, not just in terms of personal regard for one another on social occasions, but also in terms of professional activity. This activity is sharply focussed upon the best means to work together toward accomplishing the important goals of schooling. Teachers who collaborate are teachers who share their best practices, work toward ameliorating their frustrations, concentrate on developing shared understandings and values, and keep either at bay or to a minimum those barriers to working interactively.

This brief picture of an "ideal" teacher suggests someone who is skillful and knowledgeable about the work of doing teaching, is continuing to learn about that work, thinks about his or her activities such that decisions are made based more on evidence than whimsy, accumulates information for the purpose of using it as a means to advance the science and art of teaching, and works with others toward identifying and solving the

dilemmas that have and will forever characterize large-scale efforts to educate a citizenry.

How Can the Induction Period of Teacher Education Contribute to the Development of the "Ideal Teacher?"

Although most of us have known beginning teachers who bring the attributes and characteristics I have mentioned to teaching, those instances are probably very few. If this is true, it becomes important to think carefully about how persons new to teaching can be helped during their first years to begin the often difficult but equally-often rewarding path toward excellence in teaching. Given the constraints placed upon the preparation and presentation of this paper, I will suggest only four areas of activity that seem to have promise.

Influential Selectivity. The current state of affairs, as reported in the popular press as well as in some educational circles, suggests that nothing much can be done about the so-called inferior quality of teachers entering the profession or students entering the programs of preparation that lead to teacher certification. This doomsday scenario, obviously, does not appeal to a number of us.

Although it is a somewhat radical stance, I believe it is absolutely necessary to refuse admission to preparation programs and to the teaching ranks persons for whom there is evidence of a deficient educational background. I want to be very clear, however, that I do not mean simple tests of basic skills only, although it is important to include as a test of future success some means of determining a teacher's grasp of the basic "stuff" of schooling.

The major issue for many concerned about teacher effectiveness involves the knowledge and skill directly related to doing the work of teaching and not solely language and number proficiency. The depth and breadth

of the new teacher's understanding of the curriculum, not just from his or her accomplishment within the discipline but also the understanding as it relates to how knowledge is translated and segmented for elementary and secondary students; the new teacher's grasp of what research says about teacher effectiveness; the skills of relating in positive ways with students and colleagues; the awareness of resources that are most powerful in the promotion of learning -- these and many other phenomena are essential to being a good teacher. Further, they are essential as stated and verifiable outcomes of teacher education programs. Parenthetically, they are touched lightly if at all by most current tests for prospective teachers.

My term, influential selectivity, though, suggests more than a simple or not-so-simple sorting device aimed at prospective or new teachers. It suggests that practitioners, policy makers, and professional organizations engage in a much more thorough examination of teacher preparation programs than has been typical. We must together sort out those programs of teacher preparation that do, or appear to produce teachers whose knowledge and skill we value from those that do not. Our standards must rise above and move beyond numbers of books in college libraries, labels tacked on to courses, professorial testimony about course content, and so on. We must get involved with the programs of preparation such that we not only know about what goes on ~~and~~ but also what consequences result. We must develop a set of partnerships that join together the interests and concerns o the various parties to the action such that rational decisions can be made about such vital issues as teacher selection (some programs simply do not meet our standards and, therefore, their graduates probably won't either), program approval (although difficult to admit, it is a growing realiza-

tion on the part of some that selected programs should probably be shut down despite the fiscal realities of keeping teacher education alive from selfish institutional interests), program renewal (activities designed to bring a program in alignment with strong and clearly stated expectations), and increased allocations of resources (keeping alive and strengthening the best programs of teacher preparation).

This proposal is not meant to be Draconian or unduly harsh. It is meant to provide a public and explicit charge to teacher educators. Many of us in this country are ready and willing to work together toward high quality teacher preparation so that new teachers are effective teachers. For those who are unwilling to join that effort, my suggestion is to get out of the way of your own accord or you risk the growing wrath of concerned educators as well as ever-larger numbers of the general public.

Selection, then, should be viewed as a dual opportunity in relation to the appointment of new teachers; the teacher candidate himself or herself is bound to provide necessary evidence of potential and the teacher preparation institution is bound to provide necessary evidence regarding the knowledge and skill expected by the program of the teacher candidate.

School and Teaching-Focussed Initiation of the New Teacher. New members of every professional or occupational group are initiated into the workforce in some manner or another. The nature of those entries differ, of course, but the general intent is usually to on the one hand, welcome the novice and, on the other, use the initiation as a way to ensure that the newcomer is helped to be successful during his or her first days or years.

In school systems, of course, the intention is for new teachers to

move easily into classrooms and schools and then demonstrate their skills as teachers. It is unfortunate but often true that the initiation rites for new teachers are haphazard at best and confounding at worst. It is not uncommon for new teachers to be confronted with a maze of non-teaching, non-school issues upon entry and then left to their own devices in terms of getting about the actual business of preparing to teach an as yet unknown group of young people. This approach to the new teacher can be called either "sink or swim" or "it's up to the teacher to use his or her best judgment, we don't interfere." Either way, it is an unacceptable means to ensure quality instruction and a probable death blow to many newcomers to teaching.

Four lessons have been learned about beginning teacher entry into school settings. These lessons are supported in some measure by research and in greater measure by testimony and observation.

First, minimize the procedural and emphasize the pedagogical. Use the new teacher's first hours and days in the system to focus on what schooling and teaching mean in the system. Talk with (not at) the new teachers about the central issues of curriculum requirements, instructional materials, approaches to instruction, expectations for learning, nature of the local community, characteristics of students, support systems, and the like. Focus on what teaching is, and can be. Leave for memoranda and brief information sessions the peripheral issues.

Second, provide an immediate support to the new teacher in the form of the best experienced teacher in the same area or at the same grade level. These experienced teachers, often called peer teachers or helping teachers, can be personal as well as professionally skillful lifesavers. They know where the materials are, have information about students, under-

stand the way the school "works," have a command of the subject matter to be made present to students, and, in general, can help the newcomer with the maneuvering necessary to begin to fit into a complex organization.

Third, provide careful and thoughtful training for the peer teachers. Sometimes we forget the basics when we select someone to work with a new teacher. For example, because someone works very effectively with first grade students, that is insufficient reason to suspect that he or she will be equally effective with another adult. Because an experienced teacher is powerful in a given system, formally or informally, it does not necessarily follow that he or she can translate that power into a comfortable (and comforting) relationship with a novice. Teachers typically work with persons considerably younger than themselves. They also exert considerable authority over those younger students. They also have had limited experience, in most school settings, working with other adults. And, unfortunately, many have settled into a routine that, by its very nature, mitigates against demonstrating the aforementioned qualities of deliberation, reflection, and collaboration

Peer teachers should be selected because of their potential for helping the beginning teacher be effective. They should then be helped to understand and enact the strategies best suited to working with another adult toward achieving that effectiveness. The informal "buddy" system may provide a comfort level for new teachers. A more formal, and highly regarded and rewarded, peer teacher system places demands upon the new teacher and upon the peer teacher and the system.

Fourth, provide support for the peer teacher-new teacher interaction. New teacher programs are proliferating around the country. Some acknowledge the need to provide a support system for the program, others assume that

just connecting the new teacher to a more experienced one is enough. Still others have in place an elaborate observation, monitoring, and consultation system that demands, and sometimes receives, equally elaborate support systems in terms of real and ceremonial resource allocation. As a general rule, one might suggest that the more precise and formal the expectations for the new teacher-peer teacher interactions and outcomes, the more extensive the support necessary to accomplish them.

The Knowledge Bases For Working With New Teachers. Earlier in this paper, it was noted that some college and university programs of teacher preparation appear to be inadequate to their important tasks. This overly generalized conclusion can also be made about school settings. In the same ways that institutions of higher education sometimes fall behind in their acquisition and use of knowledge about effective teaching and schooling, school systems also rely more heavily upon locally-produced folk wisdom about what is best for students and teachers in their classrooms. Already mentioned was the more-than-occasional tendency for school officials to claim that "teachers know best, let them make the decisions." This, of course, is often a wise decision but it depends upon the teacher in question. As a blanket statement of policy, it is more than inadequate, it is an abandonment of responsibility and an abrogation of authority.

At least four knowledge bases should be used in working with beginning teachers, and, for that matter, with all persons concerned about teaching and learning. First, the past two decades have produced a considerable body of information about effective instruction and effective schools. The largest part of that information is the direct result of disciplined inquiry supported by the National Institute of Education and carried forward

by the research and development center and regional educational laboratory network. This knowledge ranges from effective classroom management and organizing for orderly transmission of information to students to the ways that language influences instruction to effective delivery systems for instruction. We are much more sanguine about the most powerful ways to approach instruction than we were when many of us began our careers in education. We must capitalize upon what we now know as we work with new teachers. And, we can only realize the potential for that knowledge if it is a part of the repertoire of those charged with working with the newcomers. That holds for school officials as well as for peer teachers. It holds for leaders in teacher organizations as well as it holds for school board members.

As with all such dicta, however, there remains a caveat to be addresed in relation to research-derived knowledge about teaching and learning. Partly due to the inadequate funding for this line of research and partly due to the inadequacies of the methodologies available to accomplish the research agendas (although the latter is certainly advancing rapidly), much of the research was quite situation-specific. That is, findings are directly applicable only to populations very like the ones in which the original research was conducted. To generalize an effective teaching strategy, for example, that was discovered to be true with highly urban, third grade children to suburban eleventh grade science is problemmatic. The other part of the caveat is that much of the effectiveness research was correlational. That is, existing conditions were found to contain relationships between certain teacher behaviors and certain student outcomes. It is only recently that experimental studies have aimed toward inducing the relationships into other settings and testing for the "reality" of the

desired outcomes.

The lesson for those engaged in or planning for new teacher programs, then, is to treat research findings with some caution. And, even more importantly, become skillful research consumers so that when research-derived expectations for teachers, new or experienced, are a part of a teacher education program, they can be defended.

A second knowledge source for new teacher programs comes from another line of educational research, again supported largely by the National Institute of Education, called effective schools research. This line of inquiry has attempted with some success to identify those school level characteristics that are related to positive aspects of school life such as student outcomes, school climate, professionalism, and the like. It is entirely possible that from this body of findings can be extracted guidelines and procedures for use in developing programs for new teachers. For example, there is some evidence that professional collegiality (as differentiated from personal regard) among a school staff is positively associated with school effectiveness. If this is the case, and I believe it is, a new teacher program would have as one of its central characteristics the introduction and maintenance of the standard of peer interactions around professional matters. It would promote the practice of teachers working together, planning and evaluating together, and trying out new ideas together. It would place new teachers in situations that called for them to be contributing (rather than receiving) members of the school community. It would work toward institutional status for all members of the school community, including novice teachers. (Again, the caveat regarding effective teaching findings must be advanced in relation to effective school findings.)

A third body of knowledge in working with new teachers is more typical of current practice than the research-derived ones. This is what can be called craft knowledge. It is that information that is not necessarily derived from systematic, disciplined inquiry as it is from observations of teachers over time. It is, if you will, what teachers say "works." Even though there are some claims to teaching becoming more of a science, with underpinnings drawn from research efforts, it is still more likely that teaching is carried forward by the consequences of individual trial and error. New teachers must be put into direct contact with this craft knowledge. They must not be left to discover for themselves, often at painful cost, what others have found out before them.

The isolation of teachers mentioned earlier, of course, must be broken before it is possible for the craft knowledge to be transmitted from one teacher to another, from an experienced teacher to a newcomer. The peer teacher strategy may help with this but it is only a limited approach. New teachers should be put into settings where there are multiple interactions with a number of teachers. Settings where the chief topic of interaction is the matter of schooling -- instructional approaches, curricular strategies, diagnostic and prescriptive behaviors, instructional materials development, and the like. The key here is the integration of the new teacher into the best of the culture of the school and the setting.

The last body of knowledge I will mention is, perhaps, the most controversial. It is that diverse and often conflicting set of values and beliefs about what teaching, teachers, and schools should be about. Although it appears that some believe that teaching and schooling are neutral and value-free, we know that such is not the case. The ways that

teaching and schooling move forward are driven, or ought to be driven, by a set of shared beliefs about best practice. Those beliefs may be buttressed by research or craft knowledge. They may also be supported by a genuine and well-thought-out conception of what used to be called "the good life" in relation to the broader society. Recent years have seen the domination of a belief that schools are places where the so-called basics should be the heart, if not the entire body, of teaching and learning. We have found, to our dismay, that this attention seems to have diminished students' problem-solving abilities, their skill in logical deduction, their approach to complex issues. Moreover, there is growing testimony from teachers that the consequences of the lockstep approach to ensuring basic skills on the part of students has made their roles those of automatons rather than professionals, workers rather than managers of instruction, pawns instead of decision makers.

New teachers must be introduced to and helped to enter into the important dialogue of what schools should be accomplishing and how they should be a part of that accomplishment. They must, from the first, be involved in debates about the role of schools in the United States culture. They must be helped to understand the vital role they play in molding the future of this country.

What Policy and Administrative Strategies Should Be Adopted?

Of course, this paper touches only pieces of the complex puzzle that centers on teacher education in relation to newcomers to the profession. Even so, it is necessary to think about institutional decisions that will enhance, rather than inhibit, even these few parts of the puzzle. What follows is a set of recommendations for helping new teachers "cross the bridge" from professional preparation programs to ongoing classrooms and schools.

1. School systems and colleges of education must become more collaborative in terms of what they know, what they believe necessary for teachers to know, and how they accomplish their common objectives. The isolation of higher education from public and private elementary and secondary schools is, naturally, a consequence of dramatic and complicated institutional differences. Those differences must be put aside, however, in the common aims associated with preparation for a profession. This is particularly true when that profession is so vitally important to the nation and to the lives of the millions who comprise it.

2. A stance of aiming toward excellence, as opposed to ensuring minimum competence, should be taken in regard to working with new teachers. To select a lowest common denominator as a standard for new teachers is to ignore the challenges of teaching as well as to ignore the strong possibility that such a standard will become the guideline for years and years of professional practice. To aim toward excellence is to evaluate instead of inspect, to involve instead of isolate, to promote risk-taking instead of preservation of the status quo, to celebrate change instead of fearing it, to concentrate on growth rather than on remaining static, to acknowledge publicly instances of excellence rather than ignoring them, and to make involvement in decision making the norm rather than an exception to it.

3. Existing models of new teacher programs must be studied thoroughly and over time. These models range from highly technologized ones to informal local efforts. Some demand complex understandings of participants while others depend upon tacit understandings among parties to the activities. Some are large-scale and grandiose, others very situation-specific. Some rely heavily upon research-derived knowledge, others rely more on what

participants collectively believe to be true. We are only recently becoming more understanding of the complexities associated with providing effective instruction. Part of that understanding is related to new teachers, but not enough. Research in teacher education generally needs more attention from both the community of academic scholarship and the community of practice.

4. New questions must be framed and new answers must be found. It wasn't very long ago that teaching and schooling were looked upon as relatively simple phenomena. Someone taught someone else something in a place called a school. We are now much more sophisticated in our acknowledgement that teaching and schooling are enormously complicated enterprises. With that sensitivity in mind, we can ask more appropriate questions and, one hopes, derive more meaningful answers.

5. We must become increasingly adamant that teacher preparation programs send forth new teachers who match a realistic and well-articulated expectation of an effective teacher, at least at the early stages of a career. This will force us into uncomfortable postures about standards for accreditation of teacher education programs, the enforcement of those standards, and the abandonment of a "laissez faire" attitude toward the preparation of persons to provide a central service to a free country.

6. We must, as a nation and as a community of interest within the nation, recognize that excellence in education and in working with new and experienced teachers will depend, in large measure, upon the willingness to allocate resources in amounts equal to the task. This willingness will have to be present at all levels of the society from the Federal government through state agencies to local communities. There is, we know, no quick fix for institutions in jeopardy. And, I believe with many

others, that schools in our country are in jeopardy. It is reasonable to take the position that the next decade, a time when school enrollments are expected to rise and larger numbers of new teachers will be needed in schools, is the time to make significant differences in the ways that teaching and schooling are carried forward. We can use this opportunity in many ways, one of which is the recognition that educational opportunities for new teachers should and can be powerful influencers upon educational practice.

Resources

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