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**ABSTRACT**

A consortium of 15 Nebraska colleges of education was established to provide collaborative means for examining significant research for teacher education, to share information about programs and activities, and to provide a support network as the institutions work on program improvement. A description is given of the formation of the Consortium and its membership, goals, and organization. The activities of the Consortium during its first two years are outlined, and the action plans generated by participants in the workshops are discussed. The major focus of the workshops was the utilization of research on teaching and learning in teacher education programs. Plans for the future of the Consortium are discussed. Issues related to Consortium activities, such as organizational structure, long-range tasks, and funding, are considered. (JD)

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The Nebraska Consortium for the Improvement  
of Teacher Education

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In June, 1983, the fifteen higher education institutions in Nebraska that have teacher education programs formed the Nebraska Consortium for the Improvement of Teacher Education. The Consortium was established to provide a collaborative means by which institutions could examine research which has significance for teacher education, share information about programs and activities in the several teacher education programs, and provide a support network as the institutions work on program improvement. The purpose of this paper is to provide background about the Consortium's formation, activities, and future.

BACKGROUND

During the past ten years, there has been a major increase in the amount and quality of research on teaching, learning, and effective schools. Research on how teachers plan and make judgments in the classroom about individual students and instructional strategies (Shavelson, 1982), how

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teachers organize and manage their classrooms (Brophy, 1982), and how they use instructional time (Denham and Lieberman, 1980) are examples of research areas which have developed enough in the last decade to provide some guidance to the classroom teacher. As a result, education now has a foundation of knowledge derived from research upon which to make decisions rather than having to rely solely upon practices acquired through the practical experiences of individuals or teachers as a group.

Although the research base itself has expanded, the results of that research have been implemented only to a limited degree, either in the classroom or in the training of teachers. One of the accusations that has frequently been made against teacher education is that it does not use a theoretical, research-based body of knowledge in its training programs, thus perpetuating the practice of teaching as a craft rather than as a profession. For example, D.O. Smith, in Design for a School of Pedagogy, suggests that although the research on general concepts, principles and skills of teaching and classroom management has grown and become more dependable, there is reason to believe a large portion of the education faculty in most institutions train teachers with little knowledge or utilization of that research. Others support Smith's position, and emphasize the need to incorporate the research

base into the preservice education of teachers (e.g., Denmark, 1981; Berliner, 1984).

To accomplish such a change, however, a mechanism is needed by which institutions and individual faculty members can both become more knowledgeable about the research base and examine and modify course content and teaching behaviors, if appropriate. One approach to the improvement of teacher education programs has been to increase external controls, either through mandated competency testing programs or increased specification of program changes through legislation. In most cases, such externally imposed mandates for improvement have been developed with little active involvement of the teacher training institutions themselves, and in some cases, such as New Jersey, the proposed improvement strategies actually function outside the teacher education programs.

An alternative approach to statewide program improvement is initiation and implementation of improvement efforts by the institutions themselves. Such an approach is supported by what we have learned about change during the past two decades. The traditional change models, which followed a linear pattern of research, development, dissemination, and implementation, for the most part were not very effective in causing long-term changes in practice. The reason for this, Tikunoff and Ward (1983), suggest, is that such an approach is product-oriented; a particular

innovation, program change or research, problem is developed by one group to be passively implemented by another, which is contrary to how most people learn or change. Tikunoff and Ward argue that a more appropriate strategy is a collaborative inquiry model, in which those who must make the instructional improvements are involved in the research and development process. Teacher education programs face similar challenges as they attempt to make changes. The newly developing knowledge base about teaching and effective schools has for the most part developed outside most teacher education institutions, which are now expected to find ways in which to incorporate that knowledge base into existing programs. The Consortium was formed in part to provide a collaborative setting in which to foster that change at an institutional level.

#### **Consortium Membership**

The Nebraska Consortium for the Improvement of Teacher Education is made up of all fifteen institutions that have teacher education programs in the state. They include the two campuses of the state university system, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and University of Nebraska at Omaha; four state colleges, Chadron State College, Kearney State College, Peru State College, and Wayne State College; and nine private colleges and universities, College of St. Mary, Concordia Teachers College, Creighton University, Dana College, Doane College, Hastings College, Midland College,

Nebraska Wesleyan University, and Union College. Of the fifteen institutions, all are state approved, and 13 have NCATE accreditation. The enrollment of the institutions ranges from over 24,000 to around 500; they graduate between 25 and 560 certificated teachers per year. It is estimated that the fifteen institutions provide over 90% of Nebraska's new teachers each year.

### The Consortium's Goals

When the Consortium was proposed in June, 1983, an initial set of goals was outlined. They were:

1. To develop a network of teacher education institutions that will work in close cooperation toward the improvement of teacher education in the state;
2. To increase faculty members' confidence in and knowledge of the research base to the extent that they will use appropriate portions of that base in their own programs;
3. To change the nature of teacher education programs in participating institutions so that they will be more amenable to use of the teaching/learning and effective schools research base.
4. To develop faculty members' willingness to study research publications alone and with other faculty

groups and to build the results of their study into their programs.

5. To develop in students the knowledge of, the confidence in, and skills in working with the research base such that they will draw upon that base both during their teacher education programs and in their teaching assignments.
6. To affect the schools at which the students do their student teaching such that the faculty of those schools will have a positive attitude toward the research base.

At the initial meeting to explore the consortium idea, all fifteen institutions with teacher education programs agreed to use those goals as the beginning statement of the consortium's intent, and to participate in the consortium in an attempt to meet those goals.

#### **Consortium Organization**

At this point, the organization of the Consortium is quite informal. Once all the institutions agreed that they wanted to participate, an initial activity consisting of a two-day workshop on selected research was planned. Each institution agreed to send a team of faculty to the workshop, which was selected by the dean or head of the education program. Those teams have remained fairly stable since the consortium's beginning. In most cases, team

members were selected because of their key positions in the undergraduate teacher education program, their interest in research and the incorporation of research into their programs, and their ability to provide leadership for program change. In some cases, because of the size of the teacher education program, the team represented a substantial portion of the total education faculty. In other cases, the team was a cross-section of a much larger faculty.

The team structure is an important feature of the consortium, because teams provide a mechanism through which action can take place on campus. By studying research and making plans as part of a team, it was hoped that faculty members would be better able to carry plans into action once they returned to their campuses.

#### **First Year Activities**

The first major consortium activity was a two-day workshop on the utilization of research on teaching and learning in teacher education programs. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln agreed to organize and manage the workshop; each of the fifteen teams agreed to send their consortium team to the workshop and develop a plan of action based on the workshop sessions.

Before attending the workshop, the team members were asked to do some preparatory reading. Each institution was provided a set of materials which included papers by several



leading researchers on teaching, learning, and effective schools, publications on the effective utilization of time, and a bibliography of other references. About two months before the workshop was held, each institution also was asked to provide background information about its teacher education program, including such materials as a current college bulletin, requirements for graduation in the teacher education program, and syllabi from several key teacher education courses. A preliminary analysis of that information was done prior to the workshop.

The two-and-one-half day workshop was planned with several goals in mind. First, team members who attended the workshop should have an opportunity to read and discuss the research and to have contact with a few of the researchers who have made important contributions to some of the influential research efforts. Second, teams should have an opportunity to consider the research in relationship to their own teacher education programs and develop some specific plans for action. Third, the workshop should provide a setting which might lead to informal networks among institutions, which could be helpful as institutions implemented their plans. To accomplish those goals, the workshop provided time for presentations on research, discussion among institutions, and institutional planning. The first day emphasized review of research, discussion of

implications, and dialogue among participants; the second day emphasized team discussion and planning.

Three types of presentations were included in the workshop. Six concurrent sessions focused on specific research topics that have been major areas of research emphasis in recent years. Those sessions were conducted by University of Nebraska-Lincoln faculty members. The two sessions that focused on implementation methodology were conducted by people who are directly involved in implementation activities with teachers -- Lovely Billups, from the American Federation of Teachers, and Robert Ewy and Linda Sikorski from the Midcontinent Regional Educational Laboratory. Three sessions served an integrative and synthesizing role and provided a structure to the workshop by drawing principles from the more specific sessions, and raising some philosophical and policy-making questions for team members to consider as they made decisions about about plans they wished to propose to their own institutions. Those speakers included Robert Egbert, Gary Fenstermacher from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, and Jane Stallings from Vanderbilt University. (These presentations were published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, as the first of their monograph series on teacher education under the title, Using Research to Improve Teacher Education: The Nebraska Consortium.)

Discussion sessions were interspersed among the workshop presentations to allow workshop participants opportunity to ask questions and talk about the implications of the research findings for teacher education programs in general and in their own institutions. Beginning on the second day, each institution began to develop an institutional plan, describing the steps the team proposed to take after the workshop.

### Second Year Activities

During the remainder of the 1983-84 academic year, the institutions worked toward the implementation of their plans. In June, 1984, a planning group met in conjunction with the spring meeting of the Nebraska Association of College of Teacher Education to plan activities for the 1984-85 year. They agreed to hold a second meeting in the fall; at that session, the teams would report progress toward achievement of their plans, attend further research review sessions, and set directions for future activities of the consortium.

The second workshop was held on September 30-October 1. Fourteen of the fifteen institutions sent teams; the fifteenth institution was not able to send a team due to instructional scheduling constraints, but plans to continue in the consortium. During the first session, a panel reported on the progress of the fifteen institutions as they

reported them in summaries in late August and early September. Two sets of sessions focused on research; in a large group session David Imig, Executive Director of AACTE, reported on the implications of the research base for teacher education, and in concurrent sessions, four faculty members from consortium institutions presented reviews of research in selected areas. Two other sessions focused on the change process; workshop participants participated in several activities designed to help establish some goals and directions for the consortium.

Progress on Action Plans. As reported by the panel, progress toward the implementation of the action plans developed during the first year ranged from minimal to fairly extensive. The approaches that the institutions took were quite varied, as the following brief examples will demonstrate. Kearney State College conducted a symposium for faculty, students, and school personnel in which they reported on the research efforts of their own faculty. The symposium was well received, and they plan to conduct a similar effort in the spring. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln held two workshops for its faculty in the undergraduate teacher education program; they focused specifically on research related to classroom management and decision-making, and are now in the process of deciding how to integrate that research into their undergraduate program. The University of Nebraska at Omaha has revised several

courses based on current educational research, and has added a new graduate course, "Effective Teaching Practices," which is based on current research findings. Doane College has made some tentative decisions about what they want students to learn about research in their undergraduate program, and has made some decisions about how they will integrate the information into their initial Practicum course. Hastings College conducted faculty inservice, is beginning a newsletter for area educators and recent graduates which will include information about recent research, and is planning a graduate level course for summer, 1985 for the dissemination of research data and training of cooperating teachers. Concordia Teachers College held a series of faculty inservice sessions based on the fall, 1983 workshop, and has systematically worked to incorporate the research on effective utilization of time into their curriculum. Other institutions reported similar activities that focused on faculty development and curriculum revision.

Most of the institutions noted either in their written reports or in their comments that it is very difficult to separate those activities which were a direct result of the consortium plans and those which are part of a broader institutional improvement process. However, in at least some of the cases, improvement activities can be directly traced to the action plans developed one year ago and to the research sessions presented at the first workshop.

Research Sessions. Four faculty members from consortium member institutions conducted sessions in which they reviewed the research on specific topics. Member institutions had been surveyed earlier in the summer about topics they wanted to have reviewed; the topics which were chosen also supplemented the reviews presented at the first year's workshop. Team members selected sessions in which they were most interested.

David Imig's session addressed some of the critical issues facing teacher education today, and the contrasting images which are held of teacher education by the public and by the professions. He described several of the common beliefs the public holds about teacher education in regard to its entrance requirements, its course content and rigor, and the characteristics of its faculty, and then cited data which would lead one to a quite different conclusion about the profession. Several of the themes that Dr. Imig presented were incorporated into the consortium's final sessions as they planned for the future.

Planning for the Future. When the planning team organized the second workshop, they quickly realized that it was going to be vital for the larger group to tackle questions about the consortium's future structure, purpose and goals. While the consortium appeared to be successful in its attempt to provide inservice on current research, less attention had been paid to one of the more powerful

elements of the original design, that of collaborative efforts among institutions. It was decided that part of the second year's agenda would be used to discuss the research literature on change, to relate the change literature to the consortium approach, and to make some decisions about future organization. Daniel Wheeler, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln faculty member with extensive faculty development and networking experience, was asked to run two workshop sessions on networking and institutional collaboration, and several deans were asked to participate in a final panel discussion in which they were to discuss ways in which the institutions might collaborate on research, development, and dissemination efforts.

The purposes of the networking sessions were: (1) to identify the individual and common needs of consortium members; (2) to identify the contributions of each to the consortium; (3) to identify any barriers that might prevent the consortium from operating; and (4) to identify a structure to meet the identified goals and needs. During the two sessions, small multi-institution groups discussed these topics as identified a list of common needs which might serve as a basis for future consortium action. They are:

1. Provide a central "clearinghouse" to disseminate information to consortium members about significant research, to assess educational needs of the state,

and to provide information about other national efforts to translate research into practice in teacher education.

2. Provide a means for teacher education programs to "speak with one voice" on issues of importance to teacher education in Nebraska.
3. Provide a support group for institutions as they work toward program improvement.
4. Expand the resource base of individual institutions by conducting joint staff development activities, joint planning of data collection activities, and calling upon individuals from other institutions with special expertise.
5. Identify the components and qualities of "good, solid teacher education programs".

The group proposed that these five needs serve as the basis for future planning, and that a sixth need, to identify in a more formal way the decision-making structure of the consortium, also be addressed. A meeting which includes a representative from each of the fifteen institutions will be held in late November to work on those issues.

#### **Issues Related to Consortium Activities**

Now that the Consortium has been in operation for about one and one half years, it is at the point that several decisions must be made before it will be clear what the role of a consortium might be in improving the state's teacher



education programs. Among those decisions are: (1) organizational structure of the consortium; (2) funding; (3) long range tasks.

Organizational structure. So far, a few people have coordinated the consortium's activities, calling together planning groups to help with specific activities. At this point, a more formal organization is needed which will assure continued involvement of all interested institutions. A second issue related to organizational structure has to do with the level of participation of the fifteen institutions. Those institutions range in size, resources, and ability to participate. One of the questions that people posed during the workshop was whether a differentiated membership might need to be established that would assure that institutions could participate in the consortium to varying degrees.

Funding. Almost all of the consortium's activities to date have been funded by the institutions themselves. Each institution has sent teams to the workshops at local expense, and all faculty time has been contributed. The lack of external funds up to this point has been seen as an advantage, because the consortium has been able to evolve without the constraints of funding guidelines or a proposal to limit its direction. To move ahead on substantive issues, however, there will be the need for some financial resources. At least two of the institutions have expressed willingness to provide some faculty release time and

operating expenses to specific consortium activities, and it was suggested that a differentiated dues structure might be considered. As specific research topics are identified, external funds may also be sought. However, there continues to be concern among consortium participants that external funds be used only if the consortium's autonomy is preserved.

Long Range Tasks. The most important set of decisions to be made, and which will be addressed at the November meeting, focus on the long range tasks the consortium will undertake. There continues to be interest in providing staff development activities through the consortium, but as one workshop participant noted, such activities can and often do occur on individual campuses without a consortium. The real potential for a consortium lies in identifying tasks that individual institutions cannot do very well alone, and it is in this area that the consortium has made the least progress to date, although there appears to be commitment to the idea. It was suggested that the consortium might expand upon the idea of a central clearinghouse for research and think of itself as a state level research, development and dissemination center, through which data might be gathered on questions of particular interest to Nebraska. Such a center should not duplicate the national R & D Centers, but should focus on state issues.

## Conclusion

Teacher education programs are influenced to a large extent by the state of which they are a part. The state, through its certification and accreditation processes, its legislation and its regulatory powers, plays a significant role in the nature of the requirements preservice teachers must meet and the courses or programs they must take. In some states, this regulatory function is quite explicit and detailed; in others, the institutions have more leeway within the state's guidelines. But in all cases, the teacher education programs in both public and private institutions are influenced to some degree by the policies, philosophy and the character of the state in which they reside.

Teacher education programs are also influenced by the institutions of which they are a part. An institution's teacher education program reflects the philosophy and values of the larger institution, the characteristics of its faculty and students, and the clientele which the program serves. Thus, within one state, institutions which operate within the same state guidelines will approach teacher education from quite different perspectives.

At the same time that teacher education programs are subject to the requirements and influences of the state and the academic institutions of which they are a part, they can, in turn, exert considerable influence upon those

organizational structures. One of the ways that they can influence those structures is by explaining and interpreting the knowledge base in education. As the primary source of knowledge about educational research, members of the teacher education community have a responsibility to bring the perspective of the research base to bear upon the current debate about improvement in education, both to assist in improving the complex teaching/learning process and to inform policymakers as they consider alternative improvement policies.

The Nebraska Consortium for the Improvement of Teacher Education was established with these factors in mind. The Consortium members recognize that any attempts to improve the state's teacher education programs must take into consideration both the state's and the institution's goals and characteristics, and knowledge about teacher education and effective schooling. It seeks to retain institutional autonomy and uniqueness, but to provide a collaborative means of support and improvement.