

## **If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It? Framework and Processes for Engaging in Constructive Institutional Development and Renewal in the Context of Increasing Standards, Assessments, and Accountability for University-Based Teacher Preparation**

**By Ira Lit, Nancy Nager, & Jon David Snyder**

---

*Ira Lit is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Stanford University and director of the Stanford Elementary Teacher Education Program, Stanford, California; Nancy Nager is a member of the Graduate School faculty and Jon David Snyder is a professor and dean, both at the Bank Street College of Education, New York, New York.*

In this article we offer a descriptive essay outlining the framework and processes of a five-year institutional renewal effort at Bank Street College of Education. Extended the opportunity to participate in the *Teachers for a New Era* (TNE) initiative, a multi-year, multi-million dollar effort to enhance and “radically reshape” teacher preparation programs (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2001), our institution faced a set of questions and dilemmas likely common to many programs of teacher preparation. While the local context and environment was instrumental in the design and direction of our efforts, we suspect that the overarching issues and challenges as well as the rationales and processes moving our work forward will be informative and constructive to a broad range of collegial institutions.

Bank Street College began preparing teachers in 1930 in response to the documented need for teachers

### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

in the nascent progressive schools of that era. Founded in 1916 as the Bureau of Educational Experiments, the institution initially focused its efforts on research and a small experimental nursery school. Adding teacher preparation allowed Bank Street to integrate its efforts, educating both children and teachers and simultaneously studying these pursuits. An experimental attitude directed toward gathering and using information to inform emerging practices characterized the College.

In subsequent years, Bank Street College's Graduate School of Education has developed a reputation as a highly regarded and effective institution of teacher preparation. Various outside evaluations of Bank Street's programs have pointed to its articulation of a clear vision of good teaching, a focus on deep understanding of child development, and an intensive advisory process in support of extensive fieldwork experiences as contributing to the efficacy of the College's programs. Graduates of Bank Street's programs are highly sought after by employers, and Bank Street graduates have made significant contributions to local and national schools and other educational program (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). Additionally, as a stand-alone, non-profit, tuition-driven graduate school of education, Bank Street College has demonstrated its effectiveness through its viability in the market place: Without a clear sense of purpose, quality, and efficacy, our programs would quite literally go out of business.

While on its face one might presume that accepting the support of outside resources to help an institution enhance its work seems like a rather straightforward proposition, given this backdrop of long-term institutional success the proposition was not so clear cut. When offered the opportunity by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to be considered for its TNE initiative, numerous questions arose for us at the College: *What are our current strengths and areas for growth? Do we really need to get better at what we do? How so? Are the objectives of this particular initiative aligned with our internal sense of mission and direction? In what ways might efforts to improve our practice detract from what we currently do well? What are the costs and benefits to such an effort?* Given a near century-long legacy of accomplishment at the College, these and other questions posed by Bank Street faculty, staff, and administration both prior to and during this institutional renewal effort helped to drive and shape our collective efforts.

Of course institutional history is not the only context that framed and influenced our work. Bank Street College, like all schools, colleges, and departments of education in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, faced and faces multiple pressures and incentives for programmatic renewal, institutional change, and cultural evolution. Externally, policy initiatives at the state and federal levels were and are attempting to force change in the nature of how teachers are professionally educated. Title 1 reporting requirements, new state (often linked with national) accreditation standards, and the definitions of highly qualified teachers arising from *No Child Left Behind* all provided impetus (sometimes unwanted) for clarifying goals and devising assessments that assured the government and the public that

higher education-based professional education programs were meeting various “standards.” As this approach to educational policy progressed into efforts by the Bush Administration to re-conceptualize accreditation agencies, the pressures on professional programs of teacher preparation to establish and measure quantifiable goals also increased. Simultaneously, forces beyond the field were and are seeking to challenge and undermine the legitimacy and efficacy of traditional, university-based teacher preparation.

In addition, at the nexus of professional preparation and professional practice, changing contexts of schooling (demographic, curricular, accountability practices, and the like) and the concomitant changing demands on teachers, compelled teacher education program faculty to come to grips with whether and how their current and historical practices remained sufficient for the world into which their graduates were entering. Finally, internally, the vast majority of teacher educators feel an ethical responsibility for, and most programs assume a level of professional accountability for, the success of their graduates and, more importantly, the influence of the work of their graduates on the children and families in their care. Thus, at Bank Street, like other institutions that professionally prepare educators, the ground was fertile for a conscious and structured process for individual, structural, institutional, and cultural development.

Thus the timing was fortuitous for the selection of Bank Street as one of the four initial participants in the TNE initiative funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Annenberg Foundation, and the Ford Foundations. This initiative provided the institution with the luxury of additional financial resources to support our institutional development and renewal process; TNE also provided an impetus to be more explicit and planful in that process.

The conceptualization that formed the basis of Bank Street’s renewal efforts through the TNE initiative was a relatively linear and logical notion that change should be a conscious effort guided by (a) clear and measurable goals, (b) documentation and common understandings of current programs, policies, and practices, (c) systematic collection of evidence about how well the current programs, policies, and practices are meeting these goals, (d) analysis of the evidence, and (e) interpretation of available evidence leading to proposed changes in the work of the College. In simplest terms, the Carnegie Corporation initiative presumed that if colleges of education collected better data, and utilized that information for decision-making they would produce measurably better outcomes (Fallon, 2006).

This linear and logical approach requiring clarity of goals and systematic collection of aggregated data was not consistent with the prevailing institutional culture at Bank Street. Nor was it necessarily consistent with many faculty members’ underlying notion of professional teacher education. In the view of many Bank Street faculty, teaching and learning are too holistic, personal, and organic to be broken down and analyzed in such a linear manner. In fact, some argued that such attempts would inevitably result in the trivialization and lessening of the already

### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

established quality of our work. Accepting the grant could prove the equivalent, in the words of one respected faculty member, of “letting in the Trojan Horse.” Simultaneously, Bank Street’s institutional culture includes a strong historic tie to its origins as the Bureau of Educational Experiments. Many faculty members viewed the possibility of gathering additional evidence about the work of our candidates and graduates as a desired and proud association with Bank Street’s research tradition as well as an important professional growth opportunity. But the pursuit of data that could be quantified and aggregated at the program level threatened to exclude or undervalue important elements in the work of teachers and the values and mission of the institution.

This tension between competing visions of the institution simultaneously challenged and fueled renewal efforts. One important way we were able to navigate this tension was to work collectively to focus our efforts on *teaching* rather than on *teachers*, per se. In a sense, by “aggregating” and articulating a shared conception of good *teaching* (rather than focusing on the work of individual *teachers*) and looking at the capacity of our graduates, collectively, to measure up to our values in this regard, we strengthened our capacity to think and work at the collective, program level. Further bridging this dichotomy was a shared articulation of good teaching and learning expressed in Bank Street’s developmental-interaction approach (Nager & Shapiro, 2000). Named for its two salient concepts the term *developmental-interaction* calls immediate attention to the centrality of the concept of development, the ways in which children’s and adults’ modes of apprehending, understanding, and responding to the world change and grow as a consequence of their continuing experience of living. The term *interaction* refers both to the vital interconnections between thinking and emotion and also highlights the importance of engagement with the social and physical environment.

### **Sketching a Roadmap**

Having decided to enter into the TNE initiative and to engage in a process of institutional renewal and development, Bank Street then faced the challenge of determining how exactly to proceed with this effort. While we will describe in detail below some of the features and flavor of the programs, data gathering instruments, and procedures for institutional development, we think that the thought processes and orientation of how we organized our efforts is likely to be most informative to others in the field. Specific activities of renewal will vary relative to local circumstances, needs and resources, of course, but there are some overarching elements of our work that we hope are worth explicating for our professional colleagues.

Throughout this five-year project we relied on two inter-related operational frames or theories of action in thinking about our work. We briefly describe these in turn, though in practice we drew upon them simultaneously and to varying degrees throughout this project.

***1. Understanding Institutional Change as Individual and Collective Learning, Growth, and Capacity Building***

Working within Bank Street's developmental-interaction frame meant conceptualizing programmatic and institutional renewal as a developmental learning process involving the social construction of knowledge and the development of inter-subjectivity (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). In our view, institutional change would rest on the learning and growth of the individuals within the organization. Placing the individual learner within the larger collective at the center of our efforts was consistent with a developmental-interaction perspective and required taking into account some basic elements of adult learning in our endeavors.

Furthermore, because our aim was renewal at the program level, we would in some sense need to "aggregate" both data and learning beyond the individual level to the program level. Faculty would work in ever widening circles of organizational complexity, from individuals to small groups to program groups and cross-program groups. Faculty and staff engaged in a sustained set of common learning opportunities to construct a Bank Street definition of teaching and learning and then apply that construct to a set of inquiry projects aimed at enhancing our understanding of the work of the college and the practices of our graduates.

Essentially, we proposed to enact a progressive pedagogy of experience and reflection in service of programmatic renewal. The consonance between the renewal/professional growth opportunities and existing programmatic practices and institutional culture motivated faculty, connecting them to the ongoing history of the College and providing structured social processes to construct and reconstruct an increasingly sophisticated articulation of teaching. In the words of one participant,

From my perspective, this place has always been connected to its history and its identity. There was a real fear of change and seeing change as potentially losing what we hold dear, cherish as an institution. So it was surprising to me, in a way, that these experiences I had . . . actually felt like we were a group of people who at one point would have been reticent to engage in thinking out of the box that is Bank Street, and that we were able to push beyond it and suggest alternatives and problematize things that in another time we would have just taken for granted as truth.

***2. Utilizing curriculum design as the framework for planning for institutional renewal***

Our focus on learning and our primary roles as educators within a graduate school of education, led us to design our work as a *curriculum* for programmatic renewal, asking the same types of questions we might ask of ourselves as classroom teachers, and, perhaps more aptly, the processes by which we might encourage our teaching candidates to consider audience, goals, assessment, activities, and reflection in the design of their instructional practice:

*Goals:* Consideration of goals or outcomes is frequently (though not always) an essential first consideration in designing successful learning opportunities. Toward

### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

this end, in planning a program for institutional renewal through TNE we began with serious and significant deliberation on our aspirations for this endeavor.

Broadly, our goals included examining our teacher preparation programs to learn about and strengthen our work with candidates and graduates, with the ultimate aim of enhancing their work with children and families. More specifically, guided by TNE design principles and given our own strengths and needs, we outlined several programmatic goals to inform our efforts, including the following:

- ◆ Increase the range and types of evidence available and utilized for programmatic decision-making--particularly moving from in-depth and nuanced studies of individuals with a focus on specific *teachers* towards nuanced studies with larger sample sizes with a focus on *teaching*, as well as learning outcomes for pupils;
- ◆ Provide increased opportunities for faculty to *collectively* gather evidence and participate in inquiry that requires common procedures for data collection and analysis;
- ◆ Collect more and better information about the work of our graduates and their pupils to better understand the impact and value of our programs;
- ◆ Engage in collaborative relationships with Arts & Sciences faculty to draw on outside expertise, as Bank Street College is a stand alone professional school of education with no faculty or departments in the traditional disciplines; and
- ◆ Promote programmatic and institutional renewal by making implicit practices and beliefs explicit, through systematic data collection, analysis and discussion.

The guiding assumption was that gathering evidence about our candidates and graduates and examining it at the program level could help us learn about our practices and processes, understand what we do well, and get better where indicated. A parallel assumption was that disciplinary scholars could assist teacher education faculty by participating as team members, sharing expertise as invited colleagues; working to build an “inside-outsider” perspective, rather than purely dichotomous “insider” versus “outsider” viewpoints.

Ultimately, while our “curriculum” was driven by this set of goals, we also did not presuppose any particular answers or outcomes to this process, consistent with an institutional notion of “premature structuring as a deterrent to creativity” (Biber, 1959). This feature of our approach proved to simultaneously exacerbate certain tensions in the work related to ambiguity and uncertainty, while also providing utility in terms of flexibility and openness to the strengths, needs, and interests of the participants.

*Audience:* A successful curriculum also necessitates an understanding of one’s

audience. As the focus of our institutional renewal theory relied on the learning, growth, and development of individual professionals within the institution, the consideration of adult learning was paramount to our efforts and led us to formulate a set of questions to guide our work: What are the strengths, interests, and needs of our faculty as a whole and individually? What are fruitful ways to engage, support, and draw from adult learners? What complications might we expect and how might we best plan for and consider these? How can we utilize our own faculty's expertise in adult development to support planning and program implementation processes? A tension existed here for us that is present in most encounters with adult learners: Our faculty may have considered themselves "learners" but they did not wish to be treated as "students."

Our curriculum aimed to tap their experiences and expertise to help foster ongoing growth and development. One example of this design involved faculty, staff, and administrators interviewing each other about roles held in the institution, instructional practices, and other influences on the experiences of candidates and graduates. This process was noted as an important opportunity and source of information, as discussed this participant:

There were not only interviews of incoming graduate students and outgoing graduates, but also our own interview data... There was a sense of the opportunity to sit together and think deeply, critically, and sensitively about whom we are as individuals and as a group, where are there holes in our program and what do we do well... The incongruencies (sic) and inconsistencies are amazing, and it was very powerful to be able to sit with it.

*Activities:* We conceived of renewal as a professional growth opportunity, aligned with institutional values and practices and modeling a progressive knowledge-based practice by building faculty capacity to gather and use aggregated evidence to make programmatic decisions. This required the availability of aggregated data for faculty to fruitfully examine and utilize. Essential, non-trivial questions and issues at the heart of this effort thus included the following: What types of data would we need? What instrumentation would we rely on? What forms and formats would the data take? How would we orchestrate the use of this information? What types of experiences would encourage faculty to analyze and utilize the data for program improvements?

To be frank, this complicated set of questions did not draw on a strength of our institution. Our plan was to afford faculty opportunities to work together to utilize data to better understand our programs, what we do well (for whom? why? why not?) and ways in which we would like to improve. This professional growth model made strategic use of outside resources matched to internal values and built in social processes to enhance faculty capacity to gather and utilize evidence for decision-making. Importantly, however, we also entered the work knowing that the value of data is not in information, per se, but in the interpretation of that informa-

### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

tion and actions taken as a result of those interpretations. That is, change is thrice removed from data (at the least).

*Assessment and Reflection:* Assessment was at the core of our renewal efforts, as described throughout this paper. The essential nature of our effort involved gathering data about our students, their opportunities for learning at Bank Street, their practices as graduates, and the impact of their teaching on their own pupils and then utilizing that data to analyze, reflect on and improve our practices as teacher educators.

### **Searching for the Right Guideposts**

What would we need to know and do to be able to move forward on the goals we had identified? The crux of our efforts relied on strengthening our institutional capacity to gather and use evidence to enhance our work as teacher educators. Because the focus of our renewal efforts was programmatic, we needed to gather evidence that could be aggregated at that level. Both of these requirements posed a significant challenge for the institution; they did not necessarily draw upon core strengths of the College. Bank Street's more immediate history of data gathering had been at the individual and personal level. Supervised fieldwork constitutes a core element of faculty work and involves close observation and intimate relationships with a small group of individual candidates. Continuing engagement with graduates in the field is also common, and thus over time faculty at Bank Street develop deep funds of knowledge about the professional and personal trajectories of the individual graduates they know well. In this institutional context of careful attention to supporting individual teacher growth, aggregating data to the group level was less familiar and for some, uncomfortable.

As one faculty member expressed it: "When people first began thinking about survey data, survey construction, and that was a new emerging thing, no one had that kind of expertise . . . Our unit of analysis was always one. It was always the individual relationship." Thus, a primary framing—and tension—for the project involved widening our gaze from the *teacher*, as individual, to also encompass the *teaching* of our candidates and graduates collectively. Addressing this tension required attention to both the individual and program-levels, leading us to design an inquiry framework to guide data gathering efforts that integrated what we wanted to understand about our candidates and graduates. Broadly, we asked the following questions which reflected our theory of action and guided our choices of tools for investigation:

*1. Who are our candidates?* Our beliefs about human development and learning pre-suppose that the individual experiences, strengths, needs, and interests of our candidates all contribute in significant and important ways to the types of learning we can shape and guide through our programs. Hence, improving our work required learning more about the backgrounds, hopes, desires, strengths, and needs of our candidates.



2. *What opportunities for learning and growth does Bank Street College provide?* Bank Street College offers dozens of programs and myriad pathways for the preparation of educators. Clarifying for ourselves as faculty what the varying experiences of our candidates might be like would be instrumental in thinking about ways to modify our work to better support the needs and aspirations of our candidates and the children and families in their care.

3. *In what ways do our candidates' knowledge, skills and dispositions change during the course of their experiences at Bank Street?* Like other educational institutions and programs, Bank Street has a belief that the types of learning experiences and opportunities we enact with our candidates influence them in important ways. Clarifying what the experiences are like for our candidates—across our complex, multifold programs and pathways—as well as better understanding how these experiences influence the growth and development of our candidates is essential for us to know about and understand in greater depth.

4. *What do we know about the classroom practices of our graduates?* Again, our theory of action suggests that a Bank Street education shapes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions relevant to the classroom practices of our graduates. Developing ways to learn more about those practices and how well they meet our own hopes and expectations was a central component of our renewal work.

5. *What are pupil outcomes in the classrooms of our graduates?* In the final analysis, what matters most to us as teacher educators is the impact of our work and that of our graduates on the students, families and communities in their care. Finding ways to amplify our understanding of this dimension of our work was another key element to our renewal efforts.

We make no claim that this frame for our inquiry is novel to the field. Others have certainly raised and responded to such questions in various ways. Still, beginning with a clear explication of our internal understanding of how and why we believed our work was influential and then organizing those notions into a framework that we could articulate with clarity was invaluable in and of itself. It provided an integrated set of questions that reflected institutional values and beliefs, assuring us that we were taking into account aspects of the work that we cared about and wanted to understand.

In addition, in developing our conceptual frame and the work that followed we were careful to acknowledge that multiple other variables and influences are relevant at each stage of this process and that in reality human interactions, growth, and development are neither as linear nor as logical as we might have described it here. In our follow up work, we did our best to account for differences in context and their influences on potential outcomes in the work of our graduates and their students, though accounting for the full range of contextual complexity is not a realistic aim. In pursuing this type of work, as teacher educa-

### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

tors we must be careful neither to ignore this complexity nor to be held impotent by acknowledging it.

After clarifying our framework for inquiry, the next step in our efforts was to identify an appropriate set of tools with which to gather relevant data. We first looked to the knowledge base in the field to understand how others had attempted to respond to similar questions in the past. At the same time, bearing in mind our goals of enhancing local capacity building and institutional commitment to evidence-based decision-making, providing for the selection and modification of instruments offered an opportunity to pique interest and engage faculty in valuable opportunities for individual and collective learning. We systematically examined existing instruments for compatibility with Bank Street's approach to education, built in processes for engaging faculty in the selection and refinement of these instruments, and constructed a repertoire of tools to gather data responsive to the questions in our inquiry frame.

Our inquiry frame required a range of instruments responsive to each of our questions. Table 1 provides an overview of the types of inquiry and instrumentation we used to gather information we could aggregate and systematically examine at the program level.

### **Staking a Plot**

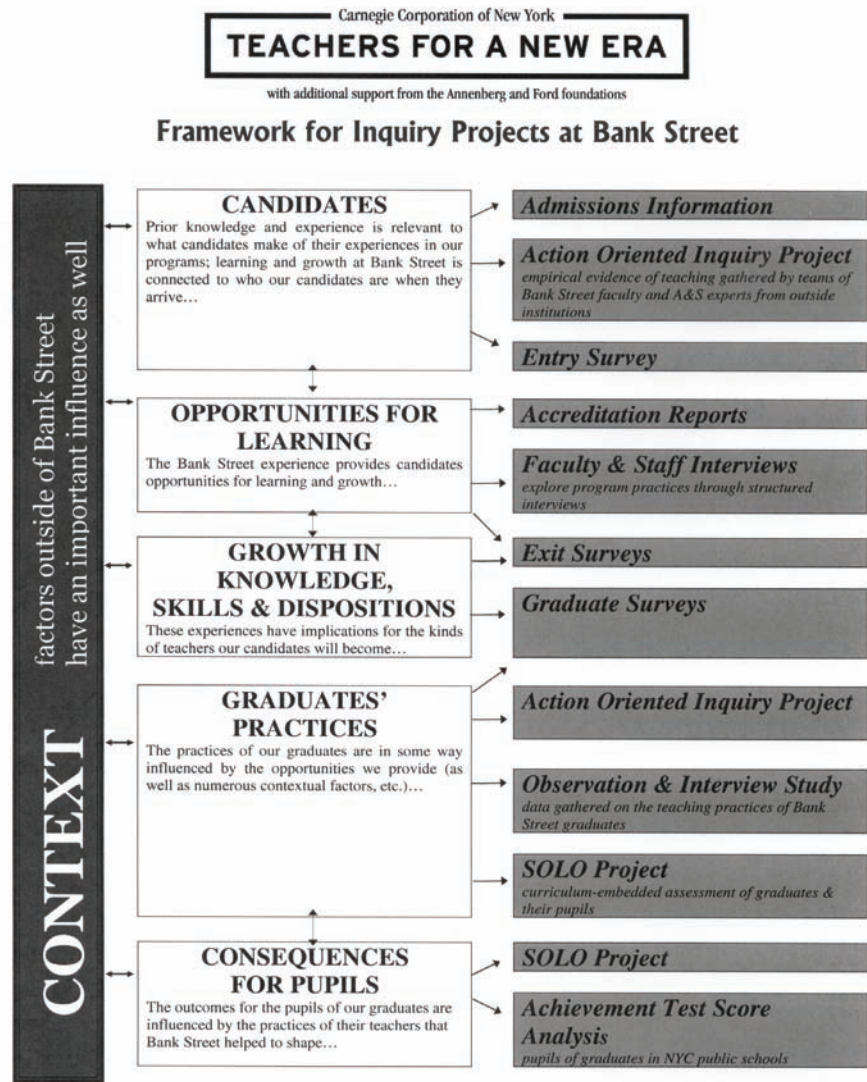
To provide a richer "flavor" of our work, in the following section we describe in depth the development and utilization of the Bank Street Continuum of Teaching, one of the instruments we crafted and utilized in support of our program renewal efforts. Following that, we offer a description of the "5Fridays" program, our major effort to engage faculty in utilizing evidence in service of professional growth and programmatic renewal. Together, these portraits serve to illustrate how we attempted to translate theoretical constructs and assumptions into a working model of individual and collective learning and institutional development.

#### ***Action-Oriented Inquiry and the Bank Street Continuum of Teaching***

As described above, one of the core aspects of our plans for institutional renewal required that we gather information about the teaching practices of our candidates and graduates that we could aggregate at the program level in order to reflect on the efficacy of our work as teacher educators. In service of those goals, we first had to consider what type of data we hoped to access and what type of tools would best serve those ends. Given our context at Bank Street, including a sense of reluctance or concern on the part of numerous faculty regarding the use of data gathering instruments that allowed for the aggregation of data, an additional element of supreme importance in this process was the selection of appropriate instrumentation that aligned well with the values and goals of those in the institution who would be tasked with utilizing the results toward program improvement.

Consequently, one of the most important outcomes of the program renewal efforts of the College has been the development of the Bank Street Continuum of Teaching. “The Continuum,” as it is commonly referred to, is essentially a rubric offering descriptions of teaching practice at four levels of sophistication for several

**Table 1:**  
**Framework for Inquiry Projects**



### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

themes under each of the following domains of teaching: (1) Planning instruction and designing learning experiences, (2) Understanding and organizing subject matter for student learning (articulated into subject specific sub-domains for literacy, numeracy, science and social studies), (3) Creating and maintaining an effective environment for student learning, (4) Engagement to support student learning, (5) Assessing student learning, and (6) Developing as a professional.

In developing the domains, themes, and descriptions of practice incorporated into this Continuum of Teaching, we engaged in a multi-year process of inquiry, utilizing our internal knowledge base, external expertise, and empirical evidence from the classrooms of our candidates and graduates. The story of the construction, modification, and use of the Continuum illustrates many key elements of our program renewal process: selection and construction of compatible instrumentation; interacting with faculty around authentic and meaningful questions; engaging Arts & Sciences “outside experts” as inside partners in the work; building faculty capacity to gather and make sense of aggregated data; and stimulating an interest in utilizing data for decision-making.

We began this effort with a review of various teaching standards and observational instruments related to those teaching standards, in an effort to identify potential matches between existing instruments and the ways in which faculty described their current practices of observing and assessing candidates’ teaching. The California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP) gained early favor as a useful starting point for our efforts (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2008). We further “tested” the goodness of fit between the CSTP and Bank Street’s approach to teaching by engaging faculty in an exercise aimed to identify the overlap and disconnect between them. “What do you look at/for in a classroom?” was the guiding question used to match desired behaviors with the domains of the CSTP.

Through this effort, faculty readily identified their own ways of observing candidates in support of a range of goals. We were also able to recognize that some important aspects of teaching identified in the CSTP were not adequately emphasized in our own work. For example, assessing student learning was not uniformly stressed in faculty accounts of what they looked for in classrooms. In this way, well before we began systematically collecting data, the process of reviewing and selecting an instrument for gathering data alerted faculty to an aspect of teacher preparation needing closer attention in our programs. Conversely, there were “distinctively Bank Street” ways of thinking about teaching that were not incorporated in the CSTP, so we were prepared to adjust the instrument to better meet our distinctive experience and point of view.

From this starting point, we began to gather information about the teaching of our candidates, recent graduates, and experienced teachers to further support the development of a reliable and institutionally supported classroom observation instrument. This effort constituted a three-year Action-Oriented Inquiry (AOI)

project. Using the actual classroom teaching of Bank Street College candidates, recent graduates, and highly regarded experienced teachers as the foundation of their work, teams of Bank Street graduate faculty, School for Children faculty, and Arts & Sciences partners from Sarah Lawrence College, the American Museum of Natural History and TERC worked to define a Bank Street approach to teaching. Working in pairs, over fifty educators gathered empirical evidence of teaching through observations, interviews and pupil work samples. Having an Arts & Sciences partner on each team created an opportunity for rich conversations about subject matter as well as other elements of teaching.

For example, after one group observation, the teacher educator on the team remarked enthusiastically to the scientist, “The children were so engaged!” to which the scientist retorted, “With what?!” Continuing conversations within the larger group of AOI faculty revealed a more nuanced view of the domains of subject matter knowledge and student engagement. Another participant described the impact this way: “Our conversations which led to [developing] the Continuum have made me have a more rigorous mindset and say, ‘Am I just seeing a good teacher who’s relating well and has kids engaged and is doing something that is really social studies and calling it science or am I really seeing someone do science?’ I wouldn’t have asked those questions before.”

The AOI work continued for three years, affording multiple opportunities to engage in sustained conversations about teaching and teacher preparation, data collection and data analysis, and ways to utilize data for personal and institutional growth. Data from these efforts were used to support the design of the Bank Street Continuum of Teaching, through an iterative process of identifying and clarifying themes and related descriptions of practice at varying levels of sophistication. “Going back into that data...was helpful and informative and did allow something to emerge more organically than it would have if we had just taken someone else’s continuum and fidgeted with it. There’s some real merit in that.” This effort again reflected a deliberate use of outside experts, both teacher educators and Arts & Science professionals from a range of institutions, who worked alongside Bank Street faculty to support identified programmatic goals.

In the final two years of Bank Street’s participation in the TNE initiative, graduate faculty utilized the Continuum of Teaching as part of an Observation and Interview Study designed to explore the teaching of Bank Street graduates. A cohort of twenty-five graduates from 2004 (in the 2005-06 study) and thirty-one graduates from 2005 (in the 2006-07 study) participated in this effort. Researchers on the project conducted multiple classroom observations and interviews with each participating teacher. In-depth training and support were provided to ensure consistency and reliability in analysis and scoring. Monthly meetings were held to respond to questions and support data collection and coding. Arts and Science consultants provided support to the research team in the subject matter domains. This two-year study continued to enact in practice the assumptions that guided our

### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

renewal efforts: building capacity by providing opportunities for adult professionals to learn together by gathering and examining meaningful information. Results from the Observation and Interview Study served as one important source of data we utilized in our “5Fridays” program renewal workshops, as described below.

One important outcome of this multi-year effort is that elements of the Continuum of Teaching are currently being used as a common tool for assessing candidates in supervised fieldwork, a new practice for Bank Street College. Faculty described the impact of this change in ways like the following: “I used [the Continuum] to provide feedback to students. They began to see the Bank Street philosophy coming through;” and “The very fact of using the document with my advisees was a big change. I’d always relied on my notes which I shared with my advisees.” and “The Continuum gave [candidates] language to discuss their work. It’s helped them to be concrete and I would force them to talk about the evidence. They would say they’re doing this and I would ask them, ‘But what’s the evidence?’ So the language [of the Continuum] forces them to be deliberate and intentional;” This is perhaps one of the more salient examples of individual and collective learning manifesting itself in ways that shape program decisions and development.

### **Putting the Data to Work**

A central challenge of this renewal effort was designing extended, authentic, and meaningful activities by which faculty could engage with and consider the implications of the aggregated data we had begun to gather through TNE and related efforts. If the first steps in this process included gathering useful data that would have value to our internal audience, an equally important task was to build a process by which our faculty of experienced and successful educators might make thoughtful use of the available information. The 5Fridays initiative can be regarded as the second phase of our TNE endeavor, incorporating our assumptions about program renewal and providing a vehicle through which we enacted a curriculum of data examination/assessment with a diverse group of adult professionals.

Toward those ends, in both 2005-2006 and 2006-2007, Bank Street College organized a year-long series of seminars, inclusive of faculty, staff, and administrators from across the College, aimed at supporting our use of data to inform programmatic renewal and promoting collegial and collaborative inquiry. This initiative provided us with an opportunity to engage faculty, administration, and staff with data we collected about our students, our programs, and our graduates, and to reflect on what it means for our practices as teacher educators—for us individually, collectively, and in small groups; by program, department, and cross-department. Through this process, faculty considered the full scope of the trajectory of Bank Street candidates/graduates as identified in our inquiry frame: What do we know about our candidates? What are their opportunities for learning here at Bank Street? How do our programs impact the practices of our graduates in the field? And,

what kind of influence do our graduates have on their own pupils? The goals of examining data gathered in response to these questions were to provide structured opportunities for explorations and conversations toward programmatic renewal as well as opportunities for individual and collective growth, collaborative work with colleagues, and the chance to expand connections and communication across the divisions, departments, programs and interest groups of the College.

Guided by principles of adult learning, we consciously created a curriculum by which a range of professionals from different parts of the institution with different backgrounds and expertise could engage in meaningful conversation about data and its implications for their work. “Homework” activities preceded each day in which we made specific data available and asked participants to review, reflect upon, and ask questions of the data. For example, participants might be asked to read one of the domains of the Bank Street Continuum of Teaching, make predictions about where they thought graduates would be located within that domain, and then examine data from the Observation and Interview study revealing the locations (practices) of graduates.

Each session began with an arts-related activity, designed to probe an aspect of the data by working in an aesthetic, nonverbal mode of expression. For example, a movement specialist on the faculty led the group in an activity designed to explore contradictions between opposing and supporting forces, prior to our wrestling with data sets that both supported and challenged some of the assumptions of our work. Seminar sessions comprised the rest of the forum, each providing an opportunity to examine a data source within a homogenous group (e.g., program) and then within a heterogeneous group (e.g., cross-divisional). A set of guiding questions facilitated focused discussion of the themes, issues, and storylines across data sets and consideration of the implications of the data for our collective work.

We believe it is also significant that the meetings took place off site, fostering a sense of purpose and possibility and removing participants from the pull of daily work assignments.

Through the 5Fridays process, key learnings and challenges emerged. Structurally, we stress the importance of placing the adult learner at the center of program renewal efforts, incorporating the arts as a form of making meaning, and focusing on multiple pathways for change: individual, program (or other group), cultural and institutional. Some topics emerged as particularly salient for us at Bank Street including the variability of subject matter preparation, the difference in professional trajectories between where our incoming candidates indicate they want to teach and where they actually teach as graduates, and cross-college communication around shared concerns. All of these issues were deemed important and worthy of further attention, leading to an additional outcome of the process: a strong desire for continued collaborative opportunities to gather and examine aggregated data in support of our programs.

Challenges in this process included pedagogical ones such as how best to dis-

### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

play data to make it accessible to a wide range of participants and how to structure questions enabling these diverse participants to meaningfully discuss and utilize the information before them. Furthermore, some participants were “comfortable with relying on the idea that change occurs through this dynamic interaction” while others wondered skeptically “What comes from the impact of 5Fridays, the research, the rubrics, looking at children’s work? How is data used in a meaningful way?”

All members of the college community were invited to participate and were paid a stipend for their efforts. While the majority of participants worked in the Graduate School, all divisions of the College were represented in the initiative. Forty-five participants were involved in the 5Fridays project in the first year, and sixty participants were involved in the second. Faculty and staff reported high levels of satisfaction with the project—97% reported that the 5Fridays experience met or exceeded their expectations. Significantly, 88% of the faculty and staff reported changes in their individual thinking and/or practices based on their experiences in the project. Changes included numerous modifications to courses to ameliorate perceived gaps in subject matter and assessment preparation; modifications to assessment practices within supervised fieldwork and advisement; and a greater emphasis on preparing candidates for urban school settings. For some faculty, anything less than 100% complete satisfaction of students was a sign of “failure” for themselves and for the institution. Others, however, tended towards a persistent “It ain’t broke” framework focusing only on data indicating candidates’ satisfaction. While aggregated data offered a new—and sometimes uncomfortable—assessment of candidates beyond an historic ‘n of one,’ it was sometimes used to bolster the case for “not fixing it.”

### **Lessons Learned**

Given this extensive (and expensive) institutional renewal and development endeavor, a key question rests on the outcomes of this work: Did the processes, structures, and activities we set in motion move the institution (and the individuals within it) toward our initial goals in a meaningful way? Were there any unintended or unexpected outcomes to which we might point? What did we learn about the process of renewal itself and what might we share from our experiences in support of our colleagues in the field?

Throughout the entirety of this five-year effort, external evaluators from the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) supported Bank Street’s efforts by gathering evidence on both processes and outcomes of the project and serving as a “critical friend.” Toward the end of the grant period, CTQ undertook a study to assess how the work of individuals, groups of practitioners, and Bank Street College as an institution had changed during the grant period with regard to the key areas targeted by the TNE initiative. The data collection for this evaluation involved document review, individual interviews, and a series of focus group interviews, spanning a broad spectrum of members of the Bank Street community (Montgomery & Berry, 2007).



The authors and the project's CTQ evaluators acknowledge that additional influences beyond the TNE initiative clearly played a role in these renewal processes, as the College experienced other important events during this period including self-study via Middle States accreditation, changes in staffing, and priorities of the College set through strategic planning. A state level accreditation process that followed this initiative also influenced the efforts described here. CTQ's evaluation study was not designed to establish a direct causal link between the TNE initiative and institutional changes at the college. However, in its report CTQ cites interviews with administrators and faculty as revealing perceptions that often traced major changes they had experienced or observed during the course of the TNE work. The evaluation report is framed around three specific organizational change lenses: (a) individuals' practices and beliefs, (b) collective practices and understandings, and (c) Bank Street College institutional structures. We report their findings in this outcomes section and integrate their analysis with our own conclusions about what we learned and accomplished and the challenges that continue to face us and other teacher preparation institutions.

#### ***Change in Individuals' Practices and Beliefs***

Engagement in the work of TNE at Bank Street impacted participants' beliefs, understandings, and practices in significant ways. Individuals developed new skills as observers and researchers through participating in structured observations and interviews and systematic examination of data. Novel to most of the participants, individuals gained a new acceptance and appreciation for what could be offered by the systematic collection of group level information about students and graduates. Not surprisingly, close examination of data led to new insights about Bank Street candidates' needs and interests and a perceived need for faculty to adjust their practice as instructors and advisors as a consequence. For example, data revealed a need to strengthen candidates' ability to effectively utilize a wide range of tools to assess children's progress and effectively communicate the results.

#### ***Change at the Collective Level***

Interactions among professional colleagues provided a key pathway for program renewal at Bank Street. The broad-based, collaborative work of TNE introduced a model for meaningful self-studies for program renewal: collection and analysis of data and extensive collegial discussions about their programmatic implications. Through this model, faculty came to know and understand each other's professional roles and programs better. Key to this process was the fact that discussions were grounded in data. Implications of the data led faculty to own the findings and propose changes in a bottom-up rather than mandated top-down fashion. For example, program groups made a host of suggestions from requesting additional displays of data to link variables of interest to utilizing findings on math and science instruction to recommend a process to ensure that field work faculty observe teaching in all curriculum areas.

### *If It Ain't Broke, Why Fix It?*

---

While the scope and scale of inquiry activity and the support structure for analysis and deliberation have been radically reduced since the close of the TNE project, various program groups within the College continue to seek data to support their work and rely on existing program structures for collective deliberation, as described in more detail below.

#### ***Change at the Institutional Level***

Changes at the institutional level are critical for operationalizing, broadening, and sustaining changes in professional culture and new approaches to teaching and learning. At Bank Street, new tools and instruments have provided sources of common, aggregated data on Bank Street candidates and graduates. These include comprehensive entry, exit and alumni surveys that are now administered annually; the Continuum of Teaching, a rubric for assessing clinical practice; and the SOLO (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome, Biggs & Collis, 1982) framework for assessing the cognitive complexity of teaching assignments and student work samples. While we were unable to match student test scores to individual graduates, the SOLO framework did provide rich discussions of candidate/graduate teaching and student learning. For example, our data indicate that while graduates often express a goal of helping students achieve 'deeper' levels of cognitive understanding, their assignments as well as samples of student work are consistent with more 'surface' levels of reproduction and recall. Finally, the College has created an Office of Institutional Research, which supports the efforts of the College and its various programs to gather and organize data for decision-making, and the demand for these services and supports has been substantial. Faculty and administrators have inundated this office with requests for survey data to help answer a host of programmatic questions and have sought a range of "outcome" measures.

Additionally, new opportunities for collaborative, evidence-driven work have been put into place. The development of the Continuum of Teaching, the OIS (Observation and Interview Study) and SOLO projects, the Induction Committee work, and the 5Fridays seminars have provided new opportunities for faculty and administrators from all departments and divisions to work with each other in structured settings with a focus on data about teaching and learning. There is some indication that established meetings (i.e., division meetings that include cross-department attendance) are beginning to include examinations of data in their agendas, as well. For example, examination of exit survey data led two departments to highlight candidates' need for greater support in meeting the needs of English Language Learners. Discussion of how to meet this need is taking place in monthly departmental meetings. In this way, even without continued funding, the 5Fridays experiment/experience of gathering together to examine data and discuss its implications has been institutionalized within an existing structure.

These collaborative efforts on relevant tasks have provided new institutional

opportunities for professional growth and renewal. Faculty engagement in developing the Continuum led to adopting elements of it to respond to a state accreditation mandate for common standards, assessments, and rubrics by program. While some faculty have expressed reservations about this more formal assessment process (particularly in supervised field work) and questions can be raised about its use, faculty are beginning to discuss the value of such data gathering and are revisiting its contextual origins in the TNE work.

Several faculty members described the work of TNE as an important opportunity for professional enhancement. Despite high demands on their time, faculty involved in TNE found that the professional growth and individual renewal it offered was well worth the time invested. Additional sources of knowledge and expertise have been integrated into the on-going operations of Bank Street College. Arts and Sciences (A&S) partners helped faculty identify subject matter knowledge gaps in candidates and graduates and they contributed substantively to the development of the Continuum of Teaching. A new course offered through a partnership with the American Museum of Natural History is helping to address gaps in candidates' subject matter knowledge in science, and continued involvement of A&S partners in the work of Bank Street has also been institutionalized. School for Children faculty who participated in building the continuum are enacting a similar process to construct an instrument to support and assess the development of social responsibility in children.

An increased focus on preparing candidates for urban, high-needs schools has begun as well. There is a much broader understanding among Bank Street educators of the high proportion of students interested in teaching in high-needs, urban schools. Progress has been made in not only discussing the needs of these candidates, but also in beginning to formally establish an emphasis on Urban Education at Bank Street.

## **Conclusions**

In all likelihood, the pressure on programs of teacher preparation to demonstrate their effectiveness—on the practices of their graduates and ultimately the work of the pupils in the classrooms of those graduates—will continue to mount in the foreseeable future. Consequently, as a field we must not only enhance our tools for assessing such outcomes, but also pay close attention to the means by which we will utilize such information to shape and inform our own professional programs and practices. In contemplating the results of one rich, yet challenging experience of designing and implementing a complex, multi-year initiative to foster institutional growth and renewal based on evidence of the efficacy of our work, we have attempted to address the challenges and opportunities provided by this experience. Our hope is that colleagues might draw from our experience in developing roadmaps to fit their own local contexts. Ultimately, we have a great deal of terrain left to cover as a field; we believe our best hope for success lies in working together in this effort.

## References

- Biber, B. (1959). Premature structuring as a deterrent to creativity. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 29, 280-90.
- Biggs, J., & Collis, K. F. (1982). *Evaluating the quality of learning: The SOLO taxonomy*. New York: Academic Press.
- California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (1997). Sacramento, CA. (Retrieved from <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/reports/cstpreport.pdf> on September 12, 2008).
- Carnegie Corporation of New York. (2001). *Teachers for a New Era Prospectus*. New York, NY. (Retrieved from <http://www.teachersforanewera.org/TNEProspectus.pdf> on September 12, 2008).
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). *Studies of excellence in teacher education: Preparation at the graduate level*. Washington, DC: National Committee on Teaching and America's Future, American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Chung, R., & Frelow, F. (2002). Variation in teacher preparation: How well do different pathways prepare teachers to teach? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(4), 286-302.
- Fallon, D. (2006). Improving teacher education through a culture of evidence. Paper presented at the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Teachers Education Accreditation Council. Washington, D.C. (Retrieved from <http://www.teac.org/membership/meetings/Fallon%20remarks.pdf> on September 12, 2008).
- Montgomery, D., & Barry, B. (2007). *The Work of TNE at Bank Street College: Year Four Report*. Unpublished evaluation report prepared by The Center for Teaching Quality. Hillsborough, NC.
- Nager, N., & Shapiro, E. K. (Eds.). (2000). *Revisiting a progressive pedagogy: The developmental-interaction approach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Tharp, R., Estrada, P., Dalton, S., & Yamauchi, L. (2000). *Teaching transformed*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.