

The Underutilized Potential of the Hybrid Educator in Teacher Education

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The hybrid educator is an essential contributor to the development of new public school teachers. A hybrid educator is a college adjunct professor employed full time by a public school system. The role of the hybrid educator involves the navigation of two separate systems in developing new teachers: the university and the public school. This requires working knowledge of the bureaucracies of dual systems in order to successfully interact in both. The hybrid educator is in the unique position of belonging to both institutions. The characteristics of hybrid educators will be identified, examples of their boundary crossings presented, and recommendations to effectively utilize their talents will be offered.

INTRODUCTION

A hybrid educator is, most typically, a college adjunct professor employed full time by a public school system. The hybrid educator has been variously described as

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a “connecting point,” a “boundary spanner,” or “intermediary” between two separate, but parallel streams of purpose, whose “primary role is in one or the other community” (Clark, Foster, Mantle-Bromley, & Associates, 2005).

Clark et al. (2005) describe hybrid educators as “people who work in multiple communities of practice” (p. 7), who “move in and out of multiple spaces” (p. 11) and “across geographical, institutional, and cultural boundaries” (p. 14). On their continuum of “hybrid dimensions” that identifies and ranks the participants in the school/university partnerships from visionaries to practitioners, the work of the hybrid educator is considered that of an “implementing practitioner.” A hybrid educator is a “school faculty member working as a college adjunct professor” (Clark et al., 2005, p. 3).

The authors of this article work together at Lehman College, the City University of New York, in the Department of Education; one author is a full-time tenure track assistant professor, the other a part-time college adjunct professor who works full time for the public school system. Our relationship has evolved over the years through examination and discussion of our work in preparing teachers for public school settings. Our collaboration has led us to reexamine both of our roles in supporting future educators to meet the needs of urban students in a multicultural society.

We intend to examine the role of the hybrid educator and the contributions they can make to the development of teachers. This will include a discussion of the tensions between higher education and urban public education. An attempt to identify characteristics and qualifications of the successful hybrid educator and the challenges that inhibit a collaborative interface between both institutions will be examined. Recommendations to more effectively utilize the singular talents of the hybrid educator will be offered.

CONTEXT OF THE TERM HYBRID EDUCATOR

Goodlad’s (1994, 2004) definition situates the term “hybrid educator” within a cross-institutional milieu. The role of the hybrid educator is complex and involves the navigation of two separate and often competing systems in developing and supporting new teachers in urban public schools. This requires a working knowledge of the bureaucracies of both systems and the ability to traverse the separate, yet parallel streams of purpose. The hybrid educator is in the unique position of belonging to both groups, while participating in one more fully than the other.

Greg works between these two worlds. During the day, he works as a supervisor in the Bronx for the New York City Department of Education. Three evenings a week, he works as a college adjunct professor for Lehman College, where he teaches methods and foundations courses to graduate students. This bifurcated professional existence is common to the “hybrid educator” (Goodlad, 1984, 2004).

Goodlad (1994, 2004) describes the relationship between public school systems and colleges of education as a “one-way relationship” with “near separation.” He speculates that the “necessary joining will not come easily and that we must work at it intensively and with great care” (p. 103). He goes on to further explicate that “school systems and universities are not cut from the same cultural cloth” and that the “norms, roles, and expectations in each of these realms could not be more different” (p. 109). Over the years, they have rarely come together to share the total obligation of a teacher education program (Goodlad, 1994). Like Fullan (2002), we believe that a quality approach to teacher preparation involves solid PK-12-postsecondary partnerships.

Graduate preservice students describe the sense of disjunction they feel between course work and their classroom experiences, and feelings of fragmentation between the academic and professional. To their graduate students, full time, tenure-track professors seem removed from the school system as they talk about theory without presenting practical strategies for implementation or practice. The most oft quoted student remark is that “no one shows them how to do it” (see, for example, Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 30). This reveals a perceived lack of “expertise” on the part of full-time professors in helping students engage with praxis.

Goodlad (1994) insists that the study of practice needs to be incorporated into teacher preparation programs. This is the component most graduate students identify as missing. Praxis is crucial to the renewal of education. Clark et al. (2005) emphasize that “there must be clear connections between theory and practice, and that those who develop theory and those who practice in the field must work closely together” (p. 15). This is clearly within the purview of the hybrid educator. It is the work of the hybrid educator to serve as a conduit between the colleges of education and the public school settings.

Nowhere is the duality of teacher education more apparent than in the classrooms of the first year preservice teacher graduate student. Graduate students continually comment on the divergence between theory and practice. They are unable to see the connections when they are facing the demands of daily practice with their students in the classroom. The discussions about Dewey, Freire, Vygotsky, and developmentally-appropriate practice appear to be of little practical use in getting students “under control,” dealing with the increasing administrative details associated with their jobs, and preparing students for the rigor of standardized exams.

Classroom management, rules and routines, accountability and standardized testing, and interpersonal relationships with colleagues and administration are the primary concerns of preservice teachers. Their biggest concerns center around issues of management, discipline, and control. Through discussion, instructors should be able to situate these pressing issues within a larger social context concerning democracy and community.

CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALIFICATIONS

As has been suggested, the college adjunct professor is a professional with bifurcated responsibilities who exhibits “boundary-spanning hybrid behaviors” (Clark et al., 2005, p. 2). “One of the challenges for hybrid educators in schools and universities is to understand the appropriate roles for each to play” (Clark et al., 2005, p. 7). To be effective, hybrid educators must be flexible since they are constantly moving in and out of diverse environments. They need to be master teachers with the ability to clearly demonstrate the relationship of theory to practice. They must possess good interpersonal skills as they move across institutional boundaries and must be able to relate effectively with students, teachers, parents, and colleges of education faculty and staff. They must possess a working knowledge of both bureaucracies in order to fully support their students in navigating the terrain between the college and the landscape of their own classrooms. They need to work collaboratively with all members involved in the development of new teachers. Finally, they need to be advocates for communities, schools, teachers, students, and their families.

OBSTACLES

Tension continues to exist between urban public schools and colleges of education. Students perceive that their needs to deal with the contemporary challenges in the urban classroom are not being met. They continue to perceive a “disjunction” between the two institutions. There are very real cultural differences between the urban public schools and colleges of education. There is a perceived hierarchy that continues to limit the school-university partnership. School personnel are not perceived as experts, and the colleges of education faculty are still assumed to be in a position of “authority” and possessors of “critical knowledge.”

The work of the hybrid educator often appears to be done in isolation. As a college adjunct professor, the hybrid educator may feel unconnected to the larger mission of the colleges of education. There are few opportunities to become enculturated into the values and practices of the college or university. Hybrid educators also have limited contact with full time faculty members who might assist with becoming more integrated within the colleges of education structure.

There are also practical issues such as calendar and time structures that exacerbate this sense of disjunction. Many schools now incorporate extended school days in their calendar. Yet, college classes continue to be rigidly scheduled, making it nearly impossible for teachers and adjunct instructors to arrive to campus on time. The structure of the colleges of education is unable to make accommodations to the working needs of their graduate students.

These differences in context, characteristics, and qualifications lead to different perspectives, understandings, and purposes held by those in the different roles.

BACKGROUND PERSPECTIVES

Greg, the College Adjunct Professor

As a supervisor, Greg visits many schools and frequently encounters some of the graduate students he teaches in the college setting. In this way, he has come to understand the sense of dissociation they experience from their academic learning in college course work to the daily demands of their classrooms. He is also aware of the pressures of academic life, having been employed in a tenure track position for two years at a private four-year college, and is familiar with the requirements of committee work, academic advising, research and publication, as well as the burden of a full teaching load.

As a hybrid educator, he has been able to bridge the gap between institutions of higher education and public education. His presence in both worlds gives him a credibility he feels he would otherwise lack. When graduate students see him in their school buildings carrying out day to day tasks just like them, they are able to develop a bond with him that full-time professors may find difficult to establish. Their engagement in their college course work is then shaped by their perceptions of Greg. They feel more able to discuss their immediate needs and concerns in the context of their course work. This helps establish a community of learners both in the work setting and the college classroom. Greg's presence in both worlds implicitly communicates to his students the ability to help them to connect curricular theory to their instructional practice.

In a real sense, he is both an observer and a participant in two spheres of teacher development. Sarason (1982) explains that the observer's inability to be neutral is due to being directly involved in the structure, which leads to perception and judgment becoming "incomplete, selective, and distorted." From this perspective, Greg is part of two competing structures. It is in the context of critical theory aimed at "self conscious critique and the need to develop a discourse of social transformation" (Giroux, 1983, p. 109) that Greg examines his participation in both spheres. It leads him to speculate on the larger implications that lie within the boundary spanning he does, as he engages in critical self-reflection, by examining his function and role within and across the institutional boundaries of the school-university partnership.

Having recently recognized the significance of his work in nurturing and developing the practice of new educational professionals, Greg began to comprehend the necessity of ongoing communication across institutional boundaries. He felt the need to more fully engage in discourse with the college of education where he works. He started communicating to Jeanne about the immediate needs and concerns of his students in the professional milieu. He began to share observations about his students' experiences in their classrooms. In this way, Greg began to more fully advocate for his students as he articulated a shared purpose in the work they pursue together.

Jeanne, the College Program Coordinator

Jeanne is an assistant professor and the program coordinator of the Graduate Childhood Program at Lehman College, City University of New York. In her role, she is responsible for creating a National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accredited teacher certification program for elementary school teachers. A large part of this role is to find adjunct faculty to teach all of the required certification courses. As with most colleges and universities, Lehman College limits the tenure track lines for full time faculty and therefore, by necessity, Jeanne is required to staff a percentage of the program with adjunct educators. Based on Goodlad's (1994, 2004) model of hybrid educators, she has sought to transform the role of the adjunct in order to build a stronger community among the full time faculty and hybrid educators.

Fueled by her desire to move beyond trying to "fill a spot" with an adjunct reading methods instructor for a course that meets on Tuesdays from 4:15–7:05 p.m., she started to reach out to build a stronger relationship with her adjunct instructors. There is a real difference between hiring someone who can teach a subject and hiring a hybrid educator who can become integrated into the Graduate Program. Currently, all of Lehman's adjunct instructors are, to some degree, hybrid educators in the sense that they all teach in the public school system as well as at Lehman College. However, Jeanne is looking to form a deeper relationship with the hybrid faculty and strengthen the ties of this often unacknowledged community to the full time faculty.

There have been many advantages in moving towards this model. The duality in teacher education between sharing educational theory and practice remains a great challenge. In her experience, Jeanne has found that hiring hybrid educators allows for the merging of the theory into practice in a model of praxis that informs students' work in their classrooms. In this context, Lehman's greatest resource into the bureaucracy of the New York City public schools is its hybrid educators who themselves are employees of the school system. As they migrate to our campus to teach the preservice teachers, they bring a wealth of information about the informal and hidden curriculum of being a teacher in New York City.

As Lehman College has tried to establish a cohesive mentoring community throughout its certification program, it has become apparent that the hybrid educators in the field are essential to supporting this concept. All graduate students are formally supervised in order to become certified. However, since hybrid educators work in schools on a daily basis, they provide informal supervision and socialization of students into a community of teaching and learning. As preservice teachers complete observation hours and then participate in student teaching, they can be informally mentored by the hybrid educators that they encounter in their public schools. As a mentoring community, Lehman College can extend its reach into the public school system by recruiting and cultivating a cadre of hybrid educators.

A SERIES OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS

The hybrid educator strengthens relationships between colleges of education and public schools and contributes to the development of teachers in both university and school settings. The hybrid educator acts as a conduit between theory and practice and assists in the socialization and induction process of new teachers.

Several of Greg's experiences underscore the need for continuity between the college and the urban public school system. Through ongoing discussion, Jeanne and Greg have examined the impact of the experiences of the students in their work settings and the critical implications they have for colleges of education.

SCHOOL VISITS SUPPORT COLLEGE COURSE WORK

One such experience relates to an introductory course in literacy methods that Greg teaches. During a typical school visit, he stopped to visit the classroom of one of his graduate students who was conducting a writing workshop. During this visit, he noticed that the teacher was having difficulty integrating the components of the workshop methodology into her classroom because she lacked simple classroom management routines. As a result of her discussion with Greg, the teacher was able to identify and modify simple classroom strategies involving student movement and assignment to centers. She came to understand that in order to conference with individual students and small groups, she needed to prepare independent and collaborative literacy activities work that students could do while she was conferencing. Greg advised the teacher to consult with her building's literacy coach to obtain additional support. As a result of this incident Greg realized that, although he had mentioned such strategies and suggestions in his class, they did not fully register with many of his students, as they are new, unsure of the actual implementation of procedures, and have only nascent ideas of what effective practices look like.

Another example is another visit Greg made to a school, where he stopped by the classroom of a graduate student who was experiencing severe discontinuity between his own ethical beliefs and the policy of his school. The student explained to Greg that his school's zero tolerance policy concerning the use of inappropriate language was in conflict with his beliefs about dealing with this behavior in his classroom. Through discussion, they were able to untangle the confluence of culture, politics, and curriculum inherent in the school's policy. Greg suggested the teacher outline his priorities and establish rules within his classroom that incorporated his beliefs in the context of the school's policy. As a result, the teacher created a set of class rules that included guidelines on how language should be used. These rules were formulated in collaboration with the class following a discussion about what constitutes appropriate/inappropriate school language. The rules included guidelines that were intended to help the students to communicate more

effectively with each other and that also helped the teacher to establish a sense of order in his room that he felt comfortable implementing. For example, the guidelines included an explanation of how language should never be used to insult or disrespect another student, and that the type of language that might be acceptable in certain situations, such as outside on the playground, was not appropriate for use in the school and the classroom. Creating this set of guidelines with his students reduced the use of inappropriate language in his classroom, so that the school's zero tolerance rule did not have to affect his students.

In this way, the teacher was able to reconcile his ethical beliefs within the rigid constraints of his school's culture through examination of the situation with an informal mentor. If he had relied only on the school's administration for support, he likely would have been referred to the school's zero tolerance rule and the uniform procedure, which clearly had not been effective in his classroom.

SCHOOL CONNECTIONS HELP THE COLLEGE MEET ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

Lehman College, like most colleges of education, is under pressure to meet all of the NCATE requirements. All course offerings need to meet certain standards across the curriculum. Jeanne had Greg assist the College in the NCATE reaccreditation process. This was invaluable to the reaccreditation visit in the spring of 2007. Greg attended Lehman's NCATE planning meetings, wrote part of the Specialized Program Assessment (SPA) report, and was instrumental in collecting data on three of his classes for the final report. Greg was able to express his concerns about areas of the program that he felt were not being adequately addressed, such as revising the research methods classes, developing cross-course uniformity in lesson plan formats, and exposing an inconsistency in the level of student writing in graduate classes. In the open dialog that ensued, the college was able to address his comments to enhance the preparation of our preservice teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through ongoing discussion, Greg and Jeanne have come to realize that for hybrid educators to be effective in their roles of supporting new teachers, there must be ongoing and open channels of communication between both institutional settings. A needs assessment of the hybrid educator should be conducted to determine what structures can be developed across boundaries to support this very necessary work.

Through our collaborative efforts, we have come to believe that the following arrangements might be useful in integrating the hybrid educator more fully into both spheres of teacher education.

- Schools of education would benefit from establishing a system to recruit practitioners from preK-12 public schools. By attracting outstanding

educators and supporting them in the transition to college teaching, schools of education need to establish a conduit between theory and practice that will serve to enhance preservice student praxis. This will also extend the reach of the college into the community.

- Adjuncts should be paired with full time faculty members in a mentoring relationship to help familiarize them with the values and practices of the schools of education. The authors were able to establish this relationship on their own. But to ensure the institutionalization of such relationships, the college must establish a formal framework through which the vision of a mentoring community can be more clearly articulated.
- Hybrid educators need to receive feedback on “how well they are doing at moving the school-university partnership closer to its vision” (Clark et al., 2005, p. 14). In addition to observing adjuncts in their college classrooms, it would also be helpful to meet and observe them in the public school domain. Additionally, a cross-institutional committee could be established of participants from both institutions that meets on an on-going basis to discuss the immediate needs of students in the field. In this way, two-way institutional feedback becomes a consistent and integral feature of the school and college partnership.

CONCLUSION

As schools of education strive to more fully prepare new teachers to successfully meet the daily challenges they face in the urban classroom, they must begin to utilize more fully the special expertise of the hybrid educator. Open channels of communication need to be established between institutions of higher education and adjunct faculty which are employed in public school systems. A forum to help the faculty assess and meet the needs of their graduate students could be established. The insights of the adjunct faculty into the day to day struggles that new teachers face could be a great help in informing and modifying the teacher education curriculum.

The hybrid educator is “engaged in work that strengthens the progress of more than one community of practice, even though his or her role is primarily in one or the other community” (Clark et al., 2005, p. 11). For hybrid educators to effectively nurture and support new teachers, they should be called upon to articulate their own vision to both communities and help both institutions design support structures that help new teachers to develop the practical skills that will enable them to better meet the needs of their students, and in turn, promote positive social change in urban schools.

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