

## Teachers Developing Teachers: A New Resource for the Challenges Ahead

By Eugene E. Garcia & Jerilyn R. Harris

You are the giver of a lifelong gift. An impulse; an enduring tool; a prolific engine called learning. The infectious transfer of enthusiasm. A glitter implosion...the exhilaration of thinking! And because the price can be so very high, there are few who risk the full cost of caring, genuinely caring, as you do. It is your commitment, your sacrifice, your courage through which many ultimately realize the fruits of your sterling sheer goodness, and your special talent for sharing. So please know, and remember always, that your priceless loving gift, boundless, limitless, you make their future...and ours. It is for this that forever, always, the world will be in your debt. For you are the giver of a lifelong gift. And we...we thank you; we...salute you, teacher. (F.X. Trujillo, 1989)

Two independent but significant reports by the United States Department of Education, *The Hispanic Dropout Report* and the *Third International Math and Science Study* (TIMSS), published in February of 1998, serve as a wake up call for the education community.

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*Eugene E. Garcia is a professor and dean and Jerilyn R. Harris is interim director of teacher education, both with the Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley.*

In 1996 of all 18 through 24 year-old Hispanics, just 61.8 percent had completed high school—that is, they had acquired either a high-school diploma (56.5 percent) or an alternative certificate such as a GED (5.3 percent) (McMillen & Kaufman, 1996, Table 14, p 18). In contrast, 90.7 percent of all white, non-Hispanic and 83.3 percent of all black, non-Hispanic

18 through 24 years old had completed high school. Most alarming is the finding that there is no significant difference in the rate of high school completion for Hispanics over the last 30 years.

According to the TIMSS, 12th graders in the United States outperformed only two (Cyprus and South Africa) of the 21 participating countries in math and science. Asian countries chose not to participate in the TIMSS study. On the physics assessment, U.S. students were outperformed by those in 14 countries, were the same as those in one country, and outperformed those in no participating countries.

For a society that bases its economic future on a precarious technological and scientific supremacy maintained by a scientifically literate work force, the results of these studies are ominous. The centrality of the teacher-student relationship, particularly for Latino immigrant students who are marginalized at school, becomes a crucial factor for any student's academic success (Nieto, 1994). When we acknowledge the success of exemplary programs in producing well prepared math and science students, the "hero" is the teacher. Unfortunately, when society collectively points at the cause of under achievement, particularly in a state such as California with its large Latino population, the "culprit" is the teacher as well.

If teachers' expectations are the single most important determinant in shaping students' expectations of their own future (Muller 1996), then the perception of the teacher by both the student and by society as a whole becomes more relevant. If teachers are seen as poorly prepared, lacking content mastery, technologically illiterate, burned out, using dated practices, uncaring, or even racist—the sole opportunity for academic success for many students disappears. The colleges or universities which prepare teachers share in culpability and are often accused of promoting unsuccessful theory and outdated methods that fail to meet the needs of today's students. The prophecy of the low status assigned to teachers in general is realized when teachers queue to access a solitary telephone or teacher educators struggle to preserve their programs from the budget ax.

If the teacher is viewed as a true professional, then those that are particularly successful should be recognized for what they do best—prepare the students in their classrooms for the future. Teachers who are facile in balancing high expectations with a competent and caring attitude which prevents the alienation of all students have much to offer to their colleagues. A reconsideration of the value of veteran teachers with years of success in the classroom, coupled with an integration of theory and practice in the training of beginning teachers, can enable us to use our available resources even more efficiently. The *key* to this reconsideration is the conservation and utilization of the wealth of knowledge of our current pool of veteran teachers, a resource seldom factored into the teacher training equation.

California urban schools provide a unique laboratory for utilizing our teacher pool. The richness of linguistic and cultural diversity converge in cities where the teacher shortage is acute—61.5 percent of these schools have language minority students and lack bilingual, mathematics, and science teachers. The sheer numbers

that California faces as a result of such factors as lower-grade class-size reduction, 25 percent of its current teachers lacking regular credentials, a projected school enrollment growth of 12 percent over the next six years, and an aging teaching force with one in six teachers over 55 necessitate a revision of methods of teacher preparation. If the tension between theory and practice can be put aside, alternative certification provides a powerful new route to prepare the large numbers of educators necessary to staff burgeoning classes in California.

A Darwinian selection procedure allows far too few exemplary veteran teachers to become student teacher supervisors and teacher educators. To quote Randy Souviney from the University of California, San Diego, "we are eating our seed corn." Training for the supervising teacher as a researcher or in the skills necessary to become a teacher educator is missing in our system.

The experience of our veteran teachers, acquired through decades of success in the classroom, appears destined to retire with them. Many of these veterans, rich with content knowledge and instructional methods useful to the beginning teacher, occupy classrooms in the same schools and buildings as uncredentialed teachers. With the exception of the occasional helping hand to a struggling colleague, the time to train or mentor a neophyte teacher is not available during the school day. In most schools the connection between teacher and higher educator is rare.

Recent research (Garcia, 1996) has focused on teachers who were consistently identified at the school site level and at the district level as "effective." In these classrooms, approximately 50-to-70 percent of the students were non-English speakers and, although the remaining students were English dominant, they represented several ethnic groups. These teachers had an average of 7.1 years experience as teachers. Therefore, these were not novice teachers with little teaching experience. In addition, they reported that they routinely participated in staff development efforts, either taking courses or attending workshops on techniques that they wanted to implement in their classrooms. Some of the workshops, sponsored by the school or district, were mandatory. These teachers also participated in courses that they sought out and financed on their own, some related to language development and others related to pedagogy and curriculum.

These teachers were quite knowledgeable and articulate with regard to the instructional philosophies which guided them. They communicated such an orientation quite coherently in their interviews. They never hesitated in addressing "why" they were using specific instructional techniques and usually couched these explanations in terms of a theoretical position regarding their role with respect to teaching and "how" students learn. Principals and parents also commented on these teachers' abilities to communicate effectively the rationales for their instructional techniques. One principal commented, "She's always able to defend her work with her students. When she first came here, I didn't agree with all that she was doing, and sometimes I still do not agree. But she always helps me understand why she is doing what she is doing. I respect her for that. She is not a 'recipe teacher'" (Garcia,

1991).

A parent commented with regard to her children's journal writing: "I didn't understand why she was letting \_\_\_\_\_ make all these spelling mistakes. It annoyed me. During the teacher-parent conference, she showed me the progress \_\_\_\_\_ was making. His spelling was getting better without taking a spelling test every week. I was surprised. She knows what she's doing" (Pease-Alvarez, Garcia, & Espinosa, 1991). A parent concerned about his daughter not being competent in English in the third grade indicated, "Me explicó que aprendiendo en español le va a ayudar a mi hija hablar mejor el inglés. Dice bien, porque mi hijo que vino conmigo de Mexico, hablando y escribiendo en español, aprendio el." Moreover, these teachers seemed to be quite competent in the content areas: The upper elementary teachers who were instructing students in fractions had a solid and confident understanding of fractions. They did not seem to be just "one step ahead of the students."

These are the same teachers that can help us meet the challenges ahead. If we genuinely teach as we learn, why can't the spirit of cooperation and collaboration enable higher educators to provide the scaffolding to support veteran teachers in public schools so they can collectively help to induct new teachers? An internship model, with the higher educator joining in a partnership with the exemplary classroom teacher to provide both credentialing requirements and relevant pedagogy—concurrent with paid teaching assignments—is often discussed but then abandoned. The missing link for both parties is time. Interest in education by business and foundations may provide the funding, on an interim basis, for a bold new way of training teachers using existing resources. Universities and school districts must then determine, on the longer term, what is the cost to society of unprepared teachers who struggle and fail children?

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