

Guest Editor's Introduction: The Good Student Teaching Placement

By Frances O'Connell Rust

In the fall of 1997, a discussion of the question, "What makes a good student teaching placement?" began between Anna Ershler Richert, Vicki Kubler LaBoskey, and me. Like most teacher educators, each of us had theories—theories derived from research and from our own lived experience as pre- and in-service teachers—but as our conversation continued over time, we came to recognize that there were differences among us and that some of these were worth looking into more deeply. While each of us saw student teaching as the linchpin of our teacher education programs, we wondered whether our colleagues around the country agreed with us about its

importance, and we wondered how they might answer the question. We expanded the conversation to include teacher educators in other urban areas: Mari Koerner, then associate dean of the School of Education at Roosevelt University in Chicago and her colleague, Frances Baumgartner; Michelle Reich, then director of Student Teaching Services at New York University; and Lily Orland-Barak of the University of Haifa.

As the conversation expanded, new, related questions emerged. We wondered how long student teaching should last—one, two, three, four semesters? More? We asked whether student teachers' needs change over time, and, if so, whether their changing

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needs have implications for a good placement. In programs where there are multiple student teaching placements, we wondered whether the placements should all be of the same character. Further, we wondered whether there are differences between what undergraduates and graduate students want and need in a student teaching placement. We focused on the setting—urban, suburban, rural—and wondered about its influence on student teaching and on teacher education itself. We discussed institutional support structures and asked what types of support student teachers need, how these needs change with classroom experience, what roles cooperating teachers and university supervisors play in student teaching, and what role the teacher education institution itself might play.

In the spring of 1999 at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Montreal, we made our first presentation of the research we had developed around the question of a good student teaching placement. Two of the papers included in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* are drawn from that first symposium. One is LaBoskey and Richert's piece, "Identifying Good Student Teaching Placements: A Programmatic Perspective" in which the authors present the Mills College program and begin to address the question of appropriateness of a placement in relation to the aims and ideology of the teacher education program. The other is a study by Koerner and myself, "Exploring Roles in Student Teaching Placements," that draws on the perceptions of the key participants in student teaching: student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university-based supervisors. Both were chosen because they address one of the critical issues of teacher education—the ways in which the core tenets and values of a teacher education program are interpreted in the field.

Ken Zeichner provided a critique of the papers of the first AERA symposium. His paper, "Beyond Traditional Structures of Student Teaching," is included here because it is such an apt synthesis of our thinking at the time and because it has served as a catalyst for our subsequent work in this area. Helen Freidus joined the symposium in our second year. Her work on the mentoring process at Bank Street College has helped us to surface some of the critical aspects of the relationship between mentor and student teacher and to explore more fully the role of the university supervisor. Christopher Clark served as our AERA discussant in 2000, our second year, and his paper, "New Questions about Student Teaching," appears here, too. Though Freidus' paper is the only one of the studies here that Clark responded to then, his message about interpersonal support for all the participants in the student teaching experience is critical, and the challenge he lays down to consider the implications of our basic premises about student teaching for each of the participants in the enterprise seems universally appropriate.

The work of Clive Beck and Clare Kosnik of the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education came to our attention in 2001. Their paper, "Components of a Good Practicum Placement: Student Teacher Perceptions," provides an interesting point of comparison as well as intersection with what is assumed to be common practice

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across the United States. Orland-Barak's paper, "The Impact of the Assessment of Practice Teaching on Beginning Teaching: Learning To Ask Different Questions," raises one of the most important and troubling issues facing teacher educators—how do we know whether our programs make a difference? As in LaBoskey and Richert's study, the data of these papers incorporates the voices of preservice and new teachers in powerful ways. What we learn from these papers is that there are more commonplaces in teacher education and student teaching across the globe than we might have thought and that the differences are noteworthy for what they help us to see.

Finally, we have included here a piece of teacher research. It is a paper done by Penny Arnold, a MetLife Fellow in the Teachers Network Policy Institute, who was then a secondary English teacher at the Manhattan Day and Night High School. Arnold began a study of her work as a cooperating teacher and expanded it to include five of her colleagues who were also working with student teachers. Her paper provides some surprising insights about the ways in which kids interpret the work of teacher education as well as the role it can play for cooperating teachers.

Our inquiry spans almost four years. Each year, we have built upon and added to what was done the year before. Our focus has moved from studying our programs (1999), the work of supervisors and mentors (2000), and the assessment of student teaching (2001) to reflecting on the adequacy and appropriateness of this line of inquiry and determining its usefulness and importance to the work of teacher education. For the most part, our studies are qualitative. They aim at uncovering the subtle and complex interplay of people, ways of knowing, and institutional contexts that shape the work of teacher educators and student teachers in school settings.

We have found that our inquiry has given us a new set of lenses for assessing various components of our teacher education programs. For example, the purposeful effort to capture the voices of student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors that is clearly evident in these studies has enabled all of us to look more carefully at the ways in which our programs are articulated in the field through our students and our colleagues—university-based supervisors and cooperating teachers. That we need to work more closely with the latter is not new news, however, the critical role they play in articulating and translating the teacher education program and the directions in which these collaborations might go are new. As Zeichner suggests here, reshaping teacher education will most certainly require a radical shift in the priorities and reward systems of universities vis-à-vis relationships with our supervisors and with the field.

What have we learned? This multi-year inquiry has enabled us to answer some of our initial questions and has helped us to push beneath the surface of others. We have learned that consistency matters and that achieving it across teacher education programs requires not only looking carefully at the articulation of courses, course activities, and course content, but also working in thoughtful, persuasive, and supportive ways with our front-line colleagues—university-based supervisors and cooperating teachers. We have learned that the suitability of a student teaching

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placement depends on a variety of factors including student teachers' interpretations and understandings of their teacher education coursework, their readiness to take initiative, to work with other adults, and to assume responsibility for curricular and instructional decisions, and the synchrony between the values of the teacher education program and the pedagogical practices of the school site. We have learned that the duration of student teaching placements matters—longer than eight weeks is better; more than one placement is better still. We have learned that the size of the teacher education program can be a factor in terms of the articulation of program goals beyond university courses and in enabling concerns in the field to be heard in the academy. There is more. Read on!

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