

Editor's Introduction: Communities of Practice

What is and/or what should be the most important commitments we make as teacher educators? To whom? For what purposes? And, in what ways?

In the recently released book, *What it Means to be a Teacher: The Reality and Gift of Teaching*, author Michael Gose looks back over a long career and posits sage-like advocacy for what it means for teachers to think of themselves as necessarily independent from the ways the institution of schooling defines teachers' roles. Many teachers at some point in their careers wrestle with the dilemma of how best to respond to their inner-driven moral imperatives, oftentimes at odds with their perceived roles and sense of professional responsibilities in a school system. Gose writes directly to what is truly at the heart of the learning experience, minimizing the importance of schooling structures that have little to do with education. His book speaks to those of us in the teacher education profession about the ways in which we too often get caught up in responding to others' "reforms" and redirects our attention to the essence of what really matters, while embodying Elliott Eisner's (1994) notion of "educational connoisseurship."

Ken Saltman's new book, *Capitalizing on Disaster: Taking and Breaking Public Schools*, examines through three case studies current efforts to privatize and commercialize public schools. Saltman analyzes the relationship between neo-liberal market capitalism and overt corporate-based attempts to realize great profits from the public school sector by influencing school policies. Both Hurricane Katrina and the war in Iraq represent ground zero. Natural disasters, wars, and inner city poverty are particularly vulnerable to private sector take-over of public schools. Renaissance 2010 and *No Child Left Behind* have resulted in disinvestment in Chicago's public schools and simultaneously opened the door to for-profit educational management organizations. Saltman signals a warning of what is to come when the "public" in public education is sacrificed for business models of running schools.

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In *Trivializing Teacher Education*, Dale Johnson and fellow co-authors provide a critical analysis of the National Council on the Accreditation of Teachers (NCATE) and reveal disturbing trends associated with over-use of power and access to schools and colleges of education held hostage by a corporate-political agenda, while also failing to link standards with research-based knowledge. Perhaps widely unknown among much of the teacher education community is the lack of empirical evidence provided by NCATE to support claims that partner institutions are preparing more effective teachers than non-NCATE accredited programs. The authors beg the question, is a teacher prepared at an NCATE accredited teacher preparation program more highly qualified than those prepared in non-NCATE accredited programs? Evidence does suggest that NCATE is masterful at self-promotion, marketing, and aligning itself with policymakers and corporate-minded philosophy. The authors urge teacher educators to ask critical questions necessary for better understanding accreditation processes, including who has what to gain and who has what to lose.

I have noted the three books above, each published in 2007, in order to provide some contextual grounding relative to the articles appearing in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, which represent the professional communities of reflective practice to which we all belong. How we respond to the increasing pressures from legislated policies will determine the directions in which future teachers will be prepared.

This Winter 2008 issue opens with "Beyond Assessment: Performance Assessments in Teacher Education" by Ruth R. Chung. In this article, Chung provides the results of her mixed-methods study on the promotion of teacher learning grounded in Schon's concept of "reflection in action. In response to California's Senate Bill 2042 stipulations for Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs), teacher preparation programs had two options. One, they could administer the TPAs as jointly developed by the state and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), or, two, develop their own teacher performance assessments to address mandated standards. A number of universities joined together to form a consortium aimed at creating a distinctive assessment system that has come to be known as the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT). The subsequent activities of the consortium offer an example of proactive response to legislated reform and signal a research-based approach to furthering reflective practice. The study suggests thoughtfully implemented teacher performance assessments contribute in valuable ways toward the professional preparation of teachers.

Jonathan R. Brown, Lisbeth J. Brown, and Courtney L. Brown follow with "Signs, Signs, Everywhere There's Signs . . . and the Sign Says: You Got to Have a PRAXIS II Membership Card to Get Inside." The authors' present the results of their quantitative study on the predictive factors associated with the PRAXIS II. The research question in this study was, "are measured test scores that teacher candidates demonstrate prior to and during their teacher preparation programs predictors of the legislatively mandated PRAXIS II test scores?"

Susan O'Hara and Robert H. Pritchard in "Meeting the Challenge of Diversity:

Professional Development for Teacher Educators” report the findings of their study of the ways in which California’s SB 2042 requirements are met through professional development programs in the California State University system. As California becomes increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, teacher education programs are being challenged to prepare teachers to meet the learning needs of this growing population. The authors provide a case study of one teacher education department and their commitment to preparing teachers to teach all students. The results of their study offer valuable insight into the dynamics associated with self directed professional development aimed at achieving a common goal.

In “Critical and Transformative Practices in Professional Learning Communities,” Laura Servage offers another example, this time in Alberta, Canada, of how professional learning communities have worked collaboratively toward creatively meeting legislated mandates while transforming themselves and their programs.

Emily J. Klein follows with “Learning, Unlearning, and Relearning: Lessons from One School’s Approach to Creating and Sustaining Learning Communities.” In this study, Klein examines how a radical alternative to traditional schools have transformed how communities view education and offers insights into dramatically different notions of teacher learning. The Big Picture schools have been growing since their inception in Rhode Island in the mid-1990s and are based on the philosophy that students learn best when they are engaged in real work that they feel passionately about. The underlying belief is that all knowledge is interconnected and that students will need to learn about how seemingly disparate subject matter disciplines are used in order to solve real world problems. Klein’s study is the result of two years of immersion in Big Picture Company schools. The author, like Michael Gose, has come to view teaching and learning in substantially different ways that focus directly on “one kid at a time.”

Continuing with the theme of professional development, Tamara Nelson and David Slavit offer “Supported Teacher Collaborative Inquiry.” In this piece the authors examine the dynamics of collaborative inquiry through an ongoing professional development project using Fullan’s framework of reculturing. The authors provide yet another example in this issue of communities of dedicated professionals responding to both exterior and interior forces of change.

In “Fostering Preservice Reflection through Response Journals,” Icy Lee examines the intersection between initial beliefs about teaching and reflective journaling as a vehicle for professional transformation. The author provides the results of a study aimed at understanding the ways in which secondary English teachers in Hong Kong developed more sophisticated representations of their work based on reflective journal writing.

A team of authors, Cynthia C. Griffin, Karen L. Kilgore, Judith A. Winn, and Amy Otis-Wilborn, present the results of their study, “First-Year Special Educators’ Relationships with Their General Education Colleagues.” Drawing from the extensive literature on novice teachers’ first year experiences, the authors designed

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their study to explore first year special education teachers as they came to integrate themselves into a general education faculty environment. Findings suggest special educators experience very different sets of circumstances than their regular classroom colleagues in their first years on a school faculty. The authors then present a set of most useful implications for teacher education programs preparing special educators to work alongside fellow teachers in school contexts. Consistent with other articles in this issue, teacher collaboration is key to achieving success.

Ron Zambo and Debby Zambo follow with "The Impact of Professional Development in Mathematics on Teachers' Individual and Collective Efficacy: The Stigma of Underperforming." In this article the authors present the results of their inquiry focused on professional development and teacher competence relative to the teaching of mathematics.

In "... But I Love Children: Changing Elementary Teacher Candidates' Conceptions of the Qualities of Effective Teachers," Nancy Brown, Pamela Morehead, and Julia B. Smith address the nexus between federal and state definitions of "highly qualified teachers" and the characteristics teachers use to describe good teachers. The authors found in their study how interconnected the emerging research surrounding teacher quality is with developing notions of teacher identity.

In closing the Winter 2008 issue, Mieke Lunenberg and Mary Lynn Hamilton present "Threading a Golden Chain: An Attempt to Find Our Identities as Teacher Educators." The authors follow the theme of describing and analyzing aspects of teacher identity through their own collaborative and introspective study of themselves as teacher educators. This fascinating self-study offers the reader powerful ways to think about their own identity, and how that identity is reflected in the lifelong process of learning to teach.

This issue is comprised of articles that speak to the broader contexts in which teachers and teacher educators work. However immersed we are at any given time in local, regional, and national educational policies, it is incumbent upon the profession that we never lose site of what it means to be a teacher. We can thank authors like Michael Gose for helping remind us of who we are. Thank you for sharing our interest in recognizing the excellent scholarly contributions represented in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*. As always, we look forward to your feedback.

—Thomas Nelson, Editor

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