

Editor's Introduction: Reflective Decision Making through Focused Inquiry

The articles in this Winter 2002 issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* represent scholarly inquiry into deeply embedded interrelationships among teacher educators, prospective teacher candidates, beginning and experienced teachers, and students in K-12 classrooms. Emphasis on transformational learning, collaborative professional development, and reflective constructivism are central to each of the articles included in this issue.

Notions of reflection, reflective practice, and professional reflectivity have become commonplace in the professional lexicon. However, it is imperative that we examine these concepts carefully as they merge with oftentimes conflicting policies that tend to reduce teaching and learning to a simplified form of technical skill development. As teacher education research reveals an increasingly complex environment within which teaching and learning occur, educational policies enacted by non-educators far from the classroom suggest that learning to teach can become an ever more efficiently systemized and bureaucratically standardized process. The language in which educational policies are legislated often lacks an integral connection to situated context and understanding of the myriad interconnections between real people living and working in real learning spaces. Throughout geographically and economically wide-ranging communities there are human beings, diverse as can be imagined, interacting with each other, seeking to understand better the world in which they live, and contemplating the significance of their own personal and collaborative contributions.

Proponents of the current standards movement who appear driven by an aim

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to centralize curriculum decision-making and who seek to hold stakeholders accountable through systematic high stakes testing assume that these efforts will result in a better educated and more productive citizenry. However, context specific conditions, individual aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as intricate tendencies to define identity within communities engaged in socially constructing knowledge, cannot be regulated or centralized through legislation. Policymakers are too often lacking in understanding deeply the contexts in which teaching and learning take place and tend to trivialize the work of those dedicated to more transformational educational ideals.

It is our charge to continue to conduct important scholarly inquiry into the ways in which teaching and learning are conceived both in theory and in practice, and to persist in seeking venues in which to introduce our findings into the policy-making arena. It is work like that represented in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* which requires on-going critical analysis both within and outside our profession in order to more effectively influence educational decision-making at the classroom level. We cannot forget that we are all in the same business, and that business is to ensure a quality education for all children in all classrooms in all communities. Consider the incredible diversity of learners in our schools, and the economic disparity in the neighborhoods in which they live. How can problems associated with such educational inequities possibly be solved in the simplistic ways suggested by current standardization and accountability policies? How best can we, as educational researchers and teacher educators, engage in critical ways of knowing, further stimulating discourse associated with the complexities inherent in the educational endeavor? And, how can we help contribute to policy development in ways that result in a more contextually sensitized approach to the education of our children?

Teacher Education Quarterly is pleased to present the following collection of articles focused on formal inquiry into reflective and collaborative learning environments.

The issue begins with "Collaborative Action Research Projects: Enhancing Preservice Teacher Development in Professional Development Schools" by Tracy C. Rock and Barbara B. Levin. This study focuses on the ways in which preservice teachers learn about practice through action research inquiry. The authors utilize the concept of self in describing how preservice teachers engaged in a series of action research efforts aimed at impacting their sense of professional development.

Kelly Chandler-Olcott follows with "Teacher Research as a Self-Extending System for Practitioners," which highlights the complexities inherent in university-school research partnerships. This study focuses on language arts pedagogical development among a selected group of teachers. The author reveals her personal journey as researcher through five years of collaborative inquiry with teachers and administrators at one elementary school site in Maine.

In "The Characteristics of Effective and Ineffective Teachers," Richard T.

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Walls, Anne H. Nardi, Avril M. von Minden, and Nancy Hoffman present the results of their research study of prospective, novice, and experienced teachers' descriptions of effective and ineffective teachers.

"Changing the Face of Teaching: Preparing Educators for Diverse Settings" by Marta D. Collier addresses historical perspectives on ethnic diversity and why the number of teachers of color has continued to decline over the past 50 years. The author also describes her work in collaborative recruiting aimed at increasing the number of African-American teachers.

Next David Malone, Brett D. Jones, and D. T. Stallings present "Perspective Transformation: Effects of a Service-Learning Tutoring Experience on Prospective Teachers." This study examines the transformative aspects of service learning experiences on preservice teacher education students.

To conclude this issue, Joelle K. Jay gives us "Meta, Meta, Meta: Modeling in a Methods Course for Teaching English," a qualitative study focusing on the use of modeling techniques in helping prepare prospective English teachers.

Each of the articles appearing in this issue was submitted independently of each other and represent the quality of scholarly research that has come to be expected from *Teacher Education Quarterly*. I encourage you to engage in intellectual dialogue with the authors. Hopefully, you will discover ideas, strategies, and ways of thinking worthy of consideration in both your research and practice.

Please take a few minutes to visit our *Teacher Education Quarterly* website at <http://www.teqjournal.org> for information on our submission processes, subscriptions to the journal, access to back issues, and membership in the California Council on Teacher Education. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

—**Thomas Nelson**
Editor