

Editor's Introduction: Sociocultural Dimensions in Teacher Learning

We at Teacher Education Quarterly are proud to present to our readers the Spring 2004 Issue, "Sociocultural Dimensions in Teacher Learning," a collection of outstanding articles reflecting empirical inquiry into collaborative contexts wherein teachers advance their professional skills and knowledge. Learning to teach is often perceived within the profession as an intellectually dynamic, situationally complex, and long-term developmental process. In order to better understand the contexts of professional development, we are pressed to engage ourselves in collegial research efforts aimed at the ways in which teachers become highly qualified. As we are aware, the term "highly qualified teacher" is being defined in both state and federal legislation. Unfortunately, political agendas often result in legislated language that tends to simplify teacher quality into easily accountable sets of skills, knowledge, and dispositions. This oversimplification is much like what we see in the standardization movement that assumes that one size fits all, and that student academic success, as well as teacher success, is ultimately determined by pencil and paper, multiple-choice assessment instruments.

If, however, educational policies were the result of consultation and collaboration with professionals about the knowledge emerging in the field, one would think that a much more complex and inherently more effective system of accountability might be designed. As educational policy-making becomes more centralized, the lack of attention to empirical research becomes ever more problematic. The articles in this issue represent the rigorous nature of educational research and its implications for better understanding the ways in which teachers truly become

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"highly qualified." Join us in furthering the dialogue across educational and political boundaries by engaging in reflective analysis of the scholarly work embedded in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*.

Leading off the Spring Issue, Chris Street presents a compelling case for advancing mentoring opportunities for new teachers in "Examining Learning to Teach Through a Social Lens: How Mentors Guide Newcomers Into a Professional Community of Learners." The author presents the results of a naturalistic study in which 15 experienced teachers and student teachers engaged in a collaborative mentoring process.

In "Leading Preservice Teachers to Water . . . and Helping Them Drink: How Candidate Teachability Affects the Gatekeeping and Advocacy Roles of Teacher Educators", Michelle L. Page, Gwen L. Rudney, and Carol E. Marxen present the findings of their qualitative research study into "student teacher growth and development in the context of a constructivist, developmental, and standards-based program."

Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Nancy Farnan follow with the presentation of their combined qualitative/quantitative research study into the professional development of student teachers in, "Student Teachers Matter: The Impact of Student Teachers on Elementary-Aged Children in a Professional Development School."

In keeping with the theme of sociocultural dimensions in professional development contexts, Tim F. Hopper and Kathy Sanford explore through action research, "Representing Multiple Views of Self-As-Teacher: Integrated Teacher Education Course and Self-Study." Through the results of their study, the authors argue for programmatic attention to integration of course work in conjunction with school-university partnerships.

Vernon G. Smith, in "African-American Male Honor Students' Views of Teaching as a Career Choice," asks the question: "why are the brightest of the young, African-American male high school graduates not seeking a career in teaching?" Smith discusses the barriers often associated with recruiting of minority teachers as well as the extrinsic factors oftentimes overshadowing African-American males' interest in becoming teachers.

"Hidden Teachers, Invisible Students: Lessons Learned From Exemplary Bilingual Paraprofessionals in Secondary Schools," by Kerri J. Wenger, Tawnya Lubbes, Martha Lazo, Isabel Azcarraga, Suzan Sharp, and Gisela Ernst-Slavit, presents the results of a three-year, multi-site ethnographic study aimed at understanding the effectiveness of bilingual paraprofessionals working with secondary school students. Findings suggest that paraprofessionals are able to assist students in academic pursuits in ways regular classroom teachers are unable to provide.

In "Teachers Need Teachers To Grow," Terri L. Wenzlaff and Katherine C. Wieseman examine the nature of teacher learning in a cohort-based, master's degree program in curriculum and pedagogy. The results of the authors' study indicate that

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teacher preparation programs that are focused on personalization and responsive to teachers' needs promote meaningful learning and a sense of empowerment.

Concluding the spring issue, Constance M. Perry and Brenda M. Power present "Finding the Truths in Teacher Preparation Field Experiences," a qualitative study addressing the valuing of teachers' practical knowledge, reflective practice and collegial inquiry.

The articles comprising this issue reflect a commitment on the part of the authors to engage in understanding the sociocultural complexities inherent in the situated contexts in which teacher learning occurs. As policymakers continue to debate educational reform while championing a set of common standards required for teacher certification, they would be well served to review the literature and the research findings provided in this issue as a way to better understand the professional development of teachers as learners.

As always, we at Teacher Education Quarterly welcome your feedback. Please visit our website at: www.teqjournal.org

—Thomas Nelson,
Editor