Introduction:
Passionate Teaching and Learning in an Era of Test-Based Accountability

By Robert L. Fried

State-sponsored standardized testing, and the homogenization of curricula that accompanies it, has hit the teaching profession with the subtlety of a Mack truck. But that doesn't mean that we who work in teacher education programs must necessarily change what we do. We are free, as ever, to articulate our ideals, enunciate our erudition, and pursue our research for the benefit of our discipline, with pre-service teachers sharing in the reflected light of our scholarship.

We can remain safe within the Academy. We can rationalize our distance from this issue by arguing that the world "out there" already has enough grubby lessons to force upon new teachers. We don't have to add to their stress, in our seminars, by frightening them with the exigency of coping with "the Test." We can hold forth, vociferously, that the role of the university is to take an aloof and critical stance on the politics of the moment. We can occupy ourselves with loftier matters — the deconstructing of a post-modern this, the re-contextualizing of a meta-cognitive that — and let school districts wrestle with how to define success and failure for classroom teachers who work with children and adolescents.

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Yet I suspect that rather few of us hold that view, as faculty in education and as supervisors of student teachers. At very least, we try to help pre-service teachers bridge the gulf they experience between theory and practice. We try to stand by them as they

struggle to replicate in their classrooms the principles and values they have acquired under our tutelage. We sympathize with them as they labor under the weight of pedagogical traditions, what Seymour Sarason calls "the regularities" — practices and routines assumed without question — that dominate "the culture of the school" (Sarason, 1971, 1996).

We take an active interest in their dilemmas, incorporating them into our research efforts. We attempt to model for them strategies to achieve better results with diverse young learners, even when such concepts of practice challenge the status quo. We do this because we believe that a new generation of teachers can and must do a better job than the majority who were trained by our predecessors in normal schools and teacher-training institutions.

But nothing has impacted our profession, nationally, quite like the rush to standardized testing, and its twin, the accompanying state role in prescribing the curricula upon which those high-stakes tests will be based — not to mention the sanctions for those students, teachers, and schools who fail to "measure up." Legislatures in practically every state have jumped on the standards/testing/accountability bandwagon (is Iowa still holding out?), and the idealistic young people and mid-career folks who now want to become teachers face an unprecedented intrusion into the sanctity of the classroom. Not Sputnik, not court-ordered busing for integration, not the inclusion of children with disabilities in classrooms has preoccupied so broad a contingent of teachers — rural, suburban, and urban — as has the prospect of censure and sanctions based on student test results. New teachers in many states must themselves pass high-stakes, state-designed competency tests before we, as teacher educators, can put them forward for certification and licensure.

In the newly reborn School of Education at Northeastern University, where I teach and supervise student teachers, our programs are consciously devoted to the preparation of "community teachers" for urban schools. And as united as we are in our purpose to significantly reform the way urban teachers are educated, the debate over standardized testing holds sway within our ranks. On the one hand, we see a need to shake up a system that has become far too complacent in its patterns of low expectations for urban youth. We want parents and community leaders to have access to data that can help them challenge a system that has traditionally ignored the problem or blamed the children themselves, and their parents, for the failure of our schools to teach adequately.

But on the other hand, we deeply resent the imposition of state mandates that are turning urban schools, and schools state-wide that serve low-income and working-class communities, into test-prep academies, while schools in the affluent suburbs feel free to emphasize "higher-order thinking" and college preparation. The fact that thousands of high school students who have successfully completed their other diploma requirements will not receive a high school diploma because they have failed to pass one or another of the MCAS tests — and that thousands more are opting (or

being subtly pushed) out of school because they are likely not to pass — means that, once again, the most vulnerable of our young citizens are paying the price of systemic failure.

Both personally and professionally, this issue has affected my conception of practice. Increased national attention to what I have called "passionate teaching" and "passionate learning" runs smack up against the threat that our teacher preparation programs are in danger of becoming trivialized, over-regulated, even bypassed. Our students at Northeastern University cannot proceed to student teaching until they have passed the state proficiency exams in their fields. And as they face the uncertain job prospects of this unstable economic period, our pre-service teachers wonder whether they will be valued by prospective schools for their ability to engage children and youth as eager, productive learners, or measured by their willingness to "get with the program" in pushing up test scores. I do not believe that we are alone in facing this dilemma.

It is in this context that I have been asked by Tom Nelson to serve as guest editor of this specially-themed issue. At first I wondered whether others would respond to the invitation, announced in last Winter's issue of Teacher Education Quarterly, to write about the conflict between the aims of passionate teaching and learning and the demands for "accountability," so narrowly-defined by state officials. But the answer to my doubts has come from all parts of the country, and I am deeply appreciative of the quality and intensity of the articles submitted, a number of which we were unable to include in this issue because of limitations of space. With the help of peer reviewers, most notably Evans Clinchy who has offered an "Afterword" to this issue, we offer herein a range of articles that reflect a number of fascinating perspectives on this issue.

The issue begins and ends with voices from the front lines, new teachers who face challenges to their idealism from both the new state requirements and from student resistance to teachers' expectations. Stergios Botzakis, writing from Baltimore, examines the hypocrisy and cynicism being fostered in an urban district by the current president's high-profile educational initiative, "No Child Left Behind," and asks "To Whom Are We Accountable?" Melanie Livingston, in her second year of teaching in a bi-lingual Boston school, reflects, in "On Sucking, Being Easy, and Staying Out of the Way," on just what it takes to win over students to our high expectations for them. Scott Hinkley, a career-changer in Indiana, teams up with one of his teachers, Debbie Rickey, from Earlham College, in a piece they call "Scott Hinkley and the Golden Hook, or, A Teacher Discovers Himself in Class after 20 Years."

We then have three articles that examine the challenges to new teachers and their mentors as they encounter inevitable clash between idealism and pragmatism in student teaching and in changing schools. From East Stroudsberg University, Janet Ferguson and Beverly Brink at Washington State University, offer us "Caught in a Bind: Student Teaching in a Climate of State Reform." They follow two talented

student teachers, trained in a constructivist culture of literacy instruction, as they accept placement in a much more traditional school. Randy Wisehart, who divides his time between teaching English to ninth-graders in Richmond, Indiana, and working as a mentor to new teachers in his district, looks at "Nurturing Passionate Teachers: Making Our Work Transparent." Wisehart, who also teaches in the M.A.T. program at Earlham College, explores how this dual role has been affected by the testing phenomenon, and speaks of ways to nurture passion in educators in the midst of the turmoil. Karen Hammerness of Stanford University, in "Teaching with Vision: How One Teacher Negotiates the Tension between High Ideals and Standardized Testing," journeys with an inspiring high school science teacher as she moves from a large California public high school to a much smaller school in Massachusetts, where she encounters both a new sense of collegiality and the imposition of the state's MCAS test.

Two unique approaches to the preparation of teachers are reflected in papers by Randall Shrock of Earlham College and Beverly Falk of City College of New York, each of whom heads a teacher education program. Shrock's paper, "The Perils They Face: Using Key Texts To Prepare Passionate Teachers for an Unfriendly World," documents the attempt to build a teacher-education program on the concept of "passion" — while acknowledging the threat posed by standardized testing. Falk's work looks at passion in the context of "inquiry research," in "A Passion for Inquiry in an Era of 'Right Answers': Inquiring about Teachers Inquiring about Their Practice."

The final two offerings, by former students of mine here at Northeastern, one undergraduate and one graduate, displayed the intensity of their commitment to learning and teaching when they first wrote these papers months ago. They have rethought their work for this issue. Melissa Wolter-Gustafson, after completing our program and student teaching, tells us why, under the conditions that prevail, she has decided not to be a teacher. Karen Ancillai boldly asks a prospective school committee to hire her because she intends "to change the world."

The most rewarding aspect of preparing this issue has been my interaction with the authors and the intense conversations we have had, subsequent to the peer review, over the shaping and reshaping of their work. I look forward to using this issue in my future classes, for it offers some of the best arguments I can think of why passionate teaching and learning should be pursued all the more avidly in the face of our nation's current preoccupation with test-based accountability.