

Introduction to the Themed Issue Assessing Innovations in Teacher Education — Challenges in Assessing Innovation in Teacher Education

By Ann I. Nevin & Ida M. Malian

The first purpose for this themed issue was to identify innovations in teacher education that emphasize the methods used to assess the impact of those innovations in teacher education. A second purpose was to integrate practitioner applications with research-based results. With the publication of this themed issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, we hope that readers will celebrate the rich variety of innovative teacher education practices and the methodologies to document the impact of the innovations and concomitantly be inspired to conduct more comprehensive studies. We are proud to present the summer 2005 issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*. Organized in three sections (Conceptual Frameworks for Assessing Innovation, Program Level Assessments of Innovation, and Course and Professor Assessments of Innovation), the articles in this issue offer what we believe to be cutting edge examples of innovations in teacher education as well as methods to study the

Ann I. Nevin is professor emerita, Arizona State University, and visiting professor, Florida International University, Miami, Florida; Ida M. Malian is a professor in the College of Teacher Education and Leadership, Arizona State University at the West Campus, Phoenix, Arizona.

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impact of those innovations. The authors contributing to this issue have engaged in scholarly inquiry that allows others to replicate their discoveries.

In Section I of this issue, *Conceptual Frameworks for Assessing Innovation*, Ida Malian and Ann Nevin describe various definitions and taxonomies of innovation and their implications for teacher education. Gene Hall and colleagues then provide a comprehensive framework for using evidence-based assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning in teacher education programs. The authors include a brief historical review of the changes in expectations for quality in teacher education as well as a description of the challenges in finding good measures for assessing impact on the learning of participants in teacher education programs. They advocate anchoring the assessment of innovation in the assessment of changes in the k-12 pupils who are taught by teacher education candidates.

Paul Sindelar and colleagues add the voices of special education researchers, showing how four current studies can yield insights about methods to assess innovations. They provide important insights of what has been learned to date in a study that focuses on defining the quality of beginning teachers who implement literacy instruction; a procedure to assess the range and variability of alternative routes to certification; a method to identify differences between alternatively and traditionally trained special educators; and a process to study cost effectiveness of teacher preparation options.

Section II, *Program Level Assessments of Innovation*, begins with Annela Teemant's description of an innovative approach to comprehensively assess a distance learning delivery process of a bilingual certification program that is contextualized within socio-cultural theory and practice. The multi-layered assessment procedures allow her to trace the impact of the teacher education program on the knowledge, skills and dispositions of the participants in partnership with local school district course facilitators. She provides enticing evidence of changes in classroom practices for teaching children learning English as a second language.

Pia Wong and Ronald Glass assess a professional development school approach for preparing teachers for urban schools serving low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Their comprehensive assessment framework includes methods to track (a) changes in achievement of k-12 learners, (b) changes in the knowledge and skills of the teacher candidates as well as follow-up of graduates, and (c) changes in the university programs as well as content and procedures utilized by university faculty to prepare teacher educators.

Service-learning has been promoted in recent legislation as an important outcome for high school graduation. Similar demands have also been made for university students. Silva Karayan and Paul Gathercoal tackle the difficult challenge of developing and utilizing a college-wide system to assess the impact of service-learning not only on the teacher education candidates but also on the k-12 pupils or other clients involved in the service-learning projects. Their innovative assessment method incorporates elements of portfolio assessment and web-sup-

ported evaluation that allow for feedback and subsequent redesign of the projects. An interesting outcome of their work is the implication for service-learning as a teaching strategy that reflects an important priority for the professoriate: the scholarship of engagement (Boyer, 1990).

Section III: Course and Professor Assessments of Innovation is comprised of five articles, illustrating a wide range of methods that professors use to assess innovative teaching practices in teacher education at the micro-organizational level—the individual course. Lori Olafson, Linda Quinn, and Gene Hall use the concerns-based adoption model to assess the impact of utilizing computer-assisted instruction on their teaching processes and the learning outcomes of teacher candidates in an introductory class. Judith Sandholtz takes the reader through the process of designing, implementing, evaluating, and redesigning a specific assignment related to National Board Certification. The intense self-study of her own thinking and actions as a professor show how assessing an innovation can lead to important insights and changes in the professor's choices for instructional procedures. In the article "Learning Together What We Do Not Know," Andrea Whittaker, Morva McDonald, and Nancy Markowitz apply the professorial role of self-study in the context of a course that encourages prospective teachers to understand the nature of multicultural education. Using a cross-case analysis approach, Ed McClintock, George O'Brien, and Zhonghong Jiang assess the impact of voluntary field experiences with teachers who practice innovative mathematics methods in keeping with school reform mandates on the actual teaching behaviors and beliefs of mathematics teacher candidates.

The concluding article by Kelly Donnell and Kelly Harper shows how professors' experiences, within a case study approach, can describe the impact of using inquiry-as-stance as a teaching strategy for a master's degree level course and simultaneously lead to a deeper understanding of the work demanded of teacher educators and their constituencies. Their focus on competing agendas provides a capstone discussion of the complexities involved in identifying, implementing, assessing, and redesigning innovation in teacher education.

The articles in this special issue represent a cross section of assessment of innovations in key teacher education venues geared at producing usable knowledge for the profession. Methodologically, the researchers featured in this themed issue utilized an interesting array of approaches: case study, computer assisted assessment and evaluation methods, pre-post assessment, and descriptive analyses of faculty and students engaged in learning the content and pedagogy of teaching. Overall, we hope that *Teacher Education Quarterly* readers and the larger research community will concur that the articles in this themed issue help the field to realize that innovative approaches can be studied with methodologically sound research designs. In this way, we can be more confident in identifying those innovations that transform teacher education.

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