Ten Points of Debate in Teacher Education:
Looking for Answers to Guide Our Future

By Alan H. Jones

It is common knowledge that American education faces constant criticism; so, too, is the field of teacher education the subject of persistent questions and tensions both from outside and from within the profession. In many cases the areas of concern and tension are conflicting; to seek a solution in one area only exacerbates another. Yet to ignore such issues likely prolongs the discomfort, since without solutions the problems represented by such issues will continue to be the subject of ongoing criticism. So as we approach the new century, let us consider ten significant points of debate that mark teacher education in the late 1990s. It is my hope that by raising and exploring these issues in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, we can assist the teacher education community in finding some enduring solutions. Each of the ten topics will be presented as a dichotomy of opinion and action in the field.

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(1) Quality Versus Quantity

The conflicting pressures of achieving high standards of quality in the preparation of new teachers and at the same time producing enough candidates to

fill the needs of the public schools have plagued teacher education for several decades. At no time in recent memory have our colleges and universities been able to produce enough teachers in such key areas of need as bilingual and second-language classrooms, special education, and mathematics and science—and with the impending retirement of the large cadre of teachers who entered the schools during the boom years following World War II, it appears almost certain that the need for teachers will explode into all other fields as well; such is already the case in many of the urban centers, areas frequently seen as both more challenging and less appealing by many teachers. The quantity dimension is further exacerbated by societal changes that have opened the doors in many other professional and attractive fields to women and minorities, those individuals for whom teaching was once the prime professional option.

How can teacher education programs maintain high standards in the face of such demands for new teachers? If high standards are maintained at the college and university level, do school districts and state agencies have any choice but to approve large numbers of emergency-credentialled bodies to fill existing classroom needs? And if teacher pay and benefits continue to lag behind other professional options, what incentives are available to lure high quality individuals into the teaching field?

(2) Majority Versus Minority

Attention to the challenges of multicultural education that have followed a recognition that American schools will increasingly be serving a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse population of students has sensitized many school districts to the desirability of employing a diverse teaching corps. Yet while school districts seek minority candidates, recent research shows that the number of minority students enrolled in teacher education programs has been on the decline, likely again because of growing opportunities in other professional fields for minorities.

What can teacher education programs do to attract more teacher candidates who represent the racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority populations being served by our schools? Do not many of the standards and testing procedures currently being used to screen future teachers work against the inclusion of more minority candidates in teacher education programs? In what ways will the current debate over affirmative action impact our efforts? Recently many state governments and colleges and universities have been determining that it is perhaps more realistic, in the face of the needs of the increasingly diverse student population in our schools, to put greater energy in teacher education into preparing all teachers to understand and address the educational needs of racial, ethnic, and language minority students, rather than to continue to expend valuable time and scarce resources solely on seeking those elusive minority teacher candidates. Given this new emphasis, how

best do teacher education programs undertake to train non-minority (*i.e.*, anglo) teachers who can meet the needs of minority youth?

(3) Preservice Versus Inservice

For several decades teacher educators and others in the educational community have debated the appropriate scope and dimension of teacher education. In some instances traditionally more-lengthy programs have been shortened by legislation requiring that such study take no more than a single academic year, to assure that prospective teachers can complete their undergraduate studies and professional preparation all within a four-year baccalaureate program. In other cases the thrust has been the opposite, as institutions experiment with innovative intern and residency programs that bridge the induction years following graduation from college. Still other institutions are discussing ways in which teacher education can be a career-long process involving an ongoing mixture of advanced preparation with inservice practice.

All such alternatives raise major questions about the best procedures for cooperation within teacher education between the college or university program and its faculty and the cooperating public school districts, schools, administrators, and teachers. The Professional Development School model has been advocated by many, while most teacher education institutions continue to work with and seek improvement of their traditional ties with local schools. In view of such directions, is there a preferred program format and a best structure and procedure for establishing and maintaining cooperative links between higher education and the public schools, or are there instead many alternative and appropriate approaches?

(4) Campus Versus School Site

Most of the rhetoric of teacher education reform over the past decade or more has suggested making a wholesale move from the college or university campus to the cooperating school site. Advocates of that direction point to research showing that the significant and long-lasting effects of teacher education on teacher candidates occur at the practice site, and further that genuine involvement and equal participation of public school personnel in the teacher education process will only occur if the primary activities are at the school site. Contrary opinions, however, suggest that teacher education is far more than just an apprenticeship or vocational training, and that a significant scholarly base must first be established in campus-based study. It is further argued that the role of teacher education should be to improve, not just to replicate, contemporary public education, and that too heavy a reliance on practice in today's schools could blunt the long-range goal of preparing new teachers who will make those schools better.

What is the appropriate balance in teacher education between the roles of the campus-based teacher education faculty and the cooperating public school person-

nel, between on-campus instruction and school-site instruction, activities, and practice, between preparation involving ongoing participation in the status quo and preparation geared to change and improve our schools?

(5) Time Versus Money

History has dictated that teaching remains, at least to this point in time, a low-paying profession; despite some significant recent gains for teachers, they still lag behind other college-prepared professions in compensation and benefits. This reality has precipitated strong opposition on the part of teacher unions towards initiatives that would increase the cost of entering the profession, and thus the number of college and university credits required for future teachers has been restricted in many states. Further, potential teacher candidates are often discouraged by high tuition costs from entering a profession with less than attractive pay, particularly if they must enroll in more than a brief program of professional study.

Yet such structurally limiting realities fly in the face of what we know about the intricacies of teaching. In counterpoint to the minimal number of courses and credits involved in preservice preparation and inservice study stands a significant body of theoretical and practical knowledge that we now have about the field of teaching, professional knowledge that could easily fill several years of intense professional preparation, but is instead on most campuses crammed into a single year of study and practice. To what degree is it possible to assemble a brief yet high quality teacher education program? And what are the prospects of creating in the future more lengthy and more realistic teacher education programs?

Equally significant is the growing realization that effective teacher education is a highly labor-intensive process, involving complex relationships between higher education and the public schools, and featuring significant one-on-one advising, supervision, and mentoring to appropriately personalize the metamorphosis from student to teacher candidate to teacher. All of this works counter to the traditional economy of scale that in the past so often made teacher education a cash-cow for many colleges and universities. Recognizing now that the effective preparation of teachers calls for a clinical style program, with the smaller faculty-to-candidate ratios that such personalization requires, how do we best argue for adequate teacher education budgets within a higher education culture that in decades past expected teacher education to turn a profit?

(6) Specialization Versus Generalization

Teacher education programs have been plagued with yet further conflicting pressures in recent years. First, due to ongoing public criticism and budgetary pressures, such programs have frequently been asked by state governments and institutional administrations to consolidate traditional coursework and expectations into fewer offerings. Then, having accomplished such streamlining, they have

been asked to tack on a variety of additional requirements that address contemporary concerns, such as the presumed appropriate approach to reading instruction, the mainstreaming of special education students, the utilization of second-language skills, the integration of computers in the curriculum and classroom, etc.

The challenge, then, is how to properly integrate into a brief program all of the essential information for effective teaching without becoming overwhelmed with detail. Are teachers to be specialists in certain specific areas, or generalists in good education, or is this a false distinction? Can they be both? Should teacher education programs feature subject-specific or generic pedagogy? Is the pedagogy the same for all subjects to be taught at the secondary level, or are there separate methodologies for each major area? In earlier decades elementary teachers took separate methods courses for each key component of the curriculum; is this pedagogy now all generic, or is some specialization still needed? What are the key ingredients of teacher education; to what extent are they universal, and to what extent should there be specialization in the preparation of certain kinds of teachers? And how long does it take to become either a specialist or a generalist?

(7) Theory Versus Practice

Throughout the history of teacher education there has been a significant tension between theory and practice. Is it more important to understand the overarching theoretical backdrop of the field, or to be able to function immediately in a classroom? Or can both be effectively accomplished? As the calls have emerged for greater teacher education activity at the school site, for more attention to such areas as special education and second-language instruction, for the integration of technology into instruction, this long-standing tension between theory and practice has been further exacerbated, and the traditional balance has become unsettled. The amount of time devoted in most teacher education programs to foundational studies (theory) has declined in favor of more field work (practice).

Yet while this imbalance appears to grow, accreditation agencies (*i.e.*, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE]) and key scholars (*i.e.*, John I. Goodlad, Ernest L. Boyer, Theodore Sizer) have called for a strengthening of the theoretical and foundational base in order to assure that the teachers of the future will have the philosophical, historical, social, economic, and political knowledge base upon which to operate as professional and reflective practitioners. What, then, is the appropriate balance between theory and practice in teacher education? And is theory necessarily restricted to the college classroom and practice to the school site, or can such features of a program be genuinely integrated in various courses, activities, stages, and sites over time?

(8) Professional Versus Public

Teacher education is a complex field. In many if not most states, initial

preparation occurs on the college and university campus, yet most of the preparation involves one's overall undergraduate study and completion of an academic major, with professional study coming later and only as a sort of add-on. Then the practice component of that professional study takes place in a joint venture between the college or university and a cooperating public school. All of this serves to satisfy certification laws of the given state, while also being guided by regional and national accreditation standards.

So who is in charge? Is it the education faculty, faculty in the academic departments, the college administration, the cooperating public schools, professional associations, state certification agencies, state legislatures, regional and national accreditation agencies? Or is it the general public, the parents and students being served, the business and industrial sector who will employ the students once taught by the new teachers? Who, if any, among these constituents should be in control? If education is a profession, should not professional educators be in control? And if so, which professional educators? And how do they actually take charge?

(9) Information Versus Myth

What is the truth about teacher education, or for that matter about American education in general? Are our schools in trouble, or is all the critical rhetoric a "manufactured crisis," as David Berliner and others suggest? Why have *A Nation at Risk* and other public-sector reports received so much more attention than the high quality professional analyses of Goodlad, Boyer, Sizer, and others, or than the professional recommendations of the Holmes Group and other professional educational organizations?

Why do research results and reports of best practice not serve as the primary basis for educational reform? How can such information be effectively communicated to those who make policy for teacher education and for public education in general? Is there no place for fact and truth in the policy process? Or is such information already in use by policymakers, despite my perceptions and observations to the contrary?

(10) Long-Range Versus Short-Range

As with all areas of public policy, teacher education appears highly susceptible to the "quick fix." Immediate concerns are voiced, and special attention is given to the currently squeaky wheel. Systematic or long-range reform loses out to short-range problems. Bigger and more difficult questions are overlooked in the process of solving smaller but immediate, and typically more solvable, problems.

And thus attention is diverted from such long-range questions as: Why, given repeated assurances of the continuing traditional public faith in our schools, does our government at all levels not invest at a more significant level in the education

of our children? (And in the education of those who will educate our children?) Why has action not been taken to adequately compensate teachers, to significantly reduce class size, to effectively assist all students in meeting meaningful standards? Why has there not been recognition that such a long-range investment in public education would be a far kinder and more effective public policy than the current and continuing and escalating need to compensate for our failures to educate all Americans through even more expensive programs of unemployment, welfare, criminal justice, and prisons upon prisons upon prisons?

Not a Conclusion, But Further Questions

These ten dichotomies are but a snapshot of the issues and concerns that mark contemporary teacher education in the United States, and in most if not all other nations. Many of these areas of difficulty in teacher education are symptoms of larger problems in society, and most often the potential and desired solutions are the province of policymakers outside our immediate field. In such circumstances, however, should not we in teacher education be more systematically outspoken and insistent about the needs that are currently going unmet?

In other cases, the uncertainties are at hand because to date no consensus has surfaced within the teacher education community. Thus, the solutions to many of these and similar concerns revolve around a central and overarching question: What can and should we in teacher education do to best fulfill our role of preparing the highest quality teachers possible for our community's and our nation's public schools? I would hope that everyone in our field would have a personal, passionate, and provocative answer? Let's hear yours.