A Normative Vision
of Teacher as Professional

By Carol A. Bartell

Teacher education has risen to the top of the policy agenda with the growing realization that improved schooling is crucial to our nation's future.

With this renewed interest comes increased scrutiny. What we do, how we do it, and even our right to do it have come into question. Some claim that we have become out-of-touch and have not been responsive to our critics—the public, practitioners, policymakers, students, administrators, and others. Others call for a rethinking of content, context, processes, curriculum, and instructional delivery models.

Perhaps we seek to be responsive to too many audiences, and thus have become defensive and unsure of ourselves and the knowledge and expertise we possess. We compete and disagree among ourselves. We try too hard to conform others' expectations and to answer all our critics, pulling us in too many directions, leading to false starts, unfocused activity, and quick or cosmetic fixes. That lack of focus leads to the dichotomies and tensions described by Alan H. Jones in the introduction to this issue.

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The current debate ignores some fundamental questions about the purposes of schooling and the role that teachers ought to play in achieving those purposes. It ignores the complexity of the work of teachers and the challenges of preparing prospective teachers not only to be effective practitioners, but to think about practice in critical, thoughtful ways. It is time for teacher educators to speak persuasively

about what we do, why we do it, and what we hope to accomplish for our students.

I argue here for a normative vision of teaching—one that recognizes the moral imperative to educate all students to their full potential and one guided by principles and standards of practice. This vision requires us to view the teacher as a professional educator, one that is knowledgeable and aware of professional norms and responsibilities and is committed and willing to be held accountable for meeting high standards of practice.

The Purpose of Schooling

Horace Mann envisioned what schools ought to accomplish as early as 1848:

> When (the common school) shall be fully developed, when it shall be trained to wield its mighty energies for the protection of society against the giant vices which now invade and torment it;—against intemperance, avarice, war, slavery, bigotry, the woes of want and the wickedness of waste,—then, there will not be a height to which these enemies of the race can escape. (as cited in Lashway, 1997)

We have our own modern day visionaries who speak with clarity and consistency about where we are and how far we have come in realizing that earlier vision. Thomas J. Sergiovanni points us to a higher moral purpose for schooling (1992) and speaks of the need to develop a "community of mind" represented in shared values, conceptions, and ideas about schooling and human nature (1994). Neil Postman observes that schools don't just serve a public but that they create a public (1995).

Others guide the way toward an understanding of the role of teachers in achieving this educative and democratic purpose. Deborah Loewenberg Ball and David K. Cohen (1996) point out that reform that moves beyond rhetoric requires a a marriage of new curricular materials and teacher learning. Dan Lortie (1975) and S.M. Johnson (1990) remind us of what is truly important to teachers—what motivates and inspires them in their work.

Teaching is challenging, complex work. We are indebted to Lee Shulman (1986) for describing how pedagogical content knowledge requires both understanding of the structure of the subject and how to explain and demonstrate the content so that others can understand it. But knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, and practice must be combined, refined, tested, and developed in the world and culture of schools (Little, 1987; Lieberman, 1988). David C. Berliner's work (1994) demonstrates that teaching develops over time, and moves through stages of development from novice to full expertise.

If we accept the premise that schools exist to help us build a better society in which all members are empowered participants, then this complex work of teachers is laden with a value orientation. We make certain choices, engage in certain activities, and conduct our practice in ways that maximize the values we hold dear. Gary Fenstermacher (1998) reminds us that teaching is "fundamentally a moral endeavor" and that teachers' manners as "moral persons" are as vital to their work

as their mastery of the subject they teach and their skill as instructors in the classroom. Nel Noddings (1992) emphasizes "caring" and Jeannie Oakes (1990) reminds us that we need to care for all students since pervasive patterns of inequality continue to limit access to learning for many.

But good intentions and caring for students is not enough. Teachers must care enough about their practice and their work to make learning happen in classrooms. They must bring knowledge and professional expertise to their work.

Highly informed, skilled teaching that is grounded in a strong and rich sense of purpose is at the heart of school improvement. But school reform and the reform of teacher education are tightly linked. John I. Goodlad (1997) offers a timely reminder of the role of and agenda for education in a democracy when he calls for "an educational renewal initiative addressed simultaneously to schools and institutions of higher education" (p131).

The challenge before teacher educators is to prepare teachers who can articulate this purpose and are able to inquire, plan, and act in accordance with those commitments. Goodlad argues that teachers will become recognized as professionals only when they "come together in pursuit of a common vision defined as the attainment of these conditions by all who educate" (1990, p. 29). Thomas Barone and colleagues (1996) propose that teacher education should be built around the unifying image of a "strong professional" (1996), one that moves beyond merely imparting strategies and skills to one that intentionally develops "an articulate teacher who can operationalize beliefs and engage in politics to promote those beliefs" (p. 1145).

Standards-Based Practice

One approach to professionalizing teaching practice that has been widely embraced is the call for developing standards to guide the profession and, by implication, shape the practice of those of us who prepare members of that profession. Many versions of these standards abound—those developed by national groups and associations, those developed at the state level, and those subscribed to by local educators in schools and in universities.

Teacher educators are increasingly nervous and dismayed about the tendency of regulatory bodies to over-prescribe the content, direction, and focus of teacher education programs. We are indeed in the middle of a standards movement that seems to compel uniformity and serves to narrow rather than broaden our sights. Despite the efforts of local, state, and national authorities to engage large numbers of professional educators in the development, articulation, modification, and validation of those standards and expectations for teacher development, it feels like a "top down" rather than a "bottom up" activity.

As Fenstermacher states:

What troubles me is the extent to which the authority for setting the criteria and

standards of our work as educators, for envisioning the good and proper outcomes of our labors is moving so relentlessly upward. When I say upward, I am referring to levels of government as well as sphere of influence in state and national associations. This shift that is occurring today is away from site where the actual work takes place, away from schools and neighborhoods, campuses and communities, to state or federal governments and to national organizations and associations. (1998, p. 1)

To standardize is to systematize or to make uniform. Standards, in their traditional form, may indeed be narrow and prescriptive, aimed toward the lowest common denominator rather than reaching for the highest potential. Educational systems that foster such prescriptive systems of accountability are what Richard Elmore (1983) calls "compliance-effecting" rather than "capacity enhancing."

Standards that seek to effect compliance are narrow, regulatory, and often highly specific. Much energy is expended in ensuring that those being regulated are complying with the requirements. The standards are quite specific not only in regard to intent, but in regard to how that intent should be realized.

Capacity Enhancing Professional Standards

Standards for professional educators ought to be of the type that build capacity of teachers and teacher educators to discover together the best way to meet the expectations of standards. That is, they should represent what we know from research and best practice and define is broad terms what teachers should "know and be able to do" as they think critically about their practice. Capacity-enhancing standards invite and challenge teachers and teacher educators to engage in deliberative, reflective conversation about the best ways to meet the standards in their own particular settings with their own students. Such standards may encourage teachers to aim for an expert level of performance, but will recognize that there are many steps along the way and perhaps different paths to attainment.

When today's teacher educators discuss questions about purposes of schooling and professional preparation, they most often focus on the content of the curriculum, or what their students should study, learn about, and what experiences they should have in classrooms. To focus on professional standards as a basis for planning our preparation programs is to move the discussion to a consideration of outcomes, or the expectations we hold for our candidates as they learn about and begin the conduct of their work.

For example, we might expect that well-prepared educators:

◆ possess a rich knowledge of their subject and understanding of pedagogy;
◆ are willing to be held accountable for results;
◆ make full use contemporary resources and technologies;
◆ are caring, competent, and committed;
◆ treat students in a fair, ethical, and inclusive manner;
◆ see diversity as a strength;

◆ work actively to develop the potential of all students;
◆ work collaboratively with other professionals;
◆ think critically about their own work; and
◆ continue to develop, refine, and better their practice.

Most standard-setting begins with a list similar to that stated above as participants in the standard-setting experience struggle to delineate expectations. In fact, it is that very dialogue and deliberation about how they are to be stated and what they should contain that participants in the standard-setting process find most meaningful. Teacher educators who struggle to delineate a conceptual framework or over-arching knowledge base to guide their programs will understand the nature of that struggle. What do you include? What do you leave out? Where do you focus? How do you prioritize? How broadly or narrowly do you craft your statement?

Capacity-building standards invite those who will be using the standards to participate in that struggle. Returning to my list of expectations, a standard that represents "teachers who value diversity" might read:

Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies and resources that respond to students' diverse needs.

This statement is actually an element included in the recently adopted *California Standards for the Teaching Profession* (1997) and, I believe, is representative of capacity-building professional standards for teaching. Users of the standards (beginning teachers and their mentors) are invited to think about that statement as they discuss their practice, and are guided in their reflection by questions such as those below:

As teachers develop, they may ask, "How do I..." or "Why do I..."
◆ engage all students in a variety of learning experiences that accommodate the different ways they learn?
◆ use a variety of strategies to introduce, explain, and restate subject matter concepts and processes so that all students understand?
◆ choose strategies that make the complexity and depth of subject matter understandable to all students?
◆ use strategies that support subject matter learning for second language learners?
◆ modify materials and resources and use appropriate adaptive equipment to support each student's fullest participation? (p. 5-6)

These kinds of questions do not prescribe, but suggest a vision of teaching and ground the dialogue and discussion in what is important to teachers and teaching practice.

Standards and the Question of Values

Normative standards pose questions about what we value. An examination of my original list will reveal my own beliefs and values related to teaching and

schooling. My list indicates a respect for such things as diversity, inclusion, caring, fairness, responsibility, accountability, collaboration, critical thought, knowledge, and professional expertise.

Values can be implicit or they may be explicitly stated in standards. When representatives of twenty-two states came together to develop what were to become model standards for beginning teachers (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 1992) they took the explicit approach. This group recognized at the outset that teachers' assumptions, beliefs, and commitments are reflected in how they conduct themselves in the classroom and how they relate to their students. Therefore, the "model standards" that came from the INTASC work describe not only knowledge that the teacher possesses and performances that can be demonstrated and measured, but also include "dispositions" or statements about teacher beliefs. For example, as INTASC deals with student diversity, the disposition is expressed as follows:

> The teacher appreciates individual variation within each area of development, shows respect for the diverse talents of all learners, and is committed to help them develop self-confidence and competence.

> The teacher is disposed to use students' strengths as a basis for growth, and their errors as an opportunity for learning. (INTASC, p. 12)

Standards for a profession should not only give us a language to discuss best practice but should clearly convey what we value as a profession.

Conclusions

Where is teacher education headed in the next century? Where ought we be headed?

I believe that educators ought to "take charge" of their profession and embrace a normative vision of teacher performance that is responsible, defensible, and attainable. That vision should be built on an understanding of the purposes of schooling in a democracy, the role and responsibilities of teachers in achieving those purposes, and a continual commitment to betterment of teaching practice.

Teacher educators should lead the way to achieving that vision by preparing educators to critically examine, thoughtfully engage in, and exemplify highly informed, skilled teaching that is grounded in a strong and rich sense of purpose. Teacher educators should also assume leadership for conveying that vision to the public in ways that improve understanding, build support, and recognize professional accomplishment.

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