Teacher Education:
A Look at Its Future

By Gerald J. Brunetti

Introduction

Americans have high expectations of their public schools: they believe that the schools can take in *all* children, regardless of their background and abilities, and provide them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to succeed in life. This is a tall order—especially difficult to meet given the needs of an increasingly diverse population and the demands of a technologically advanced economy. If the schools are to fulfill these expectations, they must have teachers who are more thoroughly trained and more professional than ever before. To produce and sustain such a teaching force will require a major effort on the part of teacher education, but this challenge offers exciting opportunities for teacher educators to have a profound impact on public education in the twenty-first century.

My responses to Alan H. Jones' thoughtful points of debate about teacher education are very much shaped by my conviction that public school teaching needs to become a stronger profession. This means that, besides increased autonomy and a stronger voice in decisions that affect their work, public school teachers should have an extended and rigorous period of preparation and benefit from meaningful opportunities for continued professional development. They should also enjoy the respect of the citizenry and be properly remunerated.

My responses also reflect my experiences as a California teacher educator, deeply aware of the

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problems that California public schools are grappling with, especially the challenge of teaching a rapidly growing, remarkably diverse student population, with burgeoning numbers of limited-English-speaking students. Over the past few years, teacher education in California has taken some laudable steps towards increased teacher professionalism. These include the implementation of successful induction projects for new teachers and the emergence of a recent report, *California's Future: Highly Qualified Teachers for All Students*, that calls for comprehensive change in teacher education. Proposals from this report (the "SB 1422 Report") are currently working their way through the Legislature and should be enacted into law before the end of the year.

In responding to Jones' points, I have combined several and sequenced them differently. Sadly, space did not allowed me to respond to all of them.

Quality Versus Quantity

Few conditions hurt teacher professionalism more than having individuals without proper credentials teaching in public school classrooms. This situation might be considered analogous, in the medical profession, to hospitals staffing emergency and examination rooms with biologists or physiologists when there is a shortage of M.D.s. California is currently struggling with an enormous teacher shortage, particularly at the elementary level, where class-size reduction in the primary grades has taxed an already inadequate supply of teachers. As it has always done in the past, California is staffing its classrooms with untrained individuals holding emergency credentials. Emergency teachers often remain in the classroom for two years or less: many are either not interested in pursuing a teaching career, or they are not able or willing to pass the tests and complete the courses needed for a regular teaching creden-tial. Besides the questionable quality of the instruction they offer, their employment undermines the professionalism of teaching: if any person with a degree can wander in off the streets and take over a classroom, what kind of a profession is it?

But what should the schools do? Clearly, school districts with severe teacher shortages cannot place students only in classes taught by certified teachers: the classes would be enormous, the situation unfair to certified teachers and students alike. One approach would be for school districts to sponsor more internship programs, where individuals with bachelor's degrees and proper subject-matter preparation receive professional training in the summer and then take over classrooms in the fall, assisted by on-site supervisors and often supported by mentor teachers, while taking coursework at a nearby collaborating university. Going one step further, California is currently piloting a plan for *pre-interns*—i.e., for those who lack full subject-matter preparation. Pre-interns receive some 40 hours of classroom training before taking over their own class. During the school year, in addition to on-site training and support designed to help them be effective in the classroom, they receive assistance in preparing for required subject-matter tests.

Once they have passed these tests, the pre-interns can move into regular internship slots, and thence into an advanced induction program. Experienced teachers on site as well as teacher educators from the university often play an important role in the training and support of intern and pre-intern teachers. Internship and pre-internship programs offer schools the advantage of having better trained staff for their classrooms and an improved prospect that the interns will become fully-credentialed teachers within two years. Moreover, these programs do not provide such an insult to the teaching profession as the proliferation of emergency teachers does.

Preservice Versus Inservice

In order to provide a competent, well prepared, fully-certified teacher for every classroom, the teaching profession must continue to welcome candidates from a variety of backgrounds and training experiences. Most teachers will still enter the profession through standard teacher education programs—characteristically an undergraduate degree followed by a fifth year of teacher education, or four- or five-year integrated programs that include both academic coursework and professional preparation. While I have my doubts about the efficacy of four-year programs—that length of time is far too short to provide both an undergraduate liberal arts education and professional training—five-year and fifth-year programs do effectively serve young people who decide during their undergraduate years or shortly after graduation that they want to be teachers. For those entering the profession later, especially those who must continue to work as they shift from another career into teaching, these standard programs often present a hardship. Many of these candidates need internship programs or perhaps even pre-internship programs like the California example described above. No single teacher education program can best serve all candidates. It is essential, however, that all candidates—even those entering teaching from high-status careers (e.g., law) or leadership positions (e.g., military officers)—meet the professional standards required for public school teaching.

An activity as complex as teaching requires years of careful preparation. For too long, the profession has ignored the struggles of new teachers in their first years in the classroom. Largely as a result of these struggles, as many as 30 percent of new teachers walk away from teaching after just one or two years. To address this problem, California has for several years offered induction programs—called Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) programs—to new teachers in select school districts. These programs have successfully reduced the trauma many new teachers face and substantially increased the likelihood that they will remain in teaching.[1] Much of the guidance and support for new teachers is provided by experienced teachers in the district. In most projects, university teacher educators also play an important, collaborative role. The SB1422 report calls for California to extend these programs, so that every new teacher in the state will have this experience. Besides being fiscally sound (saving money because of the increased retention of properly inducted teachers) and more humane, induction

programs like BTSA affirm the complexity of teaching and, through their achievements, enhance the quality of the profession.

Should teaching, like other high-status professions, require career-long continuing education? Yes, absolutely! For teachers to maintain their effectiveness they must continue to learn and grow—whether through district-based inservice programs, further study at the college or university, or collaborative work with other teachers. Moreover, teachers should have the opportunity to advance professionally and be remunerated accordingly, so that they do not have to leave teaching or become administrators in order to command a decent salary or continue their professional development. Many states have successfully established some form of professional career ladders for teachers. The new legislation proposed in California's SB 1422 report will establish a Level I credential, followed by a two-year induction program, followed by a Level II credential for successful candidates. Interested Level II teachers can then earn a Professional Services Certificate, which will enable them to assume additional responsibilities working with student teachers and new teachers. National board certification offers teachers in many states a further opportunity for professional development, enhanced professional status, and sometimes higher salaries.

For most teachers, continuing education is a hit-and-miss proposition—a patchwork of formal academic study (sometimes leading to advanced degrees or certificates) and school- or district-based inservice training programs, workshops, presentations, and the like. As professionals, teachers need a more coherent continuing education program, one that recognizes both the needs of the school and state to insure that teachers are competent and current, while validating the rights of teachers to manage their own professional careers based upon their particular interests and ambitions. California's proposal that experienced teachers design and carry out professional development plans every five years offers promise, but much more needs to be done. A well developed, readily available continuing education program is the hallmark of a true profession. University teacher educators should be involved in this process, collaborating with school districts in offering continuing education courses and training sessions, helping experienced teachers design their professional development programs, assisting with school-based research projects carried out by teachers, and providing advanced courses and higher degrees.

Campus Versus School Site/Theory Versus Practice

With the advent of professional development schools, school-based induction programs, and school-based assessment for teachers (like the kind included in National Board Certification requirements), it is clear that the locus of control for teacher education has shifted significantly from the university to the school site. And well it should: once teacher candidates move into the school setting for their clinical practice, a major part of their professional education should be built around and inform that practice.

What role is left for the university? A large one. Besides providing undergraduate, subject-matter education and introductory professional courses, the university should be heavily involved as collaborative partners with school districts, informing the induction and continuing education processes, as well as the curriculum and the organization of the school, with theory and research-based knowledge about effective practice. Instead of "front loading" teacher candidates with heavy doses of theory and research knowledge before they even arrive at the schools, university teacher educators should introduce these elements as they are needed—to student teachers, interns, first-year teachers, even experienced teachers. One excellent way to emphasize the integration of theory and practice is by having teachers and teacher candidates engage in meaningful action research, directed towards helping them find answers to classroom problems. Findings from such research will lead to generalizations and connect with established theory, which in turn can be used to guide teachers in their further work in the classroom.

Clearly university-based teacher educators will have increased responsibilities at the school site under the proposed arrangements. Meanwhile, appropriately removed from the day-to-day practical concerns of the schools, the university will continue to provide advanced coursework on campus for teachers and administrators and award higher degrees.

Majority Versus Minority

I believe that the teaching profession needs majority teachers who understand cultural and ethnic differences and who are trained to respond sensitively to the needs of minority youngsters. But it also needs many more minority teachers from underrepresented groups. No amount of training will compensate for a teaching force sadly devoid of minority teachers. Minority teachers are needed both as adult models for young people and as professionals on site who can respond to policy and teaching practice from a minority perspective. The failure to recruit enough underrepresented minority candidates into teaching is a direct reflection of our failure, as a society, to produce an adequate pool of minority college graduates to recruit from. Though formidable, the task of recruiting more minorities into teaching is ultimately achievable, in part because teaching does not require as many years of initial preparation as some other professions do. There are serious economic and educational obstacles to overcome, however, because the bulk of underrepresented minorities come from economically depressed areas—the inner city, the barrio, the agricultural fields. This means that adequate financial aid must be made available to promising minority candidates; and since beginning teachers draw such shamefully low starting salaries, the aid should come in the form of grants or perhaps work-study programs, so that minority teachers do not begin their career up to their ears in debt.

If teacher educators are serious about recruiting more minorities into teaching, they must reach down into the secondary schools, helping to establish programs

such as future teachers groups (which research suggests is a viable source of minority candidates). In fact, I would advocate that teacher educators collaborate with federal and state governments and local businesses in establishing teacher-development projects, in which secondary students from the inner city would be trained and then paid for working with younger children in child-care, tutorial, or recreation settings. In this way, secondary students who are thinking about teaching as a career would learn the rudiments of childhood and adolescent development through classes and work experiences. The pay they received would be an inducement to stay in school and work towards their goal. Following graduation from high school, they could receive guaranteed scholarships for their undergraduate and professional education.

Teacher educators should be in the vanguard of efforts to increase the percentage of underrepresented minorities in the teaching force. Without more minority teachers, it is unlikely that this country can succeed in properly educating its minority youth and sending many of them on to higher education.

Long-Range Versus Short-Range

Teacher education must be responsive to the present needs of our society. It must, for example, respond to teaching shortages where they exist and try to produce more underrepresented minority teachers and more teachers of science and mathematics. It must also ensure that teachers have the specialized skills they need today—e.g., computer competence and the skills to work with English-language-learners and mainstreamed special education students. Teacher education's fundamental responsibility, however, is a long-range one: i.e., to create a highly competent cadre of teachers who, because they are committed professionals, will continue to grow and respond to the educational needs of their students and of society.

The Future

Teacher education clearly has a dynamic future, though its role will change. Instead of focusing primarily on preservice education, teacher educators will be involved with teachers at all levels of experience: student teaching, induction, continuing education, and individualized training for seasoned veterans. Much more teacher education will occur in schools, where university-based teacher educators will collaborate with school-based professionals—often teachers—in providing programs and consultation. Universities will need to support their teacher educators in this work with school districts and make sure that they are not penalized in the rank and tenure process.

Note

1. See report: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and California Department of Education (1992). *Success for Beginning Teachers: The California New Teacher Project*. Sacramento, CA: Author.