

## **"It Was the Best of Times, It Was the Worst of Times..."**

**By Carol P. Barnes**

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness..." (*A Tale of Two Cities*, Book One, Chapter One.) We teacher educators are living in a Dickensian time. We are blessed with a high demand for our graduates; the economy is such that most colleges and universities are not existing at the bare subsistence level (whether the wealth is distributed to departments of education is another question); and while we're continuing to endure the historical criticisms of our graduates, we can point proudly to an ever-increasing body of research that provides evidence "that teacher expertise is the single most important factor in determining student achievement and that fully trained teachers are far more effective with students than those who are not prepared" (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

---

*Carol P. Barnes is a professor in the Department of Elementary and Bilingual Education, School of Human Development and Community Service, California State University, Fullerton.*

On the other hand, with these best of times come the worst of times, and Alan H. Jones has clearly put before us the dilemmas we face. I will address five of them, not because I think the others are less important, but because one of the errors of our work, I believe, is that we often try to "cover" too much with no depth. To use the Third International Mathematics and Science Study report phrase, we frequently go "a mile wide and an inch deep."

### **Quality Versus Quantity**

Wisely, Jones chose to list Quality Versus Quantity as the first point of debate. We in education do not have a corner on this dilemma: just as a production line can turn out hundreds of suits of mediocre quality in a short time, a custom tailor will require many hours to fashion one suit of extremely high quality. This issue underlies several of the other points of debate raised by Jones. Clearly in California the quality versus quantity debate is exacerbated by the Class-Size Reduction Bill signed by the Governor in 1996, which provides financial incentives for districts to limit class sizes in the primary grades to twenty. We are on a collision course between a very good policy and a rapidly growing student population. Faced with the necessity to have a warm body—prepared to teach or not—in front of each class, school districts are hiring anyone who can fog a mirror and requiring that *while they are teaching*, these folks enroll in a teacher preparation program.

Consequently the college and university faculty is facing groups of exhausted, stressed, and frustrated interns or emergency permit teachers for evening or Saturday classes. Not only do these new teachers have to cope with the realities of being underprepared and inexperienced, they must attempt to meet our course requirements. This, by the sheer limit of time, notwithstanding the pressures, most often results in a lower quality of work both in the K-12 classroom *and* in the teacher preparation program. If we refuse to respond to the need for such courses, the Legislature will deem us unresponsive, and in the case of public universities, cut our funding; if we do respond, we knowingly recommend for a credential teachers who are not as well prepared as they could be. We are caught between the proverbial rock and a hard spot.

There is no obvious way to avoid the time issue. Given some space between when the teachers are hired and placed in the classroom, we can form, for example, summer session cadres to ensure that the new recruits are given some basic training in the absolute essentials of teaching; but most often we don't have this luxury: teachers are hired and within a few days are in the classroom. One of my former graduate students calls these teachers "four day wonders"—the length of time it takes to process the contracts and paperwork needed to move a person into the classroom.

Another problem facing universities is the lack of faculty positions or faculty lines to staff the classes. This is often not just a case of money. Those of us with a few gray hairs recall the days when there was an oversupply of teachers, and teacher education faculty members were in danger of lay-off. With memory comes caution, and many administrators are hesitant to hire for today's needs for fear of returning to the lean days, despite the demographic data that abound about the long-term nature of the teacher shortage. It will be necessary for us to ensure that these data are ever present, like drops of water, on the administrators' foreheads.

To respond, schools of education are often administering teacher credential programs through extended education or extension, hiring temporary faculty to teach the classes, and often providing little oversight for the programs. Out-of-state institutions which are not regionally accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges have also expressed their wishes to offer California teaching credential programs, which is presently not permitted due to the legal requirements for such regional accreditation. The California Committee on Accreditation, of which I was a member for three years and served as co-chair, is taking this problem very seriously and is exploring ways to ensure that such programs have the appropriate management, governance, and quality controls. Such controls and oversight will be critical if we are to narrow the quality-quantity gap.

### **Preservice Versus Inservice**

Fortunately, I believe, the distinction between preservice and inservice is being blurred. This is another “best of times, worst of times” example. While the critical shortage of teachers has put underprepared teachers into the classroom, it has also forced K-12 and higher education faculty to work together toward a common goal. While the typical professional development school model is the modal way that these two groups cooperate, I believe that we are progressing to what Joe Braun describes as the next generation of collaborative models (1997). In this model, higher education faculty don’t simply choose to work with a neighboring K-12 school where they have already built strong relationships and which is an ideal training site, but rather they work with more typical schools that have a wider range of strengths and weaknesses in partnerships that are what L. Miller and C. O’Shea (1996) describe as “not so much an institutional arrangement as a set of reciprocal relationships among members.”

In the Design for Excellence Linking Teaching and Achievement (DELTA) Teacher Preparation and Professional Development Collaborative, for which I recently served as Executive Director, schools of education are partnered with a K-12 School Family (a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools) in a highly diverse, urban area, with the goal to reform how teachers are prepared over the spectrum of their careers. K-12 teachers and teacher education faculty are collaborating on new credential program development and on tailoring professional development to specific student learning outcomes. The overall goal is to facilitate that now overused term “seamless web” of teacher professional development from credential to retirement. This, I think, will be a more productive and realistic model than the single professional development school to bridge the preservice-inservice gap.

### **Campus Versus School Site**

My bias in this debate is in favor of school-site-based teacher education.

---

"Knowledge and beliefs become meaningful only in practice; practice in turn shapes knowledge and beliefs" (Scott & Hammerman, 1996) and, I hope, educational research. What is ideal may not drive this decision at all; it will very often be a choice of where the space is available.

In the DELTA Collaborative, there is a commitment to credential programs being delivered on school sites. However, due to class-size reduction, no K-12 classrooms were available to house the professional development centers. Temporary bungalows ordered to house students rightfully took first priority, and it took well over a year to have the professional development center bungalows even delivered!

### **Time Versus Money**

If as teacher educators we continue to buy into the notion that it is our responsibility to prepare new teachers who know all that our body of research indicates is desirable, we will never come out ahead on the "time versus money" game. I don't believe that it is possible to assemble a brief yet high quality teacher education program given the growing body of research indicating what the successful teacher knows and is able to do. Instead we need to change our way of viewing the initial preparation of teachers. As an alternative to attempting to equip our teacher education students with a broad spectrum of pedagogical skills with little depth in any of them, I believe that we need to come to agreement on a smaller number of critical skills and ensure that these are mastered, expecting, then, to partner with our K-12 colleagues in the continued addition of skills over the teachers' careers.

I often use the metaphor of a toolbox when describing teacher preparation. At the credential level we should expect to provide the graduates with enough simple tools to build a house: a hammer, screwdriver, saw, level, vise, and drill, and teach our graduates to use each of these proficiently. The resultant house may not be very beautiful, but it will be sturdy and weather-proof. Each month after that first house is built, we should add a more sophisticated tool to the graduates' toolboxes: a radial arm saw, a multi-speed drill, etc., and expect increasingly more beautiful houses to emerge. With people badly needing houses, we cannot expect our builders to stay under our tutelage until they are master builders.

The hardest part of all of this is bringing ourselves to agreement regarding the basic tools of the toolbox, as Jones notes in his specialization versus generalization item. At this point in time, we have given control of much of our program content to state legislators. We can argue about why this has happened, but rather than waste time on that debate, I believe that teacher education faculty must join together with teachers' unions to educate our respective legislators, both state and national. We must be politically aggressive and active and begin to behave like a unified profession. I don't notice the legislators dictating the content of medical education!

### Information Versus Myth

As noted above, I firmly believe that we must take lessons from the teachers' unions and learn how to advocate effectively for our profession—not just a few of us, all of us! Most teacher educators whom I know are not especially interested in meeting with the often-arrogant legislator, and furthermore we are not recognized, honored, or rewarded for this effort in retention, tenure, and promotion decisions.

Nevertheless, we must take the time to write for the opinion sections of the widely read newspapers, and not only for professional journals. We must phone in to the talk shows and counterattack the callers who believe that anyone with a college degree can teach. We must broadcast widely that our profession is built on a solid research base and that there is a body of knowledge and skills that are required for one to teach effectively.

The worst of times for us is the perpetuation of the "old saw" that "those who can't do, teach." Instead we need to broadcast that "Those who can, teach." The best of times is now because we have a wide range of opportunities to counterattack. It took the California Council on the Education of Teachers (CCET) about fifty years to realize that it needed to take a stand on policy issues and that political advocacy was an appropriate part of its mission. Let us not wait another fifty years to utilize the new CCET Policy Framework adopted this past year.

### Conclusion

Jones has raised ten very difficult points of debate, and as usual with difficult issues, they are not black and white. We are in many respects living professionally in the best of times many of us in teacher education have ever seen: plenty of students, a demand for our graduates, starting salaries that are at least beyond the food stamp level, and a strong body of research to support our work. The question is whether we have the passion and will to deal with the concurrent worst of times: the lack of time to do best what we know how to do, the constant badgering about teacher quality, and the seemingly inborn desire of legislators to dictate the content and nature of our work.

### References

- Braun, J. (1997). *Design and challenges of a multi-organizational professional development collaborative*. Paper presented at the semi-annual conference of the California Council on the Education of Teachers, San Diego, CA
- Miller, L., & O'Shea, C. (1996). School-university partnerships: Getting broader, getting deeper. In M. McLaughlin & I. Oberman, *Teacher learning: New policies, new practices*, p. 175. New York: Teachers College Press.
- National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1996). *What matters most: Teaching for America's future summary report*, pp.11-12. New York: National Com-

*"It Was the Best of Times, It Was the Worst of Times..."*

---

mission on Teaching and America's Future.

Nelson, B.S. & Hammerman, J. (1996). Reconceptualizing teaching: Moving toward the creation of intellectual communities of students, teachers, and teacher education. In M. McLaughlin & I. Oberman, *Teacher learning: New policies, new practices*, p. 8. New York: Teachers College Press.