

Inventing Solutions: It's Not "Either/Or" But "Both/And..."

By Ann Lieberman

Mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of either-ors, between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities. When forced to recognize that the extremes cannot be acted upon, it is still inclined to hold that they are all right in theory but that when it comes to practical matters circumstances compel us to compromise.

—John Dewey, *Experience and Education*

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Teacher education is clearly at a crossroad. Some of the contemporary challenges are described in the report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996).¹

- ◆ There will be two million teachers hired within the next decade.
- ◆ Students need to know more to succeed in the changing society.
- ◆ Our understanding of learning is expanding.
- ◆ Students are more diverse in terms of their language and culture.

In addition, schools and school systems have been slow to recognize that teachers need not only improved content learning, but time, support, and op-

portunities to develop strategies to cope with these changing needs. Even when some districts have had enough money to change the way they support teachers, their lack of knowledge and understanding of what is necessary for improved teacher learning and development has prevented progress in school reform—with a few dramatic exceptions.² While most teachers and school administrators agree that there are great pressures on schools to change, they do not necessarily agree on how or what those changes should be. What changes are significant—as opposed to “quick fixes” that can’t be sustained? What changes advance—or inhibit—democratic schooling in our country?

Rather than posing issues as dichotomies: should we deal with the quantity of teachers or the quality, support preservice or inservice, college campus versus school site, etc., we need to change the nature of the discussion. Perhaps specific examples of actual places, cases, and strategies that have involved school and university personnel in “both/and” approaches to changing teacher education and reforming schools can help us to avoid the either/or approaches. We may begin to see not only what is possible, but what new tools, language, forms, and knowledge are available to help us meet the challenges of the coming century.

Learning to Teach:

Building a Collaborative Culture of Learning

Perennial tensions between theory and practice have plagued teacher education. Typically colleges have taught theories of teaching while schools have been where new teachers really learn to teach. Universities, having provided courses in theory, subject matter, and methodology, then send students to schools where all of this knowledge is supposed to somehow come together. Teacher preparation programs have long been characterized by this separation of theory and practice, even though research—and the anecdotal experience of novice teachers—has told us that students learn the most about teaching by teaching.

But are these dichotomies necessary? Does theory have to be divorced from practice? Do university and school-based knowledge have to be two separate entities? Do students need to spend most of their time in college classrooms, with only a small block of time reserved for practicing how to teach in schools? The examples that follow enable us to see different ways in which these dichotomies can be resolved.

Building Strong Cultures of Teaching:

Alverno College

Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Bank Street College in New York City are colleges of education well known in the field for their integrated approaches to problems of theory and practice. What do these colleges do that enables their students to join together theory and practice, and teaching and learning, first as students and subsequently as teachers.

Alverno, a private liberal arts college that had at one time been a normal school, involves students in a personalized, supportive community centered on its "Ability-Based Curriculum." The entire teacher education program has been revamped so that the curriculum taught at the college is the same curriculum that serves as a foundation for the field experiences the students have in schools. (These experiences may begin when students are freshmen if they show an interest in becoming teachers).³ The college works with three partnership schools, carefully selecting cooperating teachers who understand and support the college's "Ability-Based Curriculum."

The faculty of Alverno has learned to work as a team so that courses are not given in isolation from the experiences of the students. The courses are constantly being reworked to help students relate synchronistically to their experiences in the "Abilities" curriculum. The faculty model their approach to teaching in the way they work with their students: giving feedback, constantly seeking to improve the curriculum, and studying and discussing problems connected to their own teaching. Faculty, seeing themselves as learners, formally engage in critiquing aspects of their teaching several times a year, looking for ways to change and improve the curriculum while transforming their own learning into new possibilities for their students. Teaching is seen by the faculty—and by the students—as a growing body of knowledge that is always in need of questioning, refining, and changing.

The incentives and reward systems for faculty have been designed to support the program—not to work against it. Since faculty are heavily involved in monitoring student progress, faculty courseload credit is connected to their "supervisory" load. Supervising students then is seen as a positive and important part of being a faculty member, rather than as an add-on taking time away from the "real" work of a faculty member.

Many of the faculty are also involved in the larger community outside their school. Their expertise is sought after in adjoining schools, districts, and on state committees. They are not only perceived as competent in their own right individually, but as members of a college faculty that has a reputation for producing outstanding graduates who go on to become outstanding teachers.

Bank Street College

Bank Street College, founded more than sixty years ago in Greenwich Village on the principles of what was then known as "Progressive Education," has long been known for its social values and concerns. Now located on the upper Westside of Manhattan, it continues to produce teachers who are readily recognizable as "Bank Street teachers." What do outsiders see in these teachers? What makes Bank Street graduates different from graduates of other schools?

The organizational heart of the Bank Street program is the development of its students' teaching knowledge and abilities through their involvement in, and with the support of, an "Advisory." The Advisory is made up of a group of six-to-eight students who have the same advisor throughout their teacher preparation program.

This same faculty member works with them at the college and is also their supervisor in the field. The group meets every week to talk about and work through new ideas, problems, and strategies of pedagogy and practice.

Strong progressive education values and ideas undergird the coursework and shape the way Bank Street students learn to teach. These ideas emphasize teaching by observing and building on the interests of individual students while, at the same time, creating a community of learners in the classroom. Historically, Bank Street was the first teachers college to develop a program that involved teachers in learning to observe and record students at work and, to this day, it is an important part of their teachers' learning. "Child Study" is also particularly associated with Bank Street, although it has taken other contemporary forms and iterations, such as "descriptive review" or "curriculum review." It is essentially the process wherein a whole faculty talk about and discuss a particular child, working together to better understand that child's special problems and strengths, in order to improve the ways teachers can work with that particular child. This close observation of children and their varied ways of learning is a defining characteristic of Bank Street graduates.

Bank Street College also houses a Children's School on the premises. Student teachers work in the school, then do graduate work in the same building—often using examples of what they have seen during the day as the source of their class learning. Courses, advisement, and field experiences are integrated and have become the core of the program.

Bank Street is organized around five basic themes: student centeredness; community emphasis; social and moral commitment; experiential education; and continuity of learning. These themes are at the heart of the Masters Degree program at Bank Street and are the centerpiece of the curriculum.

Many Bank Street professors who teach in the program have been at the school for many years. They speak of their work as "a way of life," not as a curriculum or a set of courses, but as a commitment to children and their learning. There is an "ethos" in the college and in Bank Street classrooms that is expressed in terms such as "child centeredness" and "experiential learning." A number of schools in Manhattan have hired Bank Street graduates for the express purpose of building "child centered" classrooms. For example, at P.S. 234 in Manhattan the whole school has been founded on Bank Street principles. The curriculum may involve several classes working together on the same theme. (For example, "Bread" is studied in the early grades. Children take field trips, bake bread, do studies of various aspects of its manufacture, draw murals, etc.) Curriculum written by teachers at this school, based on the units of study they created, can be found in their school library.

What the Two Colleges Have in Common

What do Alverno and Bank Street have in common? How have they *formed* and *shaped* a way of thinking about teacher education that avoids the familiar dichoto-

mies? Although each college is organized differently they appear to share important similarities:

- ◆ Each of these colleges has a core set of expectations for learning that is reflected in the curriculum of the college and that forms the basis for the kinds of teaching that students experience. There is an interface between theory and practice, rather than a separation.
- ◆ College teachers, themselves involved in teaching and learning, model the practice of teaching for students. It is not a model of “teacher knows all,” but rather that of a teacher who is her/himself involved in learning: inquiring into practice, observing children, monitoring progress, reading, discussing, reflecting, and keeping journals. Teaching and learning are seen as interconnected and new teachers experience this connectedness.
- ◆ College faculty involvement in schools in their community keeps them current and connected to real problems of practice, as well as contributors to the improvement of the larger community that surrounds them. They are themselves active learners, since problems they choose to teach about are problems of teaching and learning they themselves must deal with—which helps to connect the content they teach to the identifiable concerns of their students.
- ◆ Both colleges have a strong collaborative culture: the learning of students and the faculty’s own learning are constantly being questioned, strengthened, and improved. Educational reform is not an abstract topic, but an active part of the college’s work. Students (and their teachers) are active agents of reform.
- ◆ Each college in its own way teaches foundational knowledge, not at the expense of practice, but as a complement to it. General knowledge and school and classroom practice are connected so that practice informs theory as much as theory informs practice.

Regional Partnerships between Schools and Universities:

Reforming and Reculturing

The Southern Maine Partnership and the Trinity University partnership further inform our discussion.⁴ Both of these partnerships have formed relationships with groups of schools and, in the process, have joined school reform with teacher education reform.

The University of Southern Maine (USM) began by initiating a low key, low stakes connection with a group of school districts in Southern Maine. The partnership began by having conversations about issues that the school people felt were important to them. School and university personnel arranged dinner meetings that

came to be known as “dine and discuss” groups. The discussions, based on articles about educational issues, brought educators together as equals, building trust and respect for each other’s worlds over a two-year period. During this time schools were beginning to have discussions related to issues of reform of organizational and teaching practices while, at about the same time, the University was questioning the appropriateness of its Bachelor’s degree in Science. The newly-formed Partnership took the opportunity to use the partnership schools as sites for new teacher candidates, furthering a collaborative discussion about what the schools and the university could do together to both support school restructuring and invent a new teacher preparation program.

The partnership created its own governing structure: a policy board made up of the superintendents in the adjoining districts with a USM faculty person and a collaborative group consisting of the executive director of the partnership and several liaisons to the schools. Every project that the partnership has taken on creates its own collaborative group which has both school and university representatives. After a number of years it has become common to speak about the “partnership way of doing things.” Coursework and the fifth-year internship for new teacher candidates have been organized around the unique characteristics of the district, and USM students are involved in the “Partnership” schools integrating learning from both practice and coursework.

USM faculty offer courses in the schools, some team taught with teachers, some with university faculty alone, and some with teachers alone. “Reflection” is part of a district-wide norm as well as a concept taught to new teachers. Where the “Partnership” had put on Literacy Seminars for its members, several districts now put them on for their schools. Teacher learning has become continuous, beginning with new teachers and continuing throughout teachers’ careers. The “new teacher education program” (called the extended teacher education program—ETEP) is in use in several districts. A university coordinator, paid half by the district and half by the university, helps to keep the collaboration open and healthy. School reform and teacher education reform have been joined together as have practice and theory, preservice and inservice, and continuous growth for teachers, administrators, and teacher educators.

An “Alliance for Better Schools”

Trinity University, a small private liberal arts university in San Antonio, Texas, has built a strong partnership with two adjoining school districts. Like USM, Trinity slowly began to change a four-year education major to a five-year program that included students gaining experience in schools as early as their freshman year. Although a small program, it has been important in creating a close and egalitarian relationship between the schools and the university.

The process began ten years ago when a group of four schools organized into an “Alliance for Better Schools.” Following the Holmes Group suggestion of a professional development school model—where a school embedded in a district

becomes not only a place for the development of novice teachers, but for the continuing development of experienced professionals—it was transformed into a school/university partnership. The collaboratively-developed agenda was intended to help schools provide innovative teaching strategies, cooperative faculty relationships, strong university links, intensive efforts to induct new teachers, and ongoing professional development for new and experienced teachers.⁵

Using the Brackenridge Forum for the Advancement of Teaching as a base,⁶ the partnership was built encompassing two models of elementary school reform: the Basic School, modeled after Ernest Boyer's design, and the Core Knowledge School, created by E.D. Hirsch. Continuing efforts of the partnership have been directed at remaking the teacher education program, recruiting students for a career in teaching, and restructuring schools and teaching with a strong emphasis on the teacher.

An important element of the partnership is the process of bringing students into teaching. From the time they declare their interest in teaching, students begin to gain knowledge—both intellectual and practical—about schools, community, and teaching. The socialization into teaching is considered a five-year experience for a student, involving a strong mentorship program. The Trinity faculty includes clinical professors whose job is to mentor the cohorts of students at the school site in the Professional Development Schools. These faculty members, who spend half their time at the school site and half at the university, advise their students and shepherd them through their coursework, field placement, and internship. It is no accident that Trinity graduates and provides placements for one hundred percent of its students.

Bridging the Old Dichotomies

Looking at both the USM and Trinity partnerships—collaborations still in the process of rethinking and remaking themselves—enables us to see that changes can indeed be made in the way schools and colleges think about and organize themselves to create different roles and relationships. Perhaps this new knowledge can help us to bridge the age-old dichotomies that have long paralyzed the education of new teachers and frustrated the continued learning of experienced educators. And perhaps these partnerships can teach us:

- ◆ How to build relationships between schools and universities that cross the boundaries between theory and practice.
- ◆ How to recognize and make provisions for new roles that not only support new teachers, but that provide the means for linking school-based knowledge with university-based knowledge.
- ◆ Ways of organizing new teacher recruits into “cohorts” to create intentional communities of young scholars.
- ◆ How to build the commitment of districts, schools, and universities to

changing schools by supporting change agents, not as a passing fad, but as a legitimate and valued part of professional life.

- ◆ That networks of schools can provide a new form for reform by supporting and learning from each other—from school to school, district to district, and state to state.

And perhaps most importantly, we can learn how to build bridges across the old dichotomies—bridges that connect schools to universities, young teachers to older teachers, and, inevitably, theory to practice.

Notes

1. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. New York: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996.
2. See for example: Darling-Hammond, L., Reframing the School Reform Agenda: Developing the Capacity for School Transformation, in *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74(10), June, 1993; Hargreaves, A., *Changing Teachers, Changing Times* New York: Teachers College Press, 1994; Lieberman, A., Practices that Support Teacher Development: Transforming Conceptions of Professional Learning, in *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(8), April 1995; Little, J.W., *Teachers' Professional Development in a Climate of Reform*, New York: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, 1998; Elmore, R., *Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff Development and Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City*, August, 1997, New York: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.
3. For an excellent detailed case study of Alverno, see *Ability-Based Teacher Education: Elementary Teacher Education at Alverno College* by Kenneth Zeichner. New York: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, 1998. (The "Abilities" curriculum consists of: Conceptualization of Knowledge, Diagnosis, Coordination, Communication, and Integrative Interaction.) For a detailed study of Bank Street College, see *Where There Is Learning There Is Hope: The Preparation of Preservice Teachers at Bank Street College of Education* by Linda Darling-Hammond and Maritza Macdonald. New York: The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, 1998.
4. For a detailed discussion of the Southern Maine and Trinity partnerships, see *Knitting It All Together: Collaborative Teacher Education in Southern Maine* by Betty Lou Whitford, Gordon Ruscoe, and Lititia Fickel and *Trinity University: Preparing Teachers for Tomorrow's Schools* by Julia E. Koppich, both published by New York: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, 1998.
5. See Koppich, p. 11.
6. The Brackenridge Forum for the Advancement of Teaching was an institute that began an important dialog at Trinity with the surrounding school districts on teaching and learning.