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Reflection and Prognostication: Will Schools of Education Become the Alternative Route to Licensing?

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A Chronicle of Accountability

The National Evaluation Systems (NES®) annual meeting has many aspects that make it unique and attractive to those of us who are often referred to as "generalists." Interaction with persons truly knowledgeable in the field is one. The chance to attend, over a 24-hour period, a series of focused presentations that share what works and what to avoid is another. NES's annual compilation of these presentations is a third. Over the years, this publication has recorded the nation's efforts to achieve greater educational accountability in teacher preparation. Let me cite two examples.

- Five years ago, terms such as high-stakes testing, portfolio assessment, and disparate impact (as it relates to the differences in test results of minority and majority examinees) were central to some of the topics highlighted in the 1994 publication. Increasingly, states were adopting standards for teachers, and state agencies were
expected to identify valid, reliable, and fair testing procedures to ensure that teacher candidates met these standards (NES, 1994).

- Thirteen years ago, the 1986 edition made little reference to state standards, for either students or teachers. The pattern of testing, however, was becoming well established. Applicants for a state license were expected to pass tests related to basic skills, knowledge of content, and professional skills thought necessary for classroom success (Gorth and Chernoff). Test content was based less on expectations for student learning and more on what was necessary "to protect the public health, safety, and welfare" (Vorwerk and Gorth).

**Behind the Higher Education Curtain**

During my time as the Colorado commissioner of education in the early 1980s, attention to the quality of teacher education increased. Concern was expressed about the literacy of candidates applying for teaching licenses. The State Board of Education adopted a basic skills test and set a passing score that had the effect of focusing media attention on the differing results among institutions. Higher education institutions fought the basic skills requirement, but the "accountability door" had been opened. In addition, graduates of teacher preparation programs were asked to judge the effectiveness of their programs after one year of teaching and again after three years. Institutions supported this data collection on the condition that all results be sent directly to the institutions but not to the Colorado Department of Education for review and public reporting. The legislature resoundingly defeated the institutional amendment.

State policymakers moved to increase accountability to the public at all levels of education, but higher education was erratic in its support of this movement and jeopardized its
relationship with lawmakers by challenging legislative efforts. Behind this institutional curtain rested schools of education and teacher education. As K–12 reform movements mushroomed, questions began to be directed more and more to higher education as the steward of teacher education. John Porter, former state superintendent of Michigan and superintendent of Detroit, was once asked what he would have done differently in his career. Porter (1995) responded with little hesitation: "Early on I would have paid more attention to teacher education. I just assumed higher education institutions were doing the best they could. I was wrong to have made such a judgment."

How did teacher education become so disconnected from the needs and pressures of elementary and secondary schools? In *The Role of the University in the Preparation of Teachers*, James Raths (1999) has a wonderful chapter detailing how this unfortunate separation occurred. His explanation tracks this evolvement from the 1940s through the 1970s. Most state constitutions make the state responsible for establishing schools and licensing teachers. However, the states sowed the "seed of disaster for university-based teacher education programs and in the long run the profession itself" by delegating program responsibilities to higher education and then accepting candidates recommended for licensing without any serious evaluation of their quality (Raths).

Buried in the culture of academia, teacher preparation assumed all the characteristics of other campus programs. Students were admitted on the basis of a minimum grade point average. Specified hours and courses directed students through to the final challenge of student teaching. The rigor of the program was to be found in meeting the academic requirements of the university—sanctioned in general terms by state regulators with the guidance of campus educators. Course requirements focused on foundations, methods, child development, and student teaching. Colleges determined
content. Some universities organized teacher education advisory councils that included representatives from the arts and sciences and from local schools. But these groups made limited contributions and were used primarily to validate courses and work out the technical problems of program implementation. Confirmation of the quality of graduates with respect to their ability to teach effectively and their knowledge of their content areas was given scant attention until the states began to intervene in the 1980s.

Transferring almost total responsibility for the quality of teacher education to the schools of education has had another subtle but compounding effect on public education. Historically, and confirmed by John Goodlad's research in the 1980s, schools of education suffered from "prestige deprivation" (Goodlad, 1990). School of education faculty, operating in a "research and scholarly environment," found that participation in field-based activity with local public schools was held in low regard by faculty in the arts and sciences. Consequently, particularly in many states' regional and research institutions, school of education faculty have tried to build a rapport with their colleagues by directing their energy toward research and publication. Relationships with public schools and K–12 faculty have been given minimal commitment. When state policymakers aggressively sought to connect the quality of student learning, schools, and teachers in the 1990s, only a shallow reservoir of support, understanding, and sympathy was to be found in higher education.

The Curtain Is Lifted

Predictably, when policymakers tried to "repair" public education, student performance became tied to teacher performance. Beyond satisfying institutional requirements, policymakers asked, what evidence was there that beginning teachers were prepared to deal with the problems of students and schools? Besides the results of efforts to assess the basic
literacy level, professional skills, and the knowledge base of persons preparing to become teachers, few data were available.

Lacking convincing data and responding to beginning teachers' criticism of higher education institutions, lawmakers moved to establish alternative routes to licensing. In numerous legislative hearings in the second half of the 1980s, teacher education programs took a beating from graduates who felt unprepared for the challenges of the classroom and argued in support of preparation programs that often bypassed institutions of higher education. One distinct benefit of the reform proposals and the implementation of alternative licensing routes has been the escalated concern for collecting better summative data relevant to the validation of any teacher preparation program.

Mary Kennedy's examination (1999) of evidence in teacher education underscores the data problem. Assuming the role of a skeptic, Kennedy looked at the five general research strategies that have characterized teacher education research over the past few decades. Although some studies did attempt (with marginal success) to relate the characteristics of teacher preparation program graduates to student achievement, most research (1) focused on the classroom behavior of teachers, the attitude or beliefs of new teachers, or short-term observation of teachers after exposure to professional development opportunities or (2) consisted of follow-up studies summarizing self-reported data from program graduates.

Kennedy observed that policymakers are more apt to be persuaded by multiple regression studies that attempt to prove or disprove that good teaching makes a difference in children's learning. However, in her review and in more recent research, there is little definitive data on the ability of teacher preparation program graduates to move a group of students over time to a higher level of performance. In a
closing comment, Kennedy challenged those of us who believe that schools of education can provide America with high-quality beginning teachers. She wrote, "Taken together, these studies do not make a strong case for teacher education."

The century ends, however, with significant attention being paid to the transformation of programs and organizational processes. Most states have adopted teacher standards and now seek to relate these standards to their goals for student learning. The NES publications provide a wonderful chronicle of state efforts to make this connection. As states revisit their initial knowledge and content requirements, we see a replay of earlier debates over appropriate cut-off scores and pass rates. Courts have refined their responses to the various legal tests, and Michael Rebell's regular presentations at NES meetings have kept state education department staff advised of the minefields to be avoided. Recently, institutional results have taken on high-stakes implications as states and the federal government have increased their data and evaluation requirements. Even if one considers only the revolution in standard setting and assessment, one must recognize that it has been a traumatic decade.

I have worked for the past 10 years with the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) and the Institute for Educational Inquiry. The emphasis of this work has been on the simultaneous renewal of teacher education and schools as an integral part of creating "better teachers and better schools," the theme of one of John Goodlad's recent books (1994). The strategy of simultaneous renewal is intended to cement the connection between campus programs and schools. Officially launched in 1990, the NNER has been a leader in promoting school/university relationships. As dean of the College of Education at the University of Washington and a member of the NNER, Allen Glenn spoke enthusiastically at this meeting of the energy growing
out of the University of Washington's involvement in the life of public schools in the Puget Sound area. It is a story being told by an increasing number of the estimated 1,300 institutions preparing teachers.

Professional development schools or partner schools have become the primary vehicle for bringing teacher education faculty and public school personnel together on a regular basis. These opportunities have given public school staffs an opportunity to sensitize higher education faculty to the needs of the schools and the pressures faced by beginning teachers. Faculty have increased their hours in the field in support of programs aimed at linking theory and practice much more tightly. The report at this meeting by Hilda Medrano of the University of Texas–Pan American at Edinburg, Texas, on the school/university partnerships developed in that setting provided a sense of the far-reaching impact of such collaboration. The success at Edinburg and the results of some 400 to 500 partnerships in the NNER suggest that this model is becoming more widespread and will be a major component of all teacher preparation programs in the coming years. The simultaneous-renewal concept and the partner-school strategy establish a base on which states can build their results-oriented programs and collect data to evaluate teacher education effectiveness.

While observing policy shifts in recent years, I have watched states struggle to build a standards-based, performance-oriented preparation sequence. Establishing such a structure is not easy. Tom Wickenden, Billie Enz, and Caryn Shoemaker reported on the Arizona summit and the efforts of the Arizona State Board of Education and the regents to enhance teacher quality as a critical step in raising student academic performance. To assist that state in exploring the necessary structural changes, the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education helped organize round-table discussions involving many of Arizona's leaders in government,
business, and education. Change of this magnitude requires a high level of trust and cooperation among state agencies, the governor's office, the state legislature, school districts, higher education institutions, and associations—a level of trust and cooperation one struggles to find in any of the 50 states.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future made a report in September 1996 (Darling-Hammond) that broadened our challenge further. From a base of student and teacher standards, the focus moved to the quality of the preparation and professional development programs, recruitment and selection of persons entering the profession, rewards for those choosing an educational career, and the creation of schools that support the work of high-quality teachers. The commission laid out a daunting agenda. A dozen states have conducted audits of their current systems and have used these studies as a base from which to move to a state-level action agenda. In my judgment, some states have done well while others have struggled to get stakeholders to take the audits seriously. Implementation of strategies to change has been disappointingly slow in some states. The work of the Commission illustrates the enormous task of bringing about redirection of teacher preparation and professional development.

Possibilities for the Future

Given some of these trends and developments, what does the future hold? I would like to use the presentation of Education Trust Director Kati Haycock as a takeoff point for such speculation. The Education Trust is a well-respected foundation focusing on schools and colleges that serve low-income and under-represented populations. Haycock's comments were taken from her thought-provoking article titled "Good Teaching Matters . . . A Lot" (1998).
While states and the profession grapple with evaluative techniques to connect the quality of beginning teachers with student achievement, Haycock extends this discussion to the dramatic effect of good teaching on low-achieving students. She highlighted studies showing that students who had effective teachers for a three-year period showed marked academic improvement over students who had teachers judged to be less effective. In some cases, the students started with roughly similar test scores, but the difference after three years was significant. Good teaching had a tremendous impact on the performance of the students. Would you expect this? Of course. But do we organize our schools in ways that recognize these findings? No.

In most schools in low-income, racially diverse, urban areas, there is a high turnover of teachers, and school district collective-bargaining agreements are designed to allow teachers to move out of such schools. As Haycock indicated, the percentage of teachers judged to be effective in these schools is much lower than in middle- and upper-income areas. The message clearly escalates the quality question. If we are truly committed to educating all children well, it is critical to confirm the quality of classroom leaders. At this conference, we have focused primarily on the efforts of teacher educators and the states to ensure quality in teacher preparation and licensing. We hope that studies such as those cited in "Good Teaching Matters . . . A Lot" will stimulate educational leaders to adopt preservice and professional development policies and practices that demonstrate to the public and concerned legislators that we have a high-quality teacher in every classroom—a teacher who deserves respect and a high level of compensation. Educators at all levels are feeling pressured by the quality-assurance debates.

Are institutions of higher education and state departments ready for this heightened level of scrutiny? Some are, but most are not. In Colorado, we have been debating how
schools of education can confirm the ability of a potential teacher to move a group of students to a higher level of performance. For example, should a person preparing to teach second grade be required to show that he or she can, over time, move a student's reading score from the 40th percentile to a higher level? We have had some spirited exchanges over such questions. Three concerns are frequently expressed by campus educators.

1. Student teachers are not in the field long enough to demonstrate this level of confirmed performance.

2. Student teachers work under the supervision of classroom teachers, and there is no way to separate the student teacher's impact from that of the regular teacher.

3. The results on student tests are not seen as a valid measure of a teacher's ability to teach.

Each of these concerns deserves attention. Such questions are important because one year after the student teaching experience, the student teacher will be a classroom leader in a school that is being challenged to raise student test scores. Where should the ability to raise test scores first be demonstrated? Must it be on the job and not during the preparation period? Checklists to help supervising faculty and classroom teachers evaluate a student teacher often mention the student teacher's ability to present a single lesson, evaluate learning, diagnose problems, and remediate as necessary. Some programs are more demanding, but this is not an uncommon and limited set of criteria.

Time is also a factor in the evaluation of candidates for a state license. It is not unusual to find preparation programs still operating with only 400 to 500 hours of required field activity. The better programs, in which skills can be demonstrated and judged over time, require 900 to 1200 hours of supervised, field-based experience. Finally, if higher education faculty do not feel that teacher education programs
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can be related to student performance over time, they need to join the policy debates. Discussions on such topics will escalate in frequency and intensity as policymakers seek to connect progress in student learning to licensing practices and program review procedures.

As states adopt strategies for evaluating the ability of prospective teachers to meet various standards, regional and flagship institutions should take the lead in recognizing a persistent and major flaw in state policymaking. At a time when most states are adopting significant statutory provisions to affect the quality of teaching, few legislators can answer the following question: Five years from now, will you know whether this legislation has had a positive impact on the classrooms and schools of the state? Most adopted legislation contains no provisions for answering this question. Providing an answer is a legitimate and vital contribution to be made by the research institutions in each state. Higher education claims to revere research as one of its foremost missions. Why should research institutions not seek out resources to help states assess the value and long-term impact of their legislative acts?

Finally, what does all of this mean for the future of state departments of education? There will be (and should be) great change in the role of these departments, and much of it will relate to the confirmation of quality—the theme we have focused on at this conference. Confirming quality currently means making a massive time commitment to reviewing college transcripts. Does a transcript confirm quality? Probably to a limited degree, but departments need greater flexibility to experiment with new procedures to assure the public that a teacher license carries a meaningful stamp of quality.

Should state education department staff time be directed toward other tasks? Yes. Staff members need to spend far more time working with teacher preparation institutions and organizations to develop their ability to monitor and confirm
teacher quality. While some research projects can and should be directed by the states' research institutions, the state departments of education must have the study and research capacity to respond to the school districts' concerns about teaching quality, particularly as it relates to the licensing of out-of-state teachers and emergency licensing to meet teacher shortages.

In summary, over the past decade we have witnessed an attempt by states to assume responsibility for the quality of new teachers. This effort has been seen by some as a threat to the professionalization of teaching and to the dominant position of institutions of higher education. It has created divisions between state boards and higher education commissions, institutions and professionals, school districts and higher education. These splits have hindered development of a unified strategy with which to address the quality issue. We are threatened by further bypassing of higher education in the preparation of teachers. Some legislators are at the point of debating the need for any licensing of teachers by the state. Continued arguments among the various educational entities have the potential to be destructive to public education and society itself.

We have heard many positive reports at this conference, but the salient ones in my mind are those stories in which K–12 education, higher education, and the state have come together to aggressively improve the system. The coming challenges are great, and we will succeed only with a greater unity of effort that recognizes the urgency of the topics we have pursued at this conference. This urgency and unity are struggling to emerge in most states and at the national level. Unless we come together on the issue of quality, we may well see a future NES conference focusing on the topic: "Schools of Education: A Desirable Alternative Route to Teacher Licensing?"
References


John Porter's quote is taken from a planning meeting of the Chief State School Officers in St. Louis, May 20–21, 1995. As former chiefs, Porter and the author were invited to review priorities we wished we had set during our time in office and to suggest topics current chiefs might consider.

