"...Letters and Reflections on Our First Year as Beginning Professors" Revisited— and a Letter to Deans of Education

By J. Gary Knowles & Ardra L. Cole

In 1991 we wrote a paper, which was later published, in which we explored, through the exchange of letters, our first year as "beginning" professors of teacher education (see, Knowles & Cole, 1994). We examined the contexts and demands associated with our roles as "neophyte," tenure-track faculty members, and considered our experiences and analysis in relation to other research in the areas of beginning professor socialization and development, and the teacher education professoriate. This led us to an articulation of several issues and questions related to individually and institutionally defined roles, expectations, and commitments for beginning professors of teacher education.

In this concluding article of the theme issue on beginning professors and teacher education reform we thought it fitting to revisit that earlier, published

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writing. We do so because, preparing this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*—reading, selecting, and editing manuscripts as well as exploring various bodies of literature—served to remind us both of our own early experiences in the professoriate and, more significantly, of the adage that "the more things change [or, in the case of education, are **purported** to change] the more they stay the same." Although we are not naive enough to expect great changes in schools and faculties of education over a relatively short term, we are, however, struck by the similarities between the experiences and contexts expressed by the many relatively new, untenured professors of teacher education represented in this issue and our own expressions several years earlier. In response we conclude this article and the issue with an open letter to Deans of Education.

Revisiting Our Letters

We revisit our published reflections from our current vantage point, eight or so years after our "beginning" and five years after we assembled the letters and wrote the original version of the article. Some of our responses are these:

We are struck by the all-pervading significance of **institutional context**—meaning the encompassing aspects, bureaucracies, climates, divisions, and collective energies of faculty within our institutions—and the ways that it eventually played out in our respective experiences. Moreover, we are more aware of the roles of leadership and the roles of "power brokers" within faculties and schools of education in perpetuating (or challenging?) the institutional status quo and how, together, such influences dramatically shaped our respective, current contexts and our responses to them. Deans, chairpersons, and senior faculty played major roles in shaping our professional lives, indirectly and in very subtle ways. For example, our respective dean/director and chairpersons profoundly affected our current professional status and standing by the manner in which they encouraged our practices, rewarded us with merit pay (as in Gary's case, since merit pay is not used at Ardra's institution), advised us with respect to the tenure and promotion application process, allocated and negotiated teaching loads, solicited our participation on significant or insignificant committees, or supported us with professional development funds and other resources. And, in some very real ways, they helped set the tone of the institutional environments.

We now know, with more experienced-based certainty, how institutional contexts can support, hinder, or blatantly obstruct the well-rounded professional growth of new professors. While, over the years, we became more comfortable within our respective contexts—no doubt becoming ever more socialized by the insane pressures of our work and institutional demands—they continued to be the most powerful influences on the shape of our experiences and careers. Some of the very elements that made our respective institutions potentially exciting (such as the possibility of working with able graduate students, and the attention to the researching

endeavor) were the elements that turned out to have a hand in our frustrations and dilemmas. We have both worked with more than a fair share of dissertation writers, for example, so that we have at times felt somewhere between being ecstatic at working with creative and intelligent doctoral students and totally swamped in reading theses, advising writers, and bringing the work of committees to completion. We continue to agree with those such as Howey and Zimpher (1989) who maintain that we, as a profession, understand far too little about the contextual elements in which we work and which profoundly affect new faculty in particular.

The importance of understanding institutional contexts and cultures was highlighted by Kleinsasser *et al* (pp. 37-54) and by Olson (pp. 127-142). For Olson, making sense of the university landscape and her place on it were/are essential for understanding her work with preservice teachers and other educators.

That context is (almost?) everything in the introduction of new members of the teacher education professoriate into the academy is underscored by the experiences of new faculty at a new California campus (Rios, McDaniel, & Stowell, pp. 23-36). Their collective story witnesses a different twist to most. Their considerable legitimate and institutionally supported claims to autonomy are very enviable; yet, as they suggest, such autonomy in practice is tempered by the potential for tenure disaster. On one hand they have great latitude in the programmatic affairs of their work and roles. On the other hand, the considerable opportunities for progressive, innovative practices supported by new forward-planning (?) administrators may be thwarted by faculty beyond the school of education. Or worse, such opportunities may be lost altogether in these faculty members' attempts to merely replicate the reward structures of "old" institutions in a "new" university without due consideration of contemporary mandates, demands, and possibilities for wider, systemic educational reform. The chance for substantial reform in teacher education may be lost, it seems, in a regressive enterprise. Nevertheless, the sky is the limit. Still, it seems, only time will tell whether more than the stars will shine.

The **isolationist nature** of work in the academy still evokes in us a tension. Even though we acknowledge that the relative isolation of the academy has provided us freedoms to pursue our own agenda, we also have appreciated many opportunities we have had to work collaboratively with each other and with other colleagues. Our best work, we feel, has been accomplished by working together. The culture of individualism in the academy, however, supported by the drive for uniqueness, distinction, and prestige, works counter to the sustenance of different forms of collaborative work. Collaboration in any kind of professional work—teaching, researching, writing, program development—is enormously time-consuming; much emphasis needs to be placed on the **process** of working together. For teachers and reform-minded teacher educators, attention to process is paramount; it is the heart of "good" teaching and essential for the creative articulation of alternative programs and practices. Yet, in a product-oriented culture like the academy, attention to process is not deemed efficient—it does not represent "good

value for the money." Most of the contributors to this issue comment on the culture of isolationism prevalent in the academy, and on their preference for collaborative work. Rios, McDaniel, and Stowell (pp. 23-36) and Kleinsasser, Bruce, Berube, Hutchinson, and Ellsworth (pp. 37-54) explicitly address the relationship between collaborative work and the reward system of the university.

On the other hand, the fact that most of the articles within this issue reflect high levels of collaboration is, in itself, witness to other ways of being in the university. The Arizona Group (pp. 153-168) as well as the writing groups from California (Rios, McDaniel, & Stowell, pp. 23-36), Wyoming (Kleinsasser, Bruce, Berube, Hutchinson, & Ellsworth, pp. 37-54), and Ontario (Chin & Russell, pp. 55-68) witness the value, professional empowerment, and influence of collaborative enterprises. The Wyoming teacher educators talk about the isolationist nature of the university context and the need for relationships that ease newcomers like themselves into the institution. The energy, it seems, associated with building programs from the foundations up, as we might always hope and as is evident in the California case, is increased by the synergetic flow of ideas and practices of these new, innovative, collaborating faculty members. The Arizona Group's members survived their early years because of their relationships with and support of one another. And, in Chin and Russell's case (pp. 55-68), their relationship brought mutual sustenance and stimulation to their teaching endeavors.

We continue to be amazed at the relative **lack of attention to the introduction and developmental support of new members of the professoriate**. Likewise we still feel—and also hear from many colleagues—the great gap between the **rhetoric** of support for new faculty and the actual **practices** associated with attempts to foster ongoing professional development. Even in institutions where there have been attempts to assist with the introduction and support of new faculty, there is a tendency to respond programatically (*i.e.*, with the establishment of generalized orientation or mentoring programs, for example), whereas more individually-attuned responses to the professional growth needs of new professors may be more appropriate. In this regard, we are reminded, again, of the parallels between beginning teachers and beginning professors when we consider how, in the recent past wave of attention to beginning teachers, school systems responded with the institutionalization of various kinds of induction **programs** rather than with attention to teachers as **individuals**. We hear in all of the articles in this collection, direct or indirect calls for attention to this issue, although it is primarily the writers from Wyoming who are more vocal about the need for more formal arrangements (see, Kleinsasser, Bruce, Berube, Hutchinson, & Ellsworth, pp. 37-54).

The **dualities** of teaching and researching are ever more present in our thinking. Over the intervening years we worked hard to integrate these two elements of our work. Personally, we believe we have been quite successful, and have experienced satisfaction as a result; from an institutional perspective, however, Gary in particular, has had substantial difficulties, as we noted in an earlier article in this

issue (see Cole & Knowles, pp. 109-126). We recognize that the integration of teaching and researching represents a challenge to the compartmentalized nature and hierarchical quality of the relationship that traditionally has defined teaching and research. And we understand that the political will to stick to rather than break with tradition is incredibly strong in academic cultures. Nevertheless, in teacher education in particular, there **must** be appropriate recognition of the integral relationship between theory and practice, research and teaching, academic and practical knowledge. In saying this we are particularly mindful of the growing number of teacher educators who are developing research agenda based on an examination of their own practice and/or their institutions. We wonder about the implications of political and intellectual responses to their work. Olson (pp. 127-142) wonders too, as does one of the teacher educators in Elijah's (pp. 69-90) study. And we continue to be fearful about the way the actual reward process plays out in the lives of teacher educators, a fear that is evident in every one of the articles in this issue.

Questions about the "validity" of teacher education research not embedded in mainstream epistemological approaches abound, implicitly so, in the stories of experience represented in this collection. These questions are not superficial, figments of nervous tenure and promotion candidates; nor are they smoke-screens for sub-standard, careless inquiry, or excuses for simply not being productive, scholarly members of institutional communities. They are questions that arise from individual and collective perceptions about the great gulfs between traditional and contemporary purposes and approaches to the formation of knowledge, and between understandings about the theory-practice relationship, educational reform broadly defined, and the development of sound, innovative, forward-looking practice.

The tensions associated with the dualities defining teacher educators' work reach far and wide, as attested to by the array of accounts in this issue. The work of reform is enervatingly unending and the commitment required of professors is immense. In some institutional contexts, it seems, little attention is given to the long-term human costs associated with such work. A consistent theme in these writings is the concern, expressed by teacher educators, that their work (in its entirety and scope) be honored by the pivotal power holders within the academy—the upper echelons of governance, including the trustees of universities, and **especially** institution-wide, tradition-bound faculty retention and promotion committees. This tension of commitment and career focus is evident in the vignettes of experience framed by Kleinsasser, Bruce, Berube, Hutchison and Ellsworth (pp. 37-54) who are embedded in a traditional university which holds notions about the importance of its contributions to the wider reform agenda, and by McCall (pp. 143-152) who acknowledges the inherent dilemma in "teaching against the grain" in an institution intent on rewarding conformity. Yet, more powerful in another sense is the tension evident between the power holders in the new Californian institution; Rios, McDaniel, and Stowell (pp. 23-36) torment us with the possibility of an enlightened administration hamstrung by a regressive, tradition-entrenched retention and pro-

motions committee, a position that may be more common than we dare imagine.

We continue to struggle with the issue of **balance**, of forming our holistic selves within the demands and pressures—implicit and explicit—of our work. That we each have **still** not managed to find the "right" balance between our personal lives and our professional responsibilities is attributed to more than the fact that we each have long histories of being totally involved in our work. (The Protestant work ethic runs freely in our veins.) Part of the problem, our personal histories withstanding, lies in the fact that so much of what we need to do is not clearly defined within the contexts in which we work, and this is as much a reflection on the culture of schools of education, and universities, and their related governance and reward structures as anything else. In a recent article entitled "Overextended," Hampel (1995) addresses this very issue. He convincingly argues that higher education as an institution offers tremendous incentives, and indeed socializes scholars, to overextend themselves in their work. While Hampel addresses his remarks to academics in general, we suggest that the incentives (and pressures) to overextend are even greater for beginning professors—particularly those involved in labor-intensive reform efforts—and for women faculty members. A poignant example is given by a member of the Arizona Group (pp. 153-168), as she describes her struggle at Christmas time to balance family, self, and professional responsibilities:

> I wonder at this time of year especially whether the things my children and husband are missing out on because of the decisions we have made about our academic lives are worth the things they receive because of the decisions we have made.... I think that M and E's pre-Christmas memories will be of coloring in Mom's office while she does grades and of students and faculty popping in to give good Christmas wishes. (p. 165)

We continue to wonder about the **influence of social class and gender** on our experiences and the experiences of other new professors. So too, issues of class and gender are raised in the McCall (pp. 143-152), Elijah (pp. 69-90), Finley (p. 91-107), and the Arizona Group (pp. 153-168) articles. We continue to perceive many inequities in the way some faculty members accept and carry out their responsibilities within our institutions, and attribute interpretations of social class and seniority differences to many of the inequities we have observed or experienced. We also acknowledge the heavy responsibilities for fieldwork of various kinds that many women seem to have within teacher education programs, and we question the basis for this serious inequity. It is beyond the scope of this commentary to delve into the depths of the sexist and classist traditions that continue to prevail in higher education institutions (see, *e.g.*, Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Dews & Law, 1995; Simeone, 1987; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993). For now, suffice it to say that schools of education—themselves victims of the elite, patriarchal culture of the academy—are no less guilty of the same attitudes and practices.

We were, and are, painfully aware of many other pervading and perplexing

issues associated with the work of preparing thoughtful, invigorated, creative, and caring teachers. It is exceedingly hard work and it is taken up amid a political climate which places great pressure on the teaching profession, the teacher education professoriate, and on educational institutions across the board. Yet, to expect the politically weakest members of the professoriate to fully and extensively participate in the field and in the academy under the existing governance structures and reward systems within schools of education seems deleterious. It bodes ill for the future of classroom, school, and institutional reform **and** the teacher education professoriate, more generally.

Our Letter to Deans

Continuing in the epistolary tradition we have established with respect to our experienced-based (re)examinations of the teacher education professoriate, and taking courage from the example of Sarason's (1993) *Letters to a Serious Education President*, we present an open letter addressed to deans of education in universities across North America and beyond.[1] As we do this we are also heartened by the kinds of questions asked and solutions sought by the small group of deans of education calling themselves the Network for Innovative Colleges of Education (NICE). Together, they published elements of their experiences and thinking about the prospects and problems associated with the process of leading and creating innovative (reformed?) schools of education (see the Winter, 1996, issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, specifically, Wisniewski, 1996a, 1996b; Blackwell, 1966). At the same time we are dismayed by what we see as a great disparity between the rhetoric of reform (as, for example, advocated by the Holmes Group, 1990, 1995) and the realities of practice in schools of education. We admonish all those involved in the preparation of teachers, and also remind ourselves, to endeavor to **make** the rhetoric reality.

At the risk of trivializing the very complex issues and dilemmas facing deans and their schools, we write a relatively brief letter in which we raise a narrow ranges of explicit issues and pose questions. These issues and questions are related directly to the work of untenured teacher educators (especially those who are reform-minded) and their introduction to and sustenance in the academy.

> Dear Deans of Education:
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> We know there are many conflicting and complex demands placed upon you daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. We know that your work is extensive and demanding. We know that you are extremely busy: facilitating the daily organizational activities of your school and faculty; seeking and supporting intellectually able and suitable students; responding to minor and major crises not of your doing; challenging and encouraging faculty to be exemplary teachers and learners; stimulating the innovative

flow of course and program development; encouraging faculty commitment in service to the university, local communities, and the field beyond; advocating and supporting research endeavors and associated grant-seeking; negotiating budgetary monies from tight-pursed university central administrators; lobbying, responding to, or meeting with various government and other agencies involved in monitoring educational endeavors and the preparation of teachers; answering questions of mass media journalists and the public about the state of education and of reform processes; soliciting resources from over-taxed alumni; attending professional social functions of various kinds; and meeting many other expectations, including ones associated with, perhaps, your own work of teaching and scholarship, and your own need for stimulating, ongoing professional development. And, we assume that, while teacher education may be only one of many programmatic foci that falls within your institutional responsibilities, you are invested in the notion of securing highly qualified, able, and creative new teacher education faculty, keeping them at your institution, and sustaining their careers. Our assumption is that you care about the well-being of the most politically vulnerable members of your academic community.

We urge and encourage you to address a number of pressing questions associated with the introduction of new professors to the academy and their ongoing support and professional development as they respond to both the demands of the university **and** the field. In so doing, we implore you to seek substantial resolutions to these complex questions; resolutions which are socially just and equitable, morally just and fair, intellectually just and honest, academically just and reasonable and, simply, mindful of persons in the most holistic sense. This is no small order.

Our belief in the academy—and its power to recreate, revolutionize, reform, revise, reconstruct teacher education—is waning a little, a feeling brought about by constructs of history and recent verifiable reports from untenured teacher educators themselves who find it difficult to maintain their idealism in the face of many different obstacles, some institutional, and some professional/personal.[2] Such numerous reports and reflections on the work of professing within the arena of teacher education witness frustrations concerning the processes of educational reform and, especially, with the restraints placed on those who wish to engage in alternative (re)formative pedagogies and research practices within the academy and schools. Yet, we know that there are deans who are challenging the institutional status quo, and we applaud them.

We respectfully challenge you to put yourselves on the line as it were and make bold institutional and leadership moves that in turn challenge the status quo at every level across the spectrum of educational institutions

but, **particularly**, in schools of education, your home turf. We urge you to apply the age-old adage: "Get your own household in order before admonishing others [namely, school personnel] to do the same."

Although the interrelated issues we raise and the questions we ask evidence our own particular perspectives and concerns, we have formed them thoughtfully and respectfully. They are a result of our exposure to the stories of experience as told by numerous named and anonymous untenured colleagues, and further informed by a study of the available literature (scant as it may be) on the socialization experiences of beginning, untenured professors of teacher education.

Our overlapping issues and questions are these:

u Given the prevalence of internal and external mandates which establish the legitimacy of interest in and participation by schools of education in efforts to bring about widespread educational reform, can your school of education, through examination and refinement, make more relevant and internally consistent the fundamental assumptions and values upon which your institution is based and faculty engage in their work?

u Given the often conflicting, dual demands of service to the university and service to the teaching profession in the field, can your school of education rethink and rearticulate the promotion and tenure reward structures for professors of teacher education so that there is more than merely lip service given to the work of truly reforming schools and teacher education?

u Given the vast range of fruitful scholarship—from practical and field-based theoretical work, to other more traditional forms of theoretical research—pursued and accomplished by professors of teacher education, and keeping in mind the differing paradigms that give rise to such work, can your school of education find appropriate ways of acknowledging differing perspectives and encourage the development of safe places for those with unpopular views, perhaps ideas "before their time"? Can your school of education protect the intellectual freedoms of those newer faculty who seek to challenge the status quo and imaginatively engage in the work of teacher education and school reform?

u Given the prominence of hierarchical models of governance within universities and schools, can your school of education apply the same kinds of reform processes, and encourage the same kinds of reexaminations of administrative and facilitative structures, that schools of education like yours advocate for reorganizing and invigorating elementary and secondary schools? And, can your school of education break out of the vertical power structures so common in universities and adopt more horizontal, participatory governance structures that may serve (among

other things) to mitigate the power differentials within the ranks of faculty members, a cause of considerable inequities for new professors?

u Given that the (professional) health of a faculty, and ultimately an institution, depends on the health of its individual members, and given the well-known and documented pressures placed on both new teachers in the field and new professors in the academy, can your school of education provide fundamentally new and different ways to support new faculty, ways that address the heart of their professional-personal needs rather than merely serving institutional needs? Can your school of education promote ways for new members of the professoriate to extend and develop their potentials and interests through sustained career-long development processes? And, can your school of education find fruitful ways to address institutional and personal/professional needs in mutually satisfying ways?

u Given the myriad expectations often placed on new untenured faculty as a result of their often "enlightened" interests and expertise in reform activities, and their often significant experiences in the field, can your school of education provide mechanisms to promote their more focused, sustained professorial work? Can your school of educationespecially attend to those individuals inclined to take on too much, and be spread too thinly, in efforts to become secure, appreciated, and valued members of the academy? And, can your school of education become more restrained in its expectations of new faculty, perhaps believing in the adage, "less is more"?

u Given that universities, contrary to the opinion of some, tend to be very conservative institutions, can your school of education invigorate and sustain the idealism of new faculty members who often have clear conceptions of learning environments or programs which may be fundamentally different from those commonly held within your institution? Can your school of education provide ways to honor the perspectives and idealism of new faculty by, for example, providing opportunities for the articulation, development, and implementation of their ideals? And, can your school of education encourage and reward new faculty who wish to actively search for, try out, and implement alternatives in their research, service, coursework, and program development activities?

u Given the often unintentional differentiation of faculty members—those who have taught in elementary and secondary schools, and those who have not; those who are involved in highly theoretically-based work, and those who are grounded in practice-based work—can your school of education find ways to honor the diverse and alternative work of **all** faculty by **not** over-emphasizing and valuing one kind of focus at the expense of another? (At the same time, it would be important to urge faculty to be

explicit and consistent in the articulation of their underlying rationales and perspectives.)

u Given that there are serious inequities evident within institutions, especially between gender, racial, and social class groups, can your school of education be more attentive to issues surrounding equities of work loads, expectations, and financial remunerations?

Our expectations regarding your attention to these issues and questions center on the hope that schools of education will, through their formal internal leadership and (reformed?) decision-making processes, become places more conducive to the serious work associated with substantially reforming the underlying purposes, governance, organizational structures, and pedagogical practices associated with institutions of learning at **all** levels.

Sincerely,
J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole
(with the support of and encouragement from many untenured professors of teacher education who are seeking to make a difference)[3]

Notes

1. We acknowledge the very different conditions of education and schooling, and the preparation of qualified, certificated new teachers, in **other** Western and non-Western regions and countries. We also acknowledge the considerable variation in the ways and conditions under which teacher educators are employed, and the varying levels of experience and academic preparation required of them. To deans or directors of education in these other than North American contexts our letter may appear to have limited meaning but, we believe, there is a fundamental degree of universality associated with some of the issues we raise. We believe some of our concerns about the introduction of new faculty to the professoriate are more than just regional. As we have noticed in our travels and visitations to schools in many countries, schooling and teaching is more similar across national boundaries than it is different, so too we suspect with teacher education and schools of education.
2. Some examples (such as those of McCall, pp. 143-152; Elijah, pp. 69-90; and the Wyoming Group, pp. 33-54) are represented in this issue and in the Summer, 1995, issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* entitled "Self-study and Living Educational Theory" (for overviews, see, Pinnegar & Russell, 1995; Korthagen, 1995). We particularly refer to articles by Guilfoyle (1995), Hamilton (1995), Placier (1995), and Pinnegar (1995), and examples of their earlier work.
3. We welcome responses from Deans of Education and others to our letter. Our address is The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6, Canada. We can be reached by e-mail at ardracole@oise.on.ca.

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