Through the Looking-Glass:
Self-Study in an Era of Accountability

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> Then she began looking about, and noticed that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible. (Carroll, 1865/1966, p. 8)

In spring of 1999, as the centerpiece of a school-wide evaluation of our credential programs, our school of education faculty conducted a self-study involving graduates of our credential programs. To assess how well we prepared our students for the reality of teaching, faculty members interviewed and observed our graduates teaching in their classrooms. We deliberately chose to select graduates who had been teaching three to five years, well beyond their first year of teaching. What is it like, we asked, to be a new teacher? What is the nature of the teaching context (the professional community, administrative support, school climate, etc.)? What theories and methods were most useful to these new teachers, and in what ways did their experiences in our credential programs prepare them for these jobs? This paper examines not only what we learned about our graduates, but, more importantly, what we learned about the promise and pitfalls of the process of self-evaluation.

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Self-Study in an Era of Accountability

The nationwide preoccupation with public school accountability continues to grow, with teachers and administrators pressured to structure their curricula around state-mandated standards assessed by high-stakes tests. In California, for example, the State Department of Education has implemented an accountability system by which schools are publicly ranked each year according to the results of a single standardized test. So-called high-performing schools must show a minimum of 5 percent improvement per year, while low-performing schools are assigned an “external evaluator” to help bring up scores — or risk closure. California’s 1999 Program Quality Review literature proclaims: “NO EXCUSES!: Doing Whatever it Takes to Close the Achievement Gap!” The “legislated excellence" movement (Wood, 1992) is clearly in full swing.

Teacher education programs have not escaped scrutiny. In the midst of this heightened emphasis on assessment and evaluation, the state accreditation commission directed our School of Education to design and implement, in the commission’s words, “a comprehensive unit-wide evaluation system . . . to regularly inform program planning and decision-making.”

The concept of evaluation as an integral part of curriculum development and program improvement is not anything new, dating back more than half a century (Schubert, 1986). Ever since Tyler (1949) identified four basic questions for curriculum planners and theorists to consider, evaluation has been recognized as a key component of a never-ending cycle: establishing goals —> planning learning experiences —> sequencing learning experiences —> evaluating learning experiences —> modifying goals —> planning learning experiences —> and so on.

The notion of “curriculum alignment” — in which the written curriculum, textbooks, taught curriculum, and evaluation measures all reflect the same knowledge and information (Glatthorn, 1994) — assures even greater congruency among Tyler’s four aspects of curriculum development. Of course, critical feedback to this prevailing model has been plentiful. As Apple (1974, 1995) points out, a problem with this paradigm is that it presupposes a closed system, upon which neither the evaluation system nor those individuals living the curriculum on a daily basis can have any substantive influence:

> It was largely a behaviorally oriented, procedural model. It was of almost no help whatsoever in determining the difficult issues of whose knowledge should be taught and *who* should decide. It focused instead on the methodological steps one should go through in selecting, organizing, and evaluating the curriculum. One of the ultimate effects of Tyler’s model, though perhaps not intentional, was the elimination of political and cultural debate. (Apple, 1995, p. 37, emphasis in original)

Considering Apple’s critique of this paradigm, many teacher educators would be, to say the least, reluctant to participate in a state-mandated self-study. Such an

evaluation plan would perhaps more properly seem to be merely one of myriad facets of the accountability movement which, as Karier (1973, p. 136) writes, "all [serve] as part of a broader efficiency movement to classify, standardize, and rationalize human beings to serve the productive interests of a society essentially controlled by wealth, privilege, and status."

Credentialing programs can certainly provide enough "hard" data — documentation of School of Education participants and programs, Scantron-scored surveys, Likert-scaled course evaluations, etc. — to satisfy the state bureaucrats' "modernist [positivist] obsession with quantification and measurability" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 13). It is possible, however, to view such a required task not as a bureaucratic intrusion but as an opportunity for true self-examination — to seek insights into programs and practices which would be meaningful to the participants. Solomon (1998, p. xi.) argues, "The cogent strategy is to make the influences and controls of a variety of stakeholders work for our purposes rather than against them." Especially considering state agencies' increasing control over knowledge taught in and goals expected of credentialing programs, school of education faculty need to develop evaluation plans which will push their self-studies out of Tyler's curriculum development loop and generate meaningful conversation about what they do and why they do it.

One way to accomplish this purpose is to push the locus of the evaluation itself out of the teacher education loop. A primary goal of all teacher education programs must be to prepare individuals for successful careers in teaching. But merely looking at what happens to its candidates and what they learn during the year or two that they are in the program cannot hope to determine the extent of a program's success. Teacher knowledge, as Shulman (1995) asserts, includes a dizzying array of facets, from content and pedagogical knowledge to an understanding of educational ends, purposes, and philosophical constructs. The extent of an individual's knowledge in many of these areas could not be ascertained in the vacuum of a university classroom; nor could most student teachers immediately apply all of this knowledge when they first set foot in the school. Teachers' knowledge continually evolves as they solve problems confronting them on a daily basis: "The individual classroom teacher engages in the construction of his or her own reality, using as the basis for that reality teacher education content knowledge, personal experience, intuition, and so on . . . in a highly complex, individualistic, and often unpredictable working context" (Norlander-Case, et.al, 1999, p. 49). So our education faculty's primary goal for our self-study was to determine the extent to which the knowledge that our graduates acquired in our programs prepared them for this ongoing process.

But what, we asked ourselves, does "success" in the classroom look like, and how could one determine the degree of "fit" between a teacher education program and the life of a new teacher, especially given the uniqueness of every school environment and every teacher's experience? Interestingly, while teacher education scholarship encompasses an ever-growing range of theory and research

(Zeichner, 1999), and the standards movement continues to precipitate a veritable flood of literature on assessment and evaluation, scant research addresses the evaluation of teacher education programs. If, as we believed, quantitative measures alone could not provide the knowledge we sought, what methodologies could we use to gain this knowledge?

As our primary methodology for this self-study, we chose to engage in what Pritchard (2002) calls *practitioner research* — "the array of activities people carry out as they seek knowledge or understanding while pursuing or improving a social practice in which they regularly engage" (p. 3). We visited our former students in their classrooms not as evaluators looking for particular features or teacher attributes, but rather as "educational connoisseurs" (Eisner, 1994, 1998) seeking to understand these teachers' beliefs, practices, teaching environments, and perceptions about our credential programs. Our hope was that when we all returned from the field to share what we encountered, we would look for patterns and consistencies to help us answer our research questions. Discussions would inevitably lead to conversations regarding our assumptions about good teaching, healthy learning environments, worthwhile preparation for preservice teachers, and perhaps, even the purposes of schooling. Thus, we hoped, our evaluation methodology would stimulate the kind of self-examination and political debate that can lead to substantive curricular change.

The Self-Study Process

This self-study was not initially an endeavor that the School of Education faculty voluntarily undertook. Following its 1998 review of our credentialing programs, the California Commission for Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) gave us one year to develop a school-wide evaluation system — or risk losing our accreditation.

Amid the charged political atmosphere in California, our faculty was at first quite hostile toward and suspicious of this directive. We already had a number of program-based evaluation procedures in place and had little interest in designing, administering, and compiling the results of an array of fill-in-the-bubble surveys, using antiquated — but still dominant — positivistic models of evaluation. Whose purposes, we wondered, would be served by such an evaluation system? While teacher preparation programs in California were not yet experiencing the level of scrutiny that our K-12 schools were experiencing, there had been, nonetheless, an increasing degree of top-down control of the state's credentialing programs' curricula.[1]

Fortunately, the School of Education was able to hire educational consultants at Inverness Research Associates to assist us in developing, planning, and implementing our self-study. These consultants provided an independent, external perspective on the process of the self-study. Because they were "outsiders" — not

affiliated with either the university or the state — they arrived without agenda or allegiance to any particular entity. Serving as "guides, facilitators, critical friends, and spurs to action" (St. John, et.al, 1999), they provided invaluable energy, advice, and support throughout the process. This "inside-outside partnership" between the School of Education faculty and the educational consultants allowed the "neutral and naïve outsiders" to establish a level of trust with the faculty (St. John, et al., 1999). The consultants also urged us not to just go through the motions of producing reams of quantitative data. In addition to circulating the requisite surveys and questionnaires, they advised, we should devote most of our efforts to developing strategies that would provide insights into our programs and practices in which we could find meaning. Thus, we began planning this study in the manner Pritchard describes in his discussion of practitioner research. He comments, "Practitioner researchers understand research as an integral part of what they do in the ordinary course of events as a way of improving their regular practice" (2002, p. 4).

A steering committee consisting of the dean, department chair, and two other School of Education faculty members met several times with the consultants to devise these strategies in the fall of 1998. During these meetings, Inverness Research Associates helped us to identify the framework and goals of the self-study, develop our research questions and design, and pilot the study. After the data were collected, the consultants facilitated a half-day debriefing session, helping faculty who participated in the self-study to draw out key elements of the self-study.

The goals of the study were to gain insight into the connections between our graduates' experience in our credential programs and the actual conditions of work in the schools where they were teaching. In this study, we chose to look at the experiences of graduates who successfully made it beyond the initial struggles of first year teaching. We were trying to learn about the graduates' lived experience as teachers: about the places where they have taught, the teaching experiences they have had, the issues that concerned them, and how they seemed to be faring at the moment. Finally, taking all of these concerns into account, we sought to learn how well prepared they felt for the work of teaching, and the extent to which the School of Education had contributed to their preparation.

In January of 1999, each of the four School of Education members of the steering committee, together with a consultant, observed and interviewed one graduate. Those pilot visits helped refine the methods for gathering data while convincing the committee members of the value of the process. The committee's enthusiastic reports of their classroom visits encouraged most of the rest of the faculty to participate in the study.

Early in spring semester, 18 graduates of our elementary, secondary, and special education credential programs were selected at random from the rolls of those who had completed their program three to five years prior to 1998. These graduates taught in 13n school districts representing a range of urban, suburban, and rural schools in four counties. The dean and department chair contacted them,

explained the study, invited them to participate, and sent letters to their supervisors seeking permission to visit the graduates at their schools. The actual makeup of the sample was somewhat circumscribed by the realities of availability and proximity to the university (and did not include any graduates who, for whatever reason, had chosen to leave the teaching profession). However, this limitation was of little concern to us, since we were more interested in generating ideas and engaging in conversation about our programs than in obtaining hard data; as Geertz (1973, p. 5) might put it, our analysis of what we observed involved "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."

During February and March, 14 (out of 22) full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty in the School of Education conducted fieldwork, consisting of a half-day visit to each graduate, to obtain a "snapshot" of the reality of the classroom. It was important to have direct access both to the expressed views of the graduates and to their daily work contexts. The visit consisted of a short pre-visit conversation with the teacher as an orientation to the classroom, a classroom observation, and a subsequent in-depth interview. The protocol developed by the steering committee served as a common reference for the kinds of information needed and for the broad dimensions to cover (teaching history, school context, actual practice, etc.) The only stipulation for interview technique was to avoid "leading" the graduates to certain observations about the role and nature of School of Education programs in their preparation for teaching.

Faculty researchers worked in pairs in order to provide a "check" on what they found in each classroom. They also made sure to observe graduates who were not from their own programs (i.e. secondary faculty visited elementary teachers, and so on) to relieve graduates of intimidation and relieve faculty of over-investment and concomitant bias in their observations.

Faculty researcher pairs who made visits together debriefed with one another immediately following each visit. Then in late spring, all participating faculty researchers met for the half-day session facilitated by the consultants to identify themes and lessons suggested by all eighteen cases, and to share initial thoughts about implications of our findings. Names of graduates, their schools, and their credential programs remained anonymous; this anonymity helped faculty members listen to the accounts not as individual graduates' separate stories, but rather as cases that contributed to a broader portrait of field realities.

What We Learned from the Self-Study about our Programs

Theory vs. Practice Disconnect

There were two distinct facets to our findings: what we learned about our programs, and what we learned about the self-evaluation process. First of all, our self-

study provided much valuable feedback regarding our teacher preparation programs. Generally, our graduates reported that they had learned a lot in our credentialing programs. "I came away with boxes of stuff," one graduate reported. Similarly, a special education teacher proclaimed: "Every faculty member in the program was wonderful — dedicated and involved with the students and with education."

A few graduates expressed particular satisfaction with the theoretical foundations that our programs provided. "[My credential program] was the hardest year and a half of my life," said a graduate of the Early Childhood Education Program. "But all the theory that I learned was valuable. Piaget, Erickson, Dewey, Vygotsky, Maslow, Cummins — I remember learning about them all, and I still plan my curriculum with a lot of them in mind." Said an elementary school teacher, "Thanks to what I learned about literacy, I know how to teach reading." Another invoked Piaget and her introduction to constructivism in her university coursework as the reason for the success of her math program. Similarly, a high school teacher recalled how theories of adolescent development, which he learned in the secondary education program, prepared him for the attitudes and responses of his teenaged students. "Without that knowledge, I would have made even more mistakes than I did when I started student teaching," he said.

Most of the graduates, however, failed to make such a clear connection between the theory addressed in their coursework and the reality of their daily lives in the classroom. While, for the most part, they reported the coursework had been "interesting," "thought-provoking," and "informative," they often failed to see ways to apply what they learned in their teaching. A high school teacher exemplified the responses of many when he said, "I got the big ideas . . . [but] the coursework is so out of context. You don't know how to use the information." A number of graduates told faculty researchers that the most meaningful part of their education began not with their coursework, but with their student teaching. As one teacher explained,

> There was nothing wrong with what they told us in the courses. But it all seemed so abstract. Everything that I use today I got from my resident teacher and supervisor. They were both great. I learned a lot from those women! They would point out little things. I learned a lot about discipline. I learned about how to arrange the room, how to decorate the walls. They pointed out my mistakes but they also made me feel positive about myself.

Some graduates indicated that the theory they learned was not only disconnected from their teaching but completely irrelevant. An elementary school teacher, for example, complained about the elementary education program's advocacy of whole language:

> Basically we were brainwashed. I learned all about whole language theory which I never would be able to use when I got a job. [The instructors] stacked the deck against phonics when it turns out that that was exactly what I'd have to teach in second grade. They said, 'Basals are not the way to go. Take a story and make it

> come alive. No phonics in isolation.' Of course, we all know now that phonics are essential. Fortunately for me, I took a one-day workshop on early literacy at [the county office of education] and learned all the strategies I needed.

Faculty researchers were not shocked by the graduates' perception of this disconnection between theory and practice; after all, this criticism, right or wrong, has plagued teacher education programs for time immemorial. But we were still troubled by these findings. As one of the faculty researchers concluded at our debriefing session, "The graduates seem to consider theory as course content that stays in the university classroom, rather than as something to bring to their teaching experience."

This disconnection even extended to a number of graduates who in their interviews indicated that they *were* applying theory they had learned as credential candidates, but whose instructional strategies bore little resemblance to that theory. For example, one reported that she had been strongly influenced by the attention devoted in university courses to issues of cultural diversity and second language pedagogy; yet faculty researchers noted that she grouped her students by "ability" and failed to apply the teaching methods that she had been taught about working with students whose native language was not English. Another graduate told his faculty interviewers, "From my first day of teaching, I felt like a fish *in* water. I knew what I needed to do, I knew why I needed to do it, and I felt pretty confident that I knew how to do it." Yet his interviewers noted that for most of the time they observed him in the classroom, he used direct instruction techniques rather than the more interactive methods which had been emphasized at the university. Clearly, there seemed to be a lack of connection between what we had intended to teach him and how what he learned translated into his classroom practice.

Fitting In

Although the graduate quoted in the previous paragraph told his interviewers that he felt like a fish in water when he first entered the classroom, he also told them that there were some ways that his university education had not fully prepared him for the real world of the classroom. These aspects of his job, he said, were minor, but he considered them worth mentioning.

> I was not prepared for all the sundry details of the job — the paperwork, the directives from the district, having to get along with teachers, parents, administrators, board members. I expected a lot more camaraderie! The politics get pretty intense here sometimes.… But once I became a teacher, that's when I had to learn what I needed to do to fit in at my school.

Time and again, graduates mentioned their lack of preparation for the "sundry details," and described the things they had to learn on the job. To each graduate, the "details" might be slightly different: a second grade teacher reported that she needed to learn how to implement the highly prescriptive reading program Open Court; a kindergarten teacher said that his first year taught him "the importance of

routine" in his classroom; another had to find out that the school board, not he, would decide what curriculum would be offered in his class; a special education teacher had not expected to feel so isolated and was overwhelmed with the sheer volume of paperwork she had to complete; and a high school physical education teacher had to learn about the pecking order in his department — with the old coach at the top and the new teacher at the bottom. In these and other cases, the graduates had had to supplement, adjust, or even discard what we had taught them in order to fit in in their schools' environment. As one graduate explained it:

> I think of teaching as being like an egg. The actual teaching in the classroom, that's the yolk; the white is all the non-teaching stuff. When I was in the credential program, I thought it was all yolk; but when I started teaching, that's when I realized that that the job is the whole egg.

Interestingly, most of the graduates did not fault the university for failing to provide them with the whole egg. Only a few, like the graduate who complained that she hadn't been taught phonics, felt that we had not done our job in preparing students for the real world of the classroom. Most of them reasoned that it would be impossible to tailor our curriculum to every possible scenario. The fact that most still believed in the educational visions that they had developed in our credential programs indicated that their experiences in school had not "washed out" (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) the effects of our credential programs. Yet, that yolk of knowledge, in many cases, had been completely covered up by the white of daily requirements, routines, and relationships in the schools.

The realization that many of our graduates had not immediately fit in when they began teaching led to considerable debate in our debriefing session. In most cases, "fitting in" meant engaging in teaching practices that we felt were not in the best interests of these new teachers or their students. In many ways, we do not want our graduates simply to fit in: we do not want them to accept uncritically the edicts of school boards or embrace pre-packaged, "teacher-proof" curricula; we do not want them to make "routine" the overarching feature of their classrooms; we do not want them to assume automatically a position at the bottom of the hierarchy; we do not want them to accept intensification (Densmore, 1987) as a given in the teaching profession. Clearly, we had not given adequate consideration to this problem. As one graduate explained, "You guys emphasize that we should become reflective practitioners, but we never talked about what to do when they tell you to compromise your principles." Observing and talking with our graduates showed us that we need, as Goodman (1988) recommends, to focus more on the politics of teaching in our coursework. "I thought we *did* prepare our students for the politics of teaching," said one faculty researcher, "but still [the graduate he observed] wasn't prepared for it. We did the most we could, I thought, but obviously it wasn't enough. I'm not sure that we can fully prepare them." How, we asked ourselves, can we show our students the whole egg? How can we help them to understand the political

realities of an increasingly hostile and repressive school climate without discouraging them and pushing them away from the profession? How can we prepare them to fit in the system and work as change agents at the same time?

What We Learned about the Self-Study Process

Originally, we designed this study to determine the extent to which the knowledge that our graduates acquired in our programs prepared them for teaching. Our observations and interviews suggested that while they were indeed finding ways to fit in — which was what we had originally hoped for — the cost of doing so appeared to be the rejection or oversight of the key notions upon which our credential programs were based. We realized that we needed to find ways to prepare new teachers to thrive in the system, yet at the same time to instill deeper understandings about teaching and learning, and a commitment to work toward systemic change. To meet this goal we decided we needed, as a faculty, to explore the sociopolitical forces which affect our graduates and to rethink the notion of what it means to "prepare" our credential students for the classroom. Thus, our study of our students also became a study of ourselves.

By pushing the evaluation outside the standard curriculum development loop, our study fostered opportunities for faculty to re-examine our goals and stimulated debate about fundamental issues in our programs, practices, and visions of education — which is just what self-evaluation should do. Faculty members saw both the field studies and the debriefing sessions as essential to this process. The time spent in the field taught us much about each other's programs. As a member of the reading faculty reported, "I got a sense of PE dynamics and secondary issues. I hadn't known about them. Phys. Ed. is a discourse that is not my own, and seeing it was a very positive experience." An elementary faculty researcher explained that her field study with a special education teacher caused her to reconsider not only her preconceived notions about special ed, but also her ideas about what is best for her own students:

> Seeing what the [graduates] were doing and what they had learned from their programs was eye-opening. At first I though, Oh my God, they were taught this in their program? But then I saw the kinds of challenges that special ed teachers face in the classroom — the isolation of students and teacher, the discipline, the academic problems — I couldn't help but re-evaluate my beliefs about my special ed colleagues' approach. And it made me wonder about what I'm telling my students. It made me think, if this is the situation these teachers face, then how does it all fit in with what I'm teaching? Maybe the students need the highly structured learning environment that they teach in special ed.

In addition to learning about each other's programs, we also learned about each other. One faculty member very much enjoyed the time that she spent with her research partner: "I feel like I've made a new friend. I had no idea that we had so much in common." Another explained:

> Working with a colleague from another program was great. We each have different questions and different interests. But we found a lot of common ground. We found that we both were interested in equity issues, and we built from there.

The conversations with our colleagues that began in the field continued to flourish in our half-day debriefing session. In small-group and whole-group discussions, we managed to cover a range of observations and concerns about our programs. Yet our success at addressing substantive questions, about the nature of our programs and the relationships between what we believe and what students need to know to survive in schools, also created a number of problems that we had not anticipated. While every faculty member recognized the importance of the matters we were addressing, not everyone was comfortable dealing with the potentially contentious exchanges that our research and debriefing sessions brought up. It can be difficult indeed to debate beliefs and practices in a culture where colleagues are not accustomed to critiquing one another's teaching and thinking.

For the most part, the dialogue throughout the debriefing session was cordial and collegial. There were only a few incidents during the debriefing session when one or more faculty members took exception to statements made by a colleague or consultant. For example, when some graduates' criticisms arose regarding the elementary education program's emphasis on whole language, members of the reading faculty were quick to defend their teaching and the broad range of approaches that they make sure to address in their courses. At another point, members of the secondary program questioned the validity of the criticism of the program provided by their graduates. They noted that the small sample of respondents included mostly individuals from one academic discipline — and that students from that department were notoriously resistant to the secondary program's perspectives. Although we all understood that the purpose of the self-study was to focus on issues that reached across all programs, we could not help but listen carefully to what graduates and colleagues were saying about what we do in our own programs. It was difficult not to get defensive when listening to the criticism of a graduate or faculty researcher. As one faculty researcher explained,

> It's much easier to tinker by yourself with your courses that you're teaching. There's no conflict. Meeting in small groups with colleagues who teach the same things you teach — that can work too, although it takes a lot more time. But at a program level, it gets really hard. You have to explain your perspectives to each other and you have to listen to what they have to say. That can be painful.

Others, however, saw this process as a healthy one. For example, a member of the reading faculty took exception to colleagues' characterization of her program, but concluded that their perceptions opened the way for dialogue:

> The [graduates] talked about having to deal with skills-based programs like Open Court. Some felt that they didn't get adequate preparation in their reading courses to teach these programs. Some of my colleagues [who were not involved in the

> reading courses] described our former students as feeling unprepared. I felt that I understood the reasons for the students' feeling that they hadn't been prepared, but the faculty member reporting his findings did not. I felt that I needed to explain what the faculty member had seen. I felt I needed to provide additional information for them. I realized that they might not want to see it my way, but at least this was an opening for conversation about what I do in my classes.
>
> I didn't consider this type of dialogue to be a bad thing. People reported what they heard. This is what our former students told them. I'm enough of a constructivist to understand that students in the courses all construct their own meaning from what we present in the course. The meanings that the students construct in our courses is a good place to start our conversations.

Another faculty member was even more outspoken in his advocacy for open dialogue:

> If we see something we don't agree with, we need to say to colleagues, "This is a problem."… If we have faculty teaching things that I think are wrong, then we're doing a disservice to our students: we only have them for a few semesters. I want to have conversations that spur my colleagues to question what they do. Say, for example, that a graduate has Bloom's taxonomy infused in his lesson plans. I know who taught him that, and I have a lot of problems with that. I'd say to my colleague that I think teaching Bloom's taxonomy is not the best thing to do.…
>
> Should we be prepared to dissent? *Yes*. It's necessary! It's not an argument. We're a social institution and what we do has got to be about negotiation.… Disagreement doesn't necessarily mean conflict. If you're in academia, you have to expect disagreement, big egos, and conflicting ideas. It comes with the territory.

Considering the wide divergence of approaches and ideologies among our faculty, it seems surprising that there weren't many more contentious debates than we had. Perhaps the reason for the generally benign atmosphere was that a number of faculty researchers were *not* prepared to dissent; some took pains to avoid sharing observations and opinions in the debriefing sessions which might hurt or anger colleagues or cast aspersions on their teaching. Some found confrontation uncomfortable, while others felt that dissention would not lead to any significant breakthroughs. One faculty member privately asked a consultant,

> What should I do when a graduate tells me, "So-and-so taught me to do this," and I think that that was terrible advice? What do I do when I see teaching practices which go against everything I believe in? It's a small department. I know who taught them that. If I bring it up with the whole group, it'll sound like an attack. And that's what it would be! I'm just not going to do it. It's not worth it. It wouldn't change anything anyway.

In fact, the ground rules that we had set for the debriefing expressly proscribed such a critique of specific programs, practices, or individual contributions to a credential program. While this ground rule helped to ensure an atmosphere of collegiality, it also reduced the likelihood of major revelations or changes coming out of this

process. It is relatively easy to advocate the infusion of political and cultural debate into conversations about curriculum, and even to devise an evaluation plan which builds in opportunities for such conversation; but it is not easy to initiate truly honest dialogue unless all participants are willing to risk disagreement and dissent about deeply held beliefs.

Conclusion: Through the Looking-Glass

In this era of accountability, a rapidly growing number of schools and schools of education are being required to evaluate their programs and document their findings. Yet too few are using such mandates to ask fundamental questions about themselves, the knowledge they teach, the purpose of evaluation, and their methods for undertaking a self-study: What do we want to know about ourselves and our programs? If quantitative measures cannot provide the knowledge we seek, what methodologies could we use to gain this knowledge? How can we push our self-evaluation out of the curriculum development loop in order to address information that is truly meaningful to us, and to gain new and possibly unexpected insights about ourselves, our students, and our programs? Like Alice, who travels through the looking-glass to see what is just around the corner and out of reach, faculties engaged in self-study should endeavor to look beyond what is easily apparent to see their teacher education programs in new ways.

As we concluded our self-study, faculty researchers were well aware that what we learned about our teacher education programs was not particularly earth-shaking. The exhilaration and sense of promise that we felt came less from our findings than from our collective experience and response to having pushed, all together, through the looking-glass: we realized that we could create an evaluation plan that could lead to genuine self-examination, spirited discussion, and, eventually, to substantive curricular change. But while we went beyond the requirements dictated by the state teacher licensing agency, we found that we wanted to achieve far more. We concluded that we would need to create mechanisms that make this type of debate integral to what we hoped would evolve into a regular process. As one faculty researcher declared, "We need to institutionalize the process" — not as a top-down requirement (which was how the whole process began), but "as an ongoing faculty-driven venture supported by the School infrastructure." Each year or two, we decided, a new study should build on questions and concerns which arise from the previous one, and faculty should come to regard the ongoing self-examination and debate as part of who we are and what we do as teacher educators.

But instituting such a process and ensuring that it continues to be transformative for the participants is easier said than done. In fact, we have continued the self-study process: two years after completing this first self-study, we undertook a second inquiry, deciding this time to focus on our work with professional development schools. As in the previous study, a small committee developed the research

protocol, which a sizeable percentage of our faculty implemented — conducting surveys and interviews, leading focus groups, and compiling and analyzing the data. Although our findings helped us gauge our successes and challenges in our professional development schools and stimulated conversations regarding future directions to take, the process felt more labored, the conversations a bit more guarded than in our first self-study. Somehow, we had slipped back to the conventional side of the looking-glass. What was missing with this newer self-study?

The major difference between this second study and the previous one was that we had no disinterested outsiders working with faculty — sharing advice, facilitating the process, and providing fresh perspectives. The consultants who worked with us throughout our first self-study were key to its success. As St. John et.al (1999) explain, such consultants can "gain implicit permission to ask harder questions and make more provocative propositions than insiders sometimes can. Outsiders can also give insiders more opportunity to legitimately give voice to a wide range of perspectives and to move away from insular thinking." Clearly, our second study lacked this essential ingredient; altering decades-old patterns of interaction among faculty will require many more opportunities for self-reflection, facilitated by outside consultants as well as an administration willing to provide the resources necessary for such support.

We feel confident, though, that we are evolving in the right direction. Given the increasing top-down control of schools and schools of education, we can expect, in the next few years, to continue being buffeted by externally imposed requirements. Yet we are resolved to transform such mandates into opportunities for internal growth and continued exploration of matters that are meaningful to us. "We need to thank the CCTC for getting us started," said one faculty member, "because otherwise we would never have taken the time to talk with each other.… But now we need to build this into something quite grand. It needs to become a part of the life of the School."

It is no easy task to make self-evaluative practitioner research an integral part of what we do "in the ordinary course of events." It's not just a matter of adding one more project to our busy schedules; it's about seeing what we do in a new light. It is not merely about meeting state-mandated requirements; it's about learning how to really talk with one another. This requires not only time and energy, but a willingness to take personal and professional risks not normally expected of school of education faculty. When Alice makes it through the looking-glass, she looks around and declares, "They don't keep this room so tidy as the other" (Carroll, 1865/1966). Our self-study goals may indeed be messy, but we are confident that they will yield significant rewards for all who participate. As one faculty researcher described the process, "If we're going to do it right, we've got to do it for us. Self-evaluation is not about how we revise our programs, it's about how we think about what we do."

Note

[1] A glaring example of such control was the establishment, in 1998, of the RICA (Reading Instruction Competence Assessment), a phonics-based test which all prospective elementary school teachers must now pass. With this test required of all candidates, elementary reading methods instructors have no choice but to teach the information covered in the test, whether they consider it important or not. More recently, the CCTC mandated extensive new requirements, including 18 detailed standards and 13 "Teacher Performance Expectations" (TPE), which must be adopted by all elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs. In order to earn their credentials, candidates will have to demonstrate their knowledge of the TPE by passing a high-stakes Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA).

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