

Editor's Introduction: Challenging Contemporary Politics— (Re)Imagining the Professionalization of Teaching and Learning

In the recently released book, *Education and the Making of a Democratic People*, John Goodlad comments on educational policy directives:

The American people are not accustomed to having nonnegotiable mandates for their schools (like NCLB) imposed by federal authorities, mandates that, if not observed, call for monetary penalties. There is a void regarding information-seeking queries and debate. The people responsible are invisible. The essence of political democracy is cut off at the ankles. (pg. 22)

Contemporary school reform is rooted in a politics and language of de-professionalization. Decisions about what occurs in classrooms continue to be driven by non-educators located at great distance from the classroom. In fact, politicians legislating widespread mandates have seldom, if ever, spent time working in schools and classrooms, let alone experiencing themselves the incredible challenges and complexities inherent in teaching and learning in the diverse environments in which schools are situated today. Decisions are made based on the assumption that all students need to know and be able to do the same things and that schools themselves should adhere to a prescribed uniformity of practice and, thereby, offer equal educational opportunities for all. Context is irrelevant.

Another major policy orientation suggests that adults know best what students ought to know and be able to do, and further assumes that policymakers and think-tank lobbyists themselves know best what professional educators need to know and

Editor's Introduction

be able to do. All the while, the body of educational research is replete with contrary findings as to what constitutes teacher effectiveness and, hence, student academic achievement. A far more substantial basis for viewing teaching and learning as a dynamic, complex and contextually based phenomena belies the notion of one-size-fits-all policies.

Efforts to connect teacher effectiveness with student achievement, primarily represented by standardized test scores, underlie a reform movement clearly meant to de-professionalize the work of educators, and at the same time define student learning in narrow, and mostly shallow terms. To consider that multiple choice responses on standardized tests require and value levels of learning associated with memorization and regurgitation suggests that contemporary school reform is driven by efforts to undermine any attempt to intellectualize the ways in which teachers and student engage in subject matter content. Educational aims that seek student evidence of abilities to exhibit critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis, and synthesis are being marginalized and reduced to an anti-intellectual rhetoric that has become the mantra for school reform as publicized widely through mainstream media.

Teacher Education Quarterly, however, is committed to recognizing and honoring teaching and learning as an intellectually complex academic activity while supporting scholarly research efforts that more realistically describe and analyze the conditions and challenges educators face today. The collection of articles in this issue is indicative of the kind of evidence-based research that is being generated, informing teacher education and professional development efforts, and representing a (re)imagining of professionalism as a response to large scale legislated mandates.

We are proud to open the Summer 2009 issue with a very special contribution by one of the leading educational philosophers of our time, and one of my long-time mentors, Gary D Fenstermacher. Along with co-authors Richard D. Osguthorpe and Matthew N. Sanger we present, "Teaching Morally and Teaching Morality," an exploration of the complexities inherent in how morals are represented in teaching and learning, and how they are too often overshadowed by conversations about student achievement and curriculum standardization. In this article, the authors make clear distinctions between teaching morally and teaching morality and the ways in which the development of civic identity is rooted in this dialogue.

Lily Orland-Barak follows with "Observation in Learning to Teach: Forms of 'Seeing,'" a presentation of findings from a research study aimed at addressing the value of "seeing" as a means for learning about teaching through focused observations.

In "Stepping Out of the Classroom: Building Teacher Knowledge for Developing Classroom Practice," author Mary Q. Foote examines the dynamics of a particular study group of elementary school teachers committed to becoming more effective

Thomas Nelson

teachers of mathematics. The author highlights the value of using photography as a means of collecting and analyzing data.

Nancy Brown and Babette M. Benken follow with “So When Do We Teach Mathematics? Vital Elements of Professional Development for High School Mathematics Teachers in an Urban Context.” In this piece, the authors present the findings from their study focused on the ways in which professional development opportunities are structured for improving practice in urban high schools.

In “In What Ways Do Teacher Education Courses Change Teachers’ Self Confidence as Writers?” authors Chris Street and Kristin K. Stang examine the ways in which the National Writing Project, a professional development approach to improving the writing skills of practicing teachers, impacted a select group of teachers in their efforts to improve student writing abilities.

Thomas H. Patterson and Thomas P. Crumpler follow with “Slow Transformation: Teacher Research and Shifting Teacher Practices.” The focus in this article is on one teacher who was committed to embracing the model of teacher as researcher, and the ways in which he transformed his practice over a two-year period. Implications for sustaining the process of teacher change are examined as a result of this study.

Next, Antonio J. Castro and Michelle Bauml offer “Why Now? Factors Associated with Choosing Teaching as a Second Career and Their Implications for Teacher Education Programs.” The authors present the findings and themes that emerged from their study describing the challenges facing second career teachers. Implications and recommendations aimed at teacher education programs enrolling second career teacher candidates are included.

In “Principals’ Perceptions of the Causes of Teacher Ineffectiveness in Different Secondary Subjects” authors Bruce Torff and David Sessions present the findings from their survey of 251 secondary school principals in New York about their role and practices associated with teacher evaluation.

We close the Summer 2009 issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* with a fascinating article by Darrell Dobson entitled “Royal, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Archetypal Reflectivity and the Construction of Professional Knowledge.” Drawing from Carl Jung and depth psychology, Dobson offers a framework for categorizing teacher philosophy and practice. Implications for professional development and teacher education are offered.

Once again, I want to thank the authors and especially the readers of *Teacher Education Quarterly* for helping make this one of the finest scholarly publications in the field. We welcome your feedback and continued support.

—**Thomas Nelson**
Editor

Editor's Introduction

Reference

Goodlad, J. I., Soder, R., & McDaniel, B. (Eds.) (2008). *Education and the making of a democratic people*. Boulder CO: Paradigm Publishers.