

## **Haven't We Seen This Before? Sustaining a Vision in Teacher Education for Progressive Teaching Practice**

**By Shelley C. Sherman**

Efforts to transform U.S. schools and improve student learning, including both accountability measures and progressive practices, come in cycles and are often related to contextual factors in society at particular moments in time (Cuban, 1993; Noddings, 2007; Zilversmit, 1999). Attempts to improve education during the past forty years under the banner of “educational reform” have included political initiatives generated externally by those who do not work within schools, as well as pedagogical trends and movements conceived and implemented by educators themselves. Moreover, such endeavors often gain rapid support and, subsequently, lose traction as bandwagon movements often do, reinventing themselves years later packaged somewhat differently.

A variety of such initiatives have affected the way curriculum in schools is shaped and how teachers teach. For example, the standards movement has provided the impetus for a one-size-fits-all curriculum (see, for example, Meier & Wood, 2004, Noddings, 2007), with uniform benchmarks for achievement for students at particular grade levels. On the other hand, the open education movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s promoted responsiveness to students and aimed to meet students’ individual needs (Perrone, 1972; Silberman, 1973).

The central issue I will address here concerns the challenge to teacher education programs to resist

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*Shelley C. Sherman is an associate professor and chair of the Education Department at Lake Forest College, Lake Forest, Illinois.*

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swings in the pendulum and help new teachers sustain progressive, responsive, school-based reform efforts that seek to address the unique needs of every student even as external demands for standardized measurements of learning remain firmly in place in the era of *No Child Left Behind*. I begin with the assumption that responsiveness to students cannot readily occur in standardized educational environments and that progressive practices, when implemented effectively, can, indeed, foster an individual student's growth in ways that are not easily achieved through a one-size-fits all curriculum. Fundamentally, standardized curriculum is rooted in traditional educational practices that were prevalent in U.S. schools as far back as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cuban, 1993). These practices included uniform curriculum, passive or drill-like student response, and whole group instruction. Tyack and Cuban (1995) use the term "grammar of schooling" to refer to these deeply entrenched practices and note that the public sees schools that embrace such practices as "real schools." Progressive educational practices, such as those that will be discussed here, challenge these taken-for-granted assumptions and offer alternative ways to help children learn; the merit of this challenge to traditional education, the "grammar of schooling," and notions of features that constitute "real schools" will not be argued here. Rather, this paper is directed toward those who believe that the most responsive teaching occurs when teachers can attend to the individual student's needs by embracing progressive educational principles.

Two curricular examples with potential for responsiveness to students, open education and differentiated instruction, are used to frame this discussion because they both aim to promote individual growth and meet students at their point of instructional need; both draw inspiration from progressive traditions in education, as I will discuss later. They are useful illustrations of the cyclical nature of educational reform because they are situated in different time periods, more than twenty years apart, and have strong conceptual connections. Open education represents a reform effort that gained swift popularity but lost momentum when competing interests, including political trends, came into play (Cuban, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Zilversmit, 1999). As Perrone (1972) notes, advocates of open education, "see the integration of learning, its wholeness, as an essential base for personalizing the educational process...[basic] skills are considered fundamental, but never in isolation from other learning experiences" (p.8).

Differentiation, bearing a strong resemblance to open education, particularly with respect to its focus on every student, has been characterized as "an approach to teaching in which teachers proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse needs of individual students and small groups of students to maximize the learning opportunity for each student in a classroom" (Tomlinson et al., 2003, Introduction, ¶ 6). In today's standards-driven environment, advocates of differentiation ultimately may face challenges similar to those faced by open education proponents. I will elaborate further on the characteristics of each movement as I bring

their similarities into sharper focus as well as describe the challenges faced in sustaining their goals.

I'll present a brief summary of the progressive roots of open education and differentiation and illustrate how the two initiatives are closely related. This background provides a context for the argument I will make for emphasizing strong philosophical foundations in teacher education that support responsive teaching practice; focusing on developing competencies to help new teachers meet students' individual needs; and avoiding curricular buzzwords that are sometimes reduced to formulaic, short-lived practice.

### **The Cycles of Progressive Education**

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Dewey (1990; 1997) helped lay the groundwork for the Progressive Education Movement, echoing and extending the earlier work of Rousseau, Froebel, and Pestalozzi, among others, which placed the child at the center of educational endeavors. Of course, it is impossible to do justice to Dewey's influence here, but it is important to recognize the impact of his vision for schools on the principles of open education and differentiation. This vision includes recognition of the uniqueness of every child; the importance of personal relevancy in the learning process; the requirement for an active, engaged quality in learning environments; and an image of the school as a microcosm of and preparation for life in a democratic society (see, for example, Schubert, 1986; Zilversmit, 1999).

Semel (1999) discusses the strong presence of progressive practice in schools until the mid-1940s, particularly in independent schools, and discusses the subsequent criticism of progressivism, which included a call for more "academic curriculum" (p.15) and rigorous science and math standards, especially after the launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union. She also traces the movement back toward progressivism, which occurred in the mid-1960s with the birth of the open education movement, as well as its subsequent decline in the 1970s and 1980s, with the exception of scattered pockets of robust progressive practice.

In 1990, in an attempt to reintroduce progressive ideals, the Network of Progressive Educators drafted a statement of principles, which, for example, included the following: a focus on active learning; a commitment to the interests and developmental needs of students; an embracing of multiple cultural perspectives; inclusive decision making practices; and interdisciplinary curriculum (cited in Semel, p.18, 1999). But, as already mentioned, classroom practices, for the most part, greatly resembled those of the early part of the century (Cuban, 1993).

Although many teacher education programs promote progressive educational practice, overall, progressivism does not seem to have staying power in terms of what actually takes place in classrooms on a large-scale. With respect to open education, for example, Cuban (1993) suggests that although the movement did have some impact, long-lasting effects were minimal: "the elementary school classroom

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of the 1970s was decidedly more informal than that of 1900...[but] “the core of classroom practice in all grades, anchored in the teacher’s authority to determine what content to teach and what methods to use, endured as it had since the turn of the century” (pp. 203-204).

The lack of staying power of progressive education may be due to a number of factors, including political climate. But it also may be attributed to Tyack’s and Cuban’s notions of the “grammar of schooling” and “real schools,” reinforced by an “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) in K-12 schools, when students who are future teachers form deeply ingrained impressions of how to teach. Consequently, although many teacher education programs may promote progressive practice, it can be quite challenging for such programs to have an impact on the beliefs of teacher candidates who are so accustomed themselves to being taught in certain ways. (Britzman, Dipbo, Searle, & Pitt, 1997; Graber, 1996; Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). These factors, coupled with the demands for strong standardized test results that meet state requirements, create a formidable challenge to teacher educators who are attempting to nurture responsive teaching capacities in teacher candidates.

How, then, can teacher education programs help sustain progressive educational practices that support individual students? The open education movement illustrates the pitfalls of bandwagon movements that are born from serious reform efforts but falter with shifts in the political and social climate. The more recent emphasis on differentiated instruction may be similarly threatened. The following two sections of this paper provide a description of the origins, aims, and practices of open education and differentiated instruction and discuss their commonalities. It is especially important to highlight these commonalities, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with open education or its progressive antecedents, about which space does not permit discussion here. To many, initiatives such as differentiation are seen as innovative panaceas, often unrecognized for their similarities to past reforms, and considered as instructional recipes to be followed, rather than as representations of deeper, more fundamental philosophical orientations of worthy teaching.

### **Open Education: Origins, Aims, and Practices**

Open education, drawing inspiration from Dewey and progressive educational philosophy (Schubert, 1986), was a movement that respected the individuality of students with regard to their interests and their cognitive and social development. Clearly, there was a focus on the individual student as a unique developing human being. This stood in contrast to models in which whole-group instruction and standardized curriculum were part of the norm. Although open education is closely associated with open space education, and particularly with the notion of the open classroom, there is a distinction between the two. Open education, writes Schubert (1986), “is a curricular ideology rather than a particular arrangement of materials,

physical layout, interpersonal grouping patterns, or institutional arrangement” (p. 244). In fact, the misperception that open space education is necessarily synonymous with open education points to the leap that new teachers can make when they embrace a particular technique without understanding its underlying purpose (e.g., assigning students to groups does not automatically mean that cooperative learning is taking place). I will address this problem later when I discuss possible ways for teacher education programs to focus on the substance of progressive educational practices rather than on techniques or organizational structures that may be progressive only at first glance.

Although the progressive movement of the early part of the twentieth century provided the philosophical underpinnings for open education, the political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s was surely an important influence on its emergence on the national educational landscape in the United States. Zilversmit (1999) notes that

the impetus to open American classroom was an aspect of the romantic individualism and profound anti-institutionalism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The mood of these educational reformers was often radiantly optimistic about what could be achieved by a new generation of liberated individuals. (p.240)

Additional developments in England significantly inspired reform-minded educators (see Perrone, 1972; Silberman, 1973; Smith, 1997) in the United States. Joseph Featherstone’s accounts in the *New Republic* brought to the attention of educators the activity in British primary schools, which, he says, “seems closer than conventional, formal methods to what we know about children and the nature of the learning process” (Featherstone, quoted in Smith, 1997, p.385). Certainly, as Smith (1997) suggests, open education was a good curricular match to what research says about the ways in which children learn. She goes on to provide examples of research that support the child-centered practices of open education, including the work of Piaget, who “draws attention to the growing child as a participant, not just a receiver, in the teaching-learning process” (p.406) and Gardner, who suggests that “human beings’ different ways of being intelligent are badly served by schools as they are currently conducted” (p.407).

Open education also is consistent with the principles of constructivist practice, the nature of which is captured by Good and Brophy (1997): “Students develop new knowledge through a process of active construction in which they develop and integrate a network of associations linking the new content to preexisting knowledge and beliefs anchored in concrete experiences” (p. 408). Constructivism supports the inclusion of authentic tasks in the curriculum, tasks that “require using what is being learned for accomplishing the very sorts of life applications that justify the inclusion of this learning in the curriculum in the first place” (p.404).

To summarize, many of the goals of open education are grounded in progressive philosophy, resonate with the theoretical and philosophical frameworks for

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teaching and learning provided by Piaget and Gardner, for example (also see Carini, 1986), and are consistent with the instructional principles of constructivism. In short, as Nyquist (1972) suggests, in open educational environments “Students’ feelings, interests, and needs are given priority over lesson plans, organizational patterns, rigid time schedules, and no-option structures” (pp. 84-85). In addition, assessment focuses on the individual growth of the student, and its purpose is to plan for future instruction, rather than to provide a comparison to other students through standardized measurements.

Following its quick ascension in popularity in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for all intents and purposes, support for open education ended in the mid-1970s (Cuban, 1993). Cuban (1993) characterizes the quickly vanishing popular interest in informal classrooms and return to traditional teaching practices, as “breathhtaking” (p. 206), suggesting possible reasons for the demise of open education:

No one can say with confidence whether the stiffening of academic standards was a knee-jerk reaction to the perceived changes that had occurred in schools and classrooms and that were often labeled ‘permissiveness’—a code word borrowed from an earlier generation of critics blasting progressivism. It could also have been caused by persistent reports of declining test scores, increasing school vandalism, disrespect for teachers, or the educational version of the newly conservative political climate. (p. 207)

But in addition to a changing political climate and pervasive notions of what schools should look like (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), it is possible as well that a lack of preparation of teachers, not only to implement the reforms of open education, but also to fully internalize the philosophical underpinnings of the movement, contributed to its precipitous decline. Semel and Sadovnik (1999) suggest that the difficulty of sustaining progressive practices in meaningful ways, rather than having them merely “systematically transformed into ritual” (p. 357), is connected to a number of factors, including the loss of progressive visions by the schools themselves. But, they add, institutions that prepare and certify teachers must share the blame:

It also resides in schools of education and accrediting agencies throughout this country—institutions that, in general, encourage the teaching of methods and the process of modeling devoid of any historical context or a philosophical base that would encourage critical reflection and that would lead students to ponder what worked, what did not, and why? (p. 358)

A bandwagon effect, in which rapid adoptions of “new” practices are quickly embraced by school districts and a flurry of workshops are given to bring teachers on board as quickly as possible, create fads for practice rather than well-grounded conceptual understandings from which teachers can develop practice reflectively and effectively over time. Vito Perrone presciently warned against this in 1972, in a short, elegantly written monograph entitled “Open Education: Promise and Problems.” He was concerned that without proper support, skill-building, struc-

tures, and attitudinal changes, open education would end up on what he called the “educational junk heap of once-promising reforms” (p.7):

Open education is not a package to be introduced like the older curriculum models. It is not adopted just because school principals or superintendents announce that ‘beginning next week, we will do it [‘Open Education’]. Unfortunately, there are numerous reports of school administrators making such announcements. It does not take a serious student of American education to know the results of such rapid, uninformed adoption of a serious educational orientation stripped of its substance and made into a slick package—the latest fad. (p. 31)

Although Perrone’s concerns were ultimately realized, the progressive practices that were represented by open education did not completely evaporate. Their legacy could be seen in classrooms in a variety of forms, even after the demise of the progressive renaissance of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Individual teachers across the United States continued to engage students in meaningful long-term projects and community social action initiatives and provide intellectually stimulating, highly motivating classroom environments that enabled students to investigate important questions and create personally meaningful work products that suited their unique capacities and interests. Nevertheless, as already noted, by and large, there was a return in the late 1970s to more traditional practices.

Smith (1997) suggests it is time for “another look at open education,” emphasizing that “contemporary educational research seems to bear out the basic notion of the open classroom, namely, that children can and should be taught in the ways they learn best (p. 371).” During the past ten years or so, teachers may, indeed, have been getting another look at open education—reframed, renamed, and repackaged as differentiated instruction.

### **Differentiated Instruction: Origins, Aims, and Practices**

One cannot help but notice the similarities between the philosophical center around which the open education movement pivoted and the pedagogical framework of differentiated instruction, a movement that appears to have gained at least as much popularity in schools and curriculum development models within the past five years as open education did in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Differentiated instruction, like open education, rings true with reform that occurred in the British educational system. Its original emphasis in Great Britain centered upon meeting the needs of gifted students (Kerry & Kerry, 1997). As a result of the agenda of the 1988 Education Reform Act, differentiation rose to prominence in Great Britain (Kerry & Kerry, 1997). By 1995, differentiation had become a buzzword, “used frequently in the reports on schools by the new inspectorate... and [a] much requested topic on in-service programmes for teachers” (Quicke, 1995, Introduction, ¶ 1). Kerry and Kerry (1997) suggest that “The consciousness of teachers of the need to differentiate across all classroom situations is due in no

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small measure to the emphasis placed on this range of strategies by various official pronouncements” (Introduction, ¶2). Highly capable students were one of the groups toward whom the strategies of differentiation were most specifically directed.

In the United States, too, differentiation seems to have been directed first at special populations. According to Olenchak (2001), a variety of models emerged that focused on the interests and needs of gifted students:

Approaches such as the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1977), the Purdue Three-Stage Model (Feldhusen & Kolloff, 1978), the Individualized Programming Planning Model (Treffinger, 1986), and the Autonomous Learner Model (Betts, 1991) all concentrated on modifications of content, process, and product at a personal level. Although these models initially gained quick acceptance in classrooms because of the differentiated instruction they provided for individual gifted students, there remained concern that perhaps modification of the content dimension left too much to teachers' imaginations. (p. 186)

Writing about the need to differentiate curriculum for all students, Stradling and Saunders (1993) write that “most of the work which has been done on differentiation so far has emanated from, or been addressed to, the needs of pupils with special educational needs and it is sometimes hard for teacher and managers to see how (or even why) to translate these messages into ones which are relevant for all pupils” (p.127).

The movement to differentiate for all students, not just those who are members of special populations, has gained a great deal of momentum in the United States; ironically, but perhaps serendipitously, too, this popularity comes at the same time that standardized assessments are the most publicly embraced way in which student learning is being measured. In particular, Tomlinson's (1999) work on differentiation has been highly visible. Key aspects of differentiated classrooms, according to Tomlinson (1999), include ongoing and multiple assessments to diagnose student needs and shape responsive instruction; a focus on multiple intelligences; measuring learning based on individual growth, not on a comparative basis; instructional variety; student interest-based learning choices; flexible use of time and space; and the nurturing of self-directed learning by the student.

In their discussion about extending the notion of differentiation beyond special populations to the population of a whole school, Stradling and Saunders (1993) suggest the following ways in which differentiation can occur in practice:

- differentiation by *task*, where pupils cover the same content but in different levels;
- differentiation by *outcome*, where the same general tasks are required of all pupils but they are flexible enough for all pupils to work at their own level;
- differentiation by *learning activity*, where it is recognized that different pupils may have different styles of learning...



- differentiation through varying the *pace* or rate of learning....;
- differentiation by *dialogue*, where teachers regularly discuss with individual pupils the work they are doing in order to interpret their understanding of it and to diagnose and review any emerging learning needs... (p. 130)

Furthermore, say the authors, it is essential to make decisions about which aspects of differentiation should be emphasized based upon what makes the most sense in terms of the individual student's welfare, rather than what a teacher is most comfortable implementing.

The inspiration of progressive education, then, can be seen rather clearly in the framework of differentiated instruction as I have described it here. Speaking about Dewey's foundational groundwork for the Progressive Education Movement, Schubert (1986) says, "educators must focus on each child as a unique and whole human being. . . ." (p.72). With differentiated instruction, as its name suggests, teachers recognize the uniqueness of every student and aim to teach each student in ways that help advance his or her learning given the student's academic strengths and challenges, interests, and cultural background. Moreover, as we can see, there is a strong relationship between the curricular ideology of open education and the pedagogical framework of differentiation, as it has been characterized here. The following overlapping features capture this relationship:

- Students' individual interests, needs, and capacities, not prescribed curriculum, determine how and what the teacher teaches; content is relevant and meaningful to students.
- Time and space are used flexibly and creatively.
- Students are grouped flexibly.
- Instruction is engaging and personally relevant.
- Some element of student choice is present.
- Individual, rather than comparative, growth is emphasized.

Absent from the orientation of both open education and differentiated instruction is a standardized educational environment in which all students are doing the same thing at the same time, regardless of their level of readiness, cultural background, or areas of interest.

### **Nurturing Deeper Understandings That Are Buzzword-Resistant**

Both open education and differentiated instruction aim to transform schools to make them humane, responsive places that honor the student as an individual and seek to create environments that are shaped by the students who inhabit

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them—rather than vice versa. School reform, however, as Tyack and Cuban (1995) remind us, cannot be legislated and certainly cannot be sustained without a buy-in by participants that creates internal momentum:

To bring about improvement at the heart of education—classroom instruction, shaped by that grammar [grammar of schooling]—has proven to be the most difficult kind of reform, and it will result in the future more from internal changes created by the knowledge and expertise of teachers rather than from the decisions of external policymakers. (pp. 134-135)

Such internal change can only occur if teachers understand and embrace the conceptual frameworks that drive practical reforms. It seems important, then, to help teacher candidates distinguish between “strategies” and organizational structures associated with open education and differentiated instruction and the underlying educational principles that constitute them; clarification of these distinctions should be emphasized in teacher preparation programs; techniques alone cannot sustain progressive educational environments. For example, creating large open spaces, individualizing instruction, and replacing desks with interest centers, by themselves, as Silberman (1973) warns, do not constitute open education.

All these techniques, it should be emphasized, can be useful, and some may be essential, in creating and running an open classroom. Technique *is* important; without a mastery of technique, all the understanding in the world can leave a teacher helpless...But method alone, *without serious, sustained, and systematic thought* [itals. mine] about education, will turn a teacher into a mere technician with a bag of sterile tricks. (p. xxi)

How can teacher education programs foster and help sustain the kind of reform represented by both movements? The ways in which prospective teachers may be encouraged to create progressive learning environments that resist labels, focus on substance vs. form, and recognize the importance of both public accountability and personal responsibility to individual students could include a variety of activities, including those I will now discuss.

*1. More integration of foundational studies within methods courses and fieldwork experiences to help teacher candidates maintain focus on normative perspectives in their practice* (Sherman, 2005; 2006). This includes a focus both on progressive ideals and on the moral dimensions of teaching that are so richly represented in literature about worthy teaching (e.g., Fenstermacher, 1990; Hansen, 2001; Noddings, 1984; Tom, 1984). Foundations courses that trace the philosophical and historical roots of progressivism, for example, provide candidates with a forum to discuss school reform in the abstract. But the connection between these courses, methods courses, field experiences and teacher knowledge should be explored (Clabaugh & Rozycki, 1996; Floden & Meniketti, 2005), and bridges should be established to deepen the connections (see Beyer & Zeichner, 1982). The move from theory to

practice is often abrupt. Although there is not sufficient space here to fully explore the connections between progressive practices and the moral dimensions of teaching, briefly, the focus on the individual as a unique human being who deserves the moral and intellectual attention of the teacher (see Hansen, 1998), begins to capture the essence of this relationship. Of course, this only scratches the surface. What's more, readings that are often considered appropriate for foundations courses can be revisited in methods courses in order to anchor teaching techniques to the philosophical underpinnings that support them. Teacher candidates are usually eager to learn the "how to" in methods classes to gain confidence and feel competent to teach in their own classrooms. But a rapid jump to the "how to" may sacrifice attention to the "why," which provides a rationale for selecting particular teaching techniques and may better support progressive educational practice for the long-term.

2. *Collaborative micro-level development of robust reporting structures to make individual student learning progress in multiple areas just as visible and as public as standardized test results.* A return to the "basics" and a demand for more accountability are, in part, associated with the demise of open education in the mid-1970s (Cuban, 1993). The requirement to produce evidence of learning was addressed in 1972 by the North Dakota Study Group, led by Vito Perrone:

They were concerned that careful evaluative practices were less well developed in open classrooms than were the day-to-day practices. The Study Group's plans was to meet regularly to study and discuss such common problems as 'too narrow accountability ethos' in schools, to share effective means of both 'documenting and assessing children's learning' and to encourage a widespread 're-examination of a range of evaluation issues and perspectives about schools and schooling.' They were searching for valid forms of evaluation of open education that could be expressed and adopted in actual practice. (Smith, 1997, p. 394)

Teachers who are practicing differentiation in classrooms today must be able to produce evidence that students are learning in ways that are meaningful to the public-at-large. Standardized testing and *No Child Left Behind* have diminished the richness of assessment. But complaining about standardized testing and the limitations of the data it produces accomplishes little. "Although we complain justifiably that reviewing students' achievement on standardized tests is too narrow a measure of student learning," observes Grossman (2008), "we have been slow to develop other measures that can be used in large-scale research" (p. 21). Given the pace at which alternative measures are being developed and the obstacles involved in their development, including the cost of developing authentic assessments on a large scale (Hardy, 1995), it seems that much more crucial for teacher candidates to develop tools that assess students individually and find ways to analyze and use the results effectively. Teacher logs and the work sample approach are two examples Grossman mentions with the potential to accomplish this.

Techniques to analyze individual student work, assess student growth over

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time using portfolios, and facilitate student self-assessment can be more robustly integrated in teacher education programs, especially in clinical experiences. And finding realistic ways to accomplish these things, given the multiple responsibilities teachers have during the course of the school day, should be part of the dialogue in teacher education courses. Furthermore, the results must be communicated to parents in ways that broaden and illuminate public understanding of assessing learning rather than trivialize it. Teacher candidates cannot be expected to become experts at all of this during the course of their preparation for teaching. But they must be encouraged and assisted early on to develop competencies to create more sophisticated and nuanced assessment tools that validate the efficacy of non-standardized teaching practices and measure student learning in multiple ways.

3. *Connecting learning theory to clinical experiences in significant ways.* Teacher candidates are required to take courses in learning theory. The gap between coursework and practice, similar to the philosophical foundations and methods classes disconnect already mentioned, can be bridged when clinical experiences are closely linked to the knowledge base candidates are constructing in theoretical coursework. Asking specific questions about lesson plans created for fieldwork experiences or student teaching, for example, compels teacher candidates to identify ways in which their plans specifically engage students at different points in time and address a range of student needs. Questions such as the following can be asked: What is the potential in the lesson for every student to be highly involved in the learning process? During what percentage of the lesson could a student, at least potentially, be required to merely listen to what is occurring? Students can appear to be listening without actually doing so. When does the requirement to listen include some type of responsibility on the part of the student to produce evidence of learning? How can more of the time spent listening be transformed into time spent “doing”? These questions enable teacher candidates to connect principles of active student engagement in learning with their lesson design. Requirements to include information in lesson plans regarding teaching actions that differentiate for all students, beyond modifications for students with significant exceptionalities, also bridges theory and practice in meaningful, immediate ways for teacher candidates.

Moreover, candidates can be engaged in observations of specific students in classrooms to ascertain their level of active involvement in learning activities. This can be done more easily in early fieldwork experiences where candidates have less instructional and management responsibility in the classroom (Sherman, 2004). By focusing on individual students, teacher candidates can begin to notice whether their individual needs are being met by the level of content, instructional processes, and expectations for learning outcomes. Reflective journals often produce “aha” moments in which keen insights are developed about the challenges that many students face in classrooms when a single lesson is directed toward the entire class (Sherman, 2005). The realization that, in many cases, the needs of students

are being overlooked, especially during whole-class instruction, can motivate new teachers to consider how learning environments can be re-constructed to meet student needs. Reflective dialogue journals in which teacher candidates and teacher educators process the events and interactions in classrooms can support a teacher candidate's thinking about ways in which they can be responsive in particular ways to particular students (Sherman, 2005).

The connection between theory and practice in clinical settings also puts the new teacher on the road to developing personal practical knowledge (see, for example, Clandinin, 1985; Elbaz, 1983; Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Polanyi, 1962; Trumbull, 1986; Zeichner, 1996), knowledge that is situationally specific and locally relevant. This can provide a sense of empowerment to the new teacher who begins to recognize it is within his or her capacity to design supportive learning environments to meet diverse needs.

4. *Developing "collaborative work cultures"* (Fullan, 2001). As Fullan suggests, "Significant educational change consists of changes in beliefs, teaching style, and materials, which can come about *only* through a process of personal development in a social context" (p. 124). By operationalizing the notion that teachers must communicate and collaborate with each other on a regular basis, the desirability for collaborative work cultures can be nurtured in teacher education programs. In this respect, small cohorts of teacher candidates are especially valuable. Teams of teacher candidates working on curriculum design, on-going communication through electronic message boards, and field experience and student teaching seminars that focus on collaborative problem-solving all support the development of such cultures within teacher education programs and provide an impetus for candidates to develop and sustain such a culture once they begin their careers. Common commitments to progressive practices and a sharing of ways in which to sustain this commitment can provide reform-minded teachers with encouragement and collegiality and a sense that they are not isolated practitioners but members of a community working toward a common goal.

5. *Developing deeper understandings of cultural differences and how culturally relevant pedagogy is an important aspect of differentiated practices.* Au (1993), building on the work of Cummins, distinguishes between cultural/linguistic incorporation that is either additive or subtractive:

students from diverse backgrounds will achieve higher academic levels when schools recognize and build upon strengths in students' home language and reinforce students' cultural identity. Typically, schools take a subtractive approach and try to replace students' home language and culture with mainstream language and culture. (pp. 16-17)

Teacher education programs can initiate the discourse about the importance of cultural and community connections by placing teacher candidates in multicultural settings and by helping them recognize that differentiation includes not just

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attention to academic differences but reflection about (see Howard, 2003), and equally important attention to, cultural diversity, too. Among the nine statements of principles of the Network of Progressive Educators, referred to earlier, are two which directly address the importance of these connections:

(3) Curriculum balance is maintained by commitment to children's individual interests and developmental needs, as well as commitment to community within and beyond the school's walls.

(4) Schools embrace the home cultures of children and their families. Classroom practices reflect these values and bring multiple cultural perspectives to bear. (quoted in Semel, 1999, p. 18)

An understanding of learning styles, then, as these are related to ethnicity, can be cultivated in teacher education programs. Gay (2000) suggests that "cultural congruity in teaching and learning" is needed "because the process of learning—not just the intellectual capability to do so—used by students from different ethnic groups are influenced by their cultural socialization" (p. 147). Although the literature on cultural responsiveness stands on its own and is broad and deep, its connection to the fundamental principles of progressive education can be made more explicit in teacher education programs and would be worthy of additional investigation in the literature.

6. *Cultivating understandings of the ways in which physical environments can promote a shared sense of community and reframing classroom management.* What Silberman (1973) calls the "distinctive look" that distinguishes open classrooms from traditional ones grows from the purposes of education to which proponents of open education subscribe and that ring true in differentiated instructional environments as well. These environments are created, according to Silberman, to achieve the following:

- active learning rather than passive learning;
- learning and expression in a variety of media, rather than just pencil and paper and the spoken word;
- self-directed, student initiated learning more than teacher-directed learning ... (quoted in Cuban, 1993, p. 155)

Cuffaro (1995) speaks about the importance of physical environments in establishing conditions for learning in early childhood settings that are framed by a Deweyan perspective. She suggests that classroom environments require careful planning and that there are two functions of classroom space: "to create those conditions that will evoke each child's potential and capacity, and, ...[to] facilitate interactions that promote and encourage the communication necessary to create community" (pp. 32-33). In order to achieve these goals, the physical environment should promote both "free movement and activity" and "associated living and shared activities" (p.

33). What is relevant to early childhood environments is pertinent to classrooms at all grade levels. For physical environments convey messages of intention in terms of the kinds of learning experiences that may potentially occur. What seems important to stress, however, when working with teacher candidates, is to emphasize that moving furniture does not create progressive educational environments (Murrow & Murrow, 1973). Superficial appearances can be deceptive. Silberman (quoted in Cuban, 1993) underscores this when he says:

By itself, dividing a classroom into interest areas (learning centers) does not constitute open education; creating large open spaces does not constitute open education.... For the open classroom... is not a model or set of techniques; it is an approach to teaching and learning. (p.155)

Not moving the furniture, however, restricts a teacher's ability to create environments that promote active learning and foster students' initiative and self-direction. Flexible use of time and space becomes less possible. A disruption of the traditionally arranged classroom—rows facing the blackboard, for example—challenges teacher candidates to think differently about what learning looks like and sounds like. The teacher's voice, in open space classrooms, for example, is usually much less domineering on an on-going basis. The noise level is usually much higher in non-traditionally arranged classrooms, especially those in which collaboration among students is routine. New teachers often equate noise level with a lack of control—and so do some administrators. The whole notion of classroom management, then, can be reframed during teacher education programs. The meaning of control and its relationship to teacher efficacy, student learning, and student-centeredness are all topics that require more complete exploration if teacher education programs have any hope of helping new teachers sustain progressive teaching practices.

### **Implications**

The impact of the standards movement on both teacher preparation programs and K-12 schools, in the era of *No Child Left Behind*, has been significant; both have been forced to move toward outcome-based models of education (Beyer, 2002; Bullough, Clark, & Patterson, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2001) and "research-based" practices. Seltzer-Kelly (2008) discusses the Department of Education's efforts, through the creation of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), to promote teaching practice that is grounded in "scientific" evidence and consistent with the IES's mission "to provide rigorous evidence on which to ground education practice and policy" (quoted in Seltzer-Kelly, 2008, p. 289)... "where the teaching method might be considered 'teacher-proof' if faithfully employed..." (p. 299). The push for teachers to use packaged curriculum, adhere to prescribed pacing, and follow religiously what is often referred to as "teacher-proof" curriculum, significantly challenges responsive educators to actualize the progressive educational practice represented in open education and differentiated instruction.

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Other potential, but less overt, challenges to sustaining progressive teaching practices in teacher education come from The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and many state boards of education, which require evidence that teacher candidates can demonstrate a multitude of discrete teaching competencies, neatly categorized into standards such as “instructional delivery,” “learning environment,” and “human development and learning.” This emphasis has shifted programs toward a technical orientation that is quite different from the orientation of “progressive” reform initiatives, such as those described here. How can new teachers come to value the importance of nonstandardized learning environments that respect the uniqueness of individuals within the current educational climate of standardization, which also permeates teacher preparation? This concern is echoed by Beyer (2002):

These standards fail to take up the central questions that need to frame teacher education. Since education is a human undertaking, and educational studies is a normative domain, teacher education must be infused with the kind of critical scrutiny about social purposes, future possibilities, economic realities, and moral directions. (p.240)

The desire by educators to reform school practices to become more responsive to students sometimes results in a rapid rush from theory to practical application (Sherman, 2005; 2006), often resulting in formulaic teaching strategies, rather than meaningful, contextually sensitive application. Examples include multiple intelligence workbooks with reproducible black line masters or two-day workshops to learn how to differentiate instruction. Though they are committed and well-intentioned, overwhelmed and overworked teachers may go directly to recipes for implementation rather than carefully regarding how theory can guide them to imaginatively meet diverse students' needs in situationally specific contexts. When results are not immediately apparent, teachers may move on to the next workshop idea, often leaving what is a valuable educational idea in the dust. The desire to find a quick fix that is not time and labor intensive is understandable, especially given the lack of resources and increasing diversity of public schools coupled with the demand for accountability and the implementation of unfunded mandates. Worthy notions of how to educate students responsively can turn into bandwagon movements, treated, suggests Zilversmit (1999) “as a panacea to be applied immediately and universally. Educational ideas become gimmicks and under these circumstances even good ideas and good programs pass out of favor within only a few years, only to be re-invented by the next generation of educators” (p. 253). It seems important, therefore, for prospective teachers to develop foundational understandings about worthy teaching that withstand the test of time. This becomes more likely when these understandings are grounded in serious discourse in university courses and in authentic learning contexts, such as fieldwork experiences and student teaching. In this manner, teacher candidates may develop dispositions for reflection not only



about the technical, but also the moral aspects of their work (see, for example, Hoffman-Kipp, 2003; Richardson, 1990; Sherman, 2006; Zeichner, 1996). University supervisors can provide mentorship that nurtures responsive teaching dispositions and supports progressive practices that may be associated with specific initiatives, such as open education and differentiation, but that also stand alone.

The rapid spread and popularity of pedagogical movements, such as open education and differentiated instruction, represent the educational community's recognition of principles for educating students that are embraced across time but that are not easily sustained. Part of the reason for this lack of sustainability may be the complex and idiosyncratic nature of worthy teaching that responds to student individuality; it defies standardized practices or recipes for teaching, is intellectually rigorous work, and is time and labor intensive. It also requires the kind of reflection and contemplation (cf. Buchmann, 1989) not always possible during the demanding hours of a classroom teacher's day. In order to make teacher education a value-added endeavor (see Cochran-Smith, 2000), it seems crucial that new teachers recognize the complexity of the practice (Cochran-Smith, 2003) and the deeply intellectual task that is situated at its core. Such recognition is accompanied by the realization that pedagogical movements can provide guidance but not recipes for teaching. There is no simple answer for the way to sustain particular curricular movements that draw inspiration from progressive education. But teacher educators can ask themselves how to nurture understandings about progressive practices that defy a single organizational approach or curriculum label. Open education has been called a fad—an experiment that failed. Differentiated instruction may face a similar fate if techniques, rather than unifying principles, become the message that teacher candidates take away with them as they begin to teach in their own classrooms.

### **Note**

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