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A CANDID TALK TO TEACHER EDUCATORS ABOUT EFFECTIVELY PREPARING TEACHERS WHO CAN TEACH EVERYONE'S CHILDREN

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This article focuses on characteristics necessary to be an effective teacher for all children, regardless of their academic ability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family structure, sexual orientation, and ability to speak English. The article gives attention to the issues of equity and social justice as it addresses the knowledge and skill base of effective teachers.

Teacher education is taking center stage in the national discussion of student achievement. Because we in the profession have not been proactive in defining teacher effectiveness or forthcoming about data that indicate that the teachers we prepare are able to positively affect P-12 student achievement, architects of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) have narrowed the public focus on effective teaching to knowledge about content. The focus of this conversational article is on those characteristics that describe teachers who are effective for all children, regardless of academic ability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family structure, sexual orientation, and ability to speak English. In this article, we give attention to the issues of equity and social justice—two ideas often addressed in words but much less through action. We begin with some thoughts on the selection of teacher candidates and follow with a discussion of the general knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to becoming an effective teacher, regard-less of where, who, or what our candidates will teach. As a profession of teacher educators, we must be clear and overt with our teacher candidates about that which we expect from them by the time they complete our programs and our reasons for these expectations. Finally, we discuss the need for research on and dissemination of results about the effectiveness of our teacher candidates.

The Issue of Candidate Selection

It is no surprise that the demographics of traditional teacher preparation programs and those of teacher educators have not changed dramatically during the past 20 years. The prospective teaching force and the majority of teacher educators are predominately White. As presently constituted, the corps of teacher candidates has limited opportunity to gain perspectives and insights on culture and diversity issues from professors or from classmates of

color within its program. In *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), the Supreme Court made clear the importance of race-conscious admission policies in higher education. The Court stated, "Effective participation by members of all racial and ethnic groups in the civic life of our Nation is essential if the dream of one Nation, indivisible, is to be realized" (p. 19). The *Grutter* decision makes the case for the promotion of diversity in higher education and we, as teacher educators, must become more assertive and creative in the recruitment of teacher candidates of color. Regardless of the geographic area where candidates end up teaching, there is a moral mandate to prepare a diverse teaching corps of culturally relevant teachers. Although some alternative routes to teaching have been successful in recruiting a more diverse corps of teacher candidates (U.S. Department of Education, 2004) and some "grow your own" projects in traditional programs are promising (Hill & Gillette, 2005), there is scant evidence regarding the impact of these candidates on student learning and on their longevity in the profession.

It is also time for teacher educators to enter into serious and contextualized discussions about candidate selection. We all know that there are severe teacher shortages in urban and rural areas, especially those characterized by high levels of poverty. We know there are shortages in key areas such as special education, science, and mathematics. However, we have an ethical and professional responsibility to address the fact that many of our programs allow candidates to enter based on measures of competence such as grade point averages or performance on standardized tests that tell us little about potential for success in the profession. Once admitted, we often have difficulty counseling out or removing students whose behaviors or attitudes signal an inability to help all children learn.

Martin Haberman (1995) addressed issues of selection and retention of teachers who are effective for all students in his book *Star Teachers of Children of Poverty*. In the last chapter, titled "Only Decent People Can Be Prepared To Teach," Haberman stated that he does not believe that everyone who wants to be a teacher should be allowed to proceed through our programs just because of a desire to teach or evidence of the necessary grade point average. We have all heard our candidates describe their reasons for entering the profession. The most common center on a love of children, a desire to help, and the personal satisfaction they receive from "seeing the light go on." Haberman contended that reasons such as these have little to do with a candidate's willingness and capability to help students achieve, especially in high-needs schools. In addition, these reasons have little to do with keeping a sufficient number of teachers in the profession. For some teachers, love and desire to help are quickly forgotten when faced with the difficulty of teaching. More than one quarter (29%) of teachers leave after teaching only 3 years, and 39% leave after teaching 5 years; moreover, teachers leave their profession at a higher rate than is the case in any other profession (Ingersoll, 2001).

Selection and retention of potential teachers who are committed to all students is a key issue, but we must also be clear and direct about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that we expect of our candidates. During the past 20 years, we have been building a solid research base about what it means to be a "culturally relevant teacher" and about the importance of that concept for all of our candidates. As teacher educators, we must be willing to take a hard look at our teaching and our programs using multiple assessments that provide data on candidate development from entrance through completion of our programs.

THE KNOWLEDGE BASE OF AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER

Most of our discussion of knowledge, skills, and dispositions is contextualized for the classroom, school, and local community where teachers work, but effective teachers also need to understand the larger social context in which they are working. By this we mean effective teachers need to take into account that academic and social achievement does not occur in a vac-

uum. Many societal structures—governments, markets, property rights, laws, implicit and tacit practices and patterns of inequality because of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and disability—maintain systems of reason that affect schools' results.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

When will we, as a society and as a profession, acknowledge and affirm that all students can learn and achieve and do away with the codes (e.g., at risk, single-parent home) that allow us to speak with a false tongue? To be "culturally responsive" means that effective teachers must not mouth the words; rather, they must

- Believe that all students can achieve and hold high expectations for all learners.
- Build a "community of learners" in the classroom and connect with students' families.
- Be learners themselves and vary instruction to meet the needs of students.
- Know that students have a wealth of skills and knowledge and use these in teaching.
- Be willing to be introspective about themselves and their teaching, monitor their beliefs and actions for bias and prejudice, and be unafraid to teach about the "isms."

This culturally responsive teaching does not apply only to teachers who work with students of color but instead, is essential for teaching all students. In addition, effective teachers know that the concept and practice of culturally responsive teaching is not static. It is continually undergoing evaluation and change. For example, during the past 10 years, religion and sexuality have become more pronounced within the fabric of American daily life and school life. When prospective and practicing teachers have students with two mothers, who are Muslim, or who are openly gay, their pedagogical understanding can be stretched. As Ladson-Billings (1997) maintained, such experiences may challenge prospective teachers' conceptions of themselves and others, of social relations, and of their knowledge of the world. Being an effective teacher for all students depends on achieving and acting on this pedagogical understanding.

Self-Knowledge: Understanding, Acceptance, and Willingness to Change

Often unsuccessful teacher candidates, whether they are counseled out of a program or not, exhibit difficulty in accepting criticism or a reluctance to change practices that are not in the best interests of P-12 learners or hold attitudes and beliefs about certain students, parents, families, and communities that indicate an inability to work effectively with diverse constituencies. We must assist teacher candidates in examining the knowledge and beliefs about the world they bring to the program and support them as they struggle with new ideas and as they are exposed to different beliefs. In addition, we must encourage them to ask questions and to put into practice those things that they learn.

Arthur Jersild (1955) conducted research on the relation between self-understanding and education. Jersild asked, "What does helping students mean in a distinctly intimate, personal way in the teacher's own life?" and concluded, "The teacher's understanding and acceptance of himself [*sic*] is the most important requirement in any effort he [*sic*] makes to help students to know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance" (p. 25).

Understanding oneself includes understanding how one's human and social characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, language, disability) influence teaching. Lisa Delpit (1995) stated, "One of the most difficult tasks as human beings is communicating meaning across our individual differences, a task confounded immeasurably as we attempt to communicate across social lines, ethnic lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power" (p. 66).

John Dewey (1933) noted that content knowledge and pedagogical expertise are not enough if a teacher does not have the attitude to work at becoming an effective teacher. Dewey believed that teachers need to have three characteristics to connect knowledge and skill: open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility. *Open-mindedness* was defined by Dewey as "freedom from prejudice, partisanship, and such other habits as close the mind and make it unwilling to consider new problems and to entertain new ideas" (p. 17). Here Dewey was

referring to a teacher's willingness to examine himself or herself, to admit mistakes and learn from them, and to work at always becoming more effective. Dewey contended that when people are absorbed in what they are doing, questions occur continually and new ideas spring up spontaneously. They change and they challenge ideas that are not fair to all students. Dewey described responsibility as *intellectual responsibility*. This means two things: (a) the desire to learn new things and the willingness to become absorbed in the task and (b) holding oneself accountable for teaching in an engaging way.

A Well-Constructed Philosophy of Education

We have heard colleagues argue that beginning teacher candidates do not have the background to develop an educational philosophy. We disagree. Most teacher candidates can clearly articulate their ideas about the role of school in our democracy, about how and what teachers should teach, and about how students learn best. They have developed these ideas by observing in schools for more than a dozen years as students. What they typically lack, on entering a teacher education program, is an intellectual framework for organizing their observations. They need support to interpret what they see in schools in philosophical terms. Without an educational platform that is developed from the beginning of a program and examined in terms of ongoing field placements, candidates continue to search for the "bag of tricks" that will make them successful in the classroom on a daily basis. Without an educational platform that is continually reexamined in light of their experiences and mediated by caring but critical faculty, they will succumb to unexamined practices based on "what works" for the moment.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Effective teachers need depth and breath of content knowledge and of pedagogical strategies. Effective teaching includes an understand-

ing of the organization and presentation of subject matter in a way that makes it understandable to and applicable by others. Teachers must understand and demonstrate in their teaching that knowledge is socially constructed. There is no one grand narrative that tells all about humankind, nor is there one national narrative that tells the Truth about the United States (Holmes Group, 1986). Conceptions about what constitutes acceptable knowledge are debated, shaped, and promulgated most often by those who have power.

Silberman (1970) noted that

> teachers need more than a knowledge of subject matter and a little practice teaching experience before they enter the classroom. They need knowledge about knowledge, about the ramifications of the subject or subjects they teach, about how those relate to other subjects and to knowledge—and life—in general. They need insights into their purposes as a teacher—why they are teaching what they are teaching, and how these purposes relate to the institutional setting of the school and to the value of the local community and the society at large. . . . Most important, perhaps they need to know that they need to know these things—they need to understand the kinds of questions their teaching will raise and to have some sense of where to turn for further understanding. (pp. 489-490)

Educational Psychology That Is Multicultural

Effective teachers take into account how students develop physically, socially, and cognitively; how students develop conceptions of themselves; and how these conceptions influence their learning. Too often, however, today's candidates are experiencing the same educational psychology curriculum that has existed for years, one dominated by a White, predominately male, mainstream view of psychology.

Effective teachers understand that a student's cultural identity is based on many factors, including ethnic group, social class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. They work hard at finding the balance between a student's group affiliation(s) and his or her individual characteristics and nature so as to see each student as a complex person with unique needs and talents. In addi-

tion, effective teachers are aware that a student's physical and cognitive development is affected by his or her environment—not only the physical features (e.g., pollution, geography) in the environment but cultural and historical events as well (e.g., discrimination, poverty, war, immigration). Furthermore, effective teachers know that a student's interaction with his or her physical and cultural environment influences the development of personal characteristics and ways of viewing and acting in the world.

Connecting Teacher Education to the World Outside of the School

Ladson-Billings (1994) described effective teachers as individuals with positive self-concept who see themselves as a part of the community and who see teaching as giving back to the community. Effective teachers develop a knowledge base about the community to include events, people, and places that rarely get addressed in the curriculum. Do our teacher candidates know about the local soup kitchen, the volunteers who work there, and the clients they serve? Do they know which houses of worship are in the neighborhood where they do their fieldwork and who the rabbi, pastor, priest, or imam may be? Do they know what social services are available in the community where they are observing or doing clinical experiences? Do they know the local politicians? By *do they know* we do not mean can they identify them in a crowded room. Instead, we wonder if they know these community stakeholders' perspectives, their beliefs about the community, and their goals for children who live in the community. The extent to which candidates are involved in the community and use community resources in their clinical experiences speaks volumes about their commitment to the school and to the students.

THE SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

The science of teaching may lie in the content, but the art of teaching is in the delivery of the content. Grossman (1990) linked knowledge and skills but saw skills as a set of procedures:

Skilled performance includes knowing what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. In other words, being skilled at something involves knowing a set of procedures, knowing when to apply those procedures, and being proficient at executing those procedures. (p. 37)

Culturally relevant teachers are skillful at constructing curriculum that is based on students' needs and interests; justifying their work based on external, sometimes bureaucratic demands (i.e., standards); and using data to refine and improve practice.

The Ability to Put It All Together

Pedagogical skill, or the ability to successfully implement teaching strategies to meet the educational and social needs of students, is a key factor in effective teaching. Pedagogical skill requires that teachers have not only a knowledge base derived from multiple funds of knowledge and the ability to take that knowledge apart but also the skills to make it accessible to students.

Translating curriculum into effective lessons day after day requires a knowledge base built from multiple perspectives, a stance toward teaching as an inquiry-based act, an ethic of caring that honors student voice in the design and implementation of the curriculum, an ability to continually gather and use data to improve practice, knowledge of the social conditions of the students and the world, and a solid understanding of the subject matter to be taught.

Reflective Skills: The Ability to Analyze and Act on Teacher-Generated Data

The term *reflective practitioner* means different things to different people. To us, it means a teacher who not only thinks about what is happening in the classroom but also researches his or her classroom practice to make changes that will result in a more democratic, ethical, and student-centered classroom where learning takes place every minute of the day. We support the argument made by Zeichner and Liston (1996) that if teachers do not question the goals, values, and assumptions that guide their work, and do not examine the context in which they

teach, then they are not engaged in good reflective teaching.

Some teachers erroneously believe that if they spend time just thinking about their teaching, they are being reflective. Becoming a reflective teacher involves many skills: identifying problems, reviewing the professional literature related to the problem, gathering classroom data, developing plans for altering current practice, and the fair and unbiased assessment of students.

Communication and Collaboration Skills: Building Relationships

We must begin to design collaborations that not only teach candidates how to work with each other but also build commitment and understanding across lines of ethnicity, gender, ability, socioeconomic status, language, and sexual orientation. For example, we need to consider how we can design experiences so that candidates in suburban, rural, and urban areas can collaborate to learn about the material conditions of each other's school settings. We need to ask questions and experiment with such inquiries as How can we design experiences in which candidates preparing for careers in special education work with candidates in elementary or secondary education in a manner similar to that which they will find when they accept a teaching position? How can we design experiences in which candidates work with parents in ways that will help them understand how to build partnerships with families? What do candidates learn from these experiences and how do we document that learning for dissemination? Does that learning transfer to candidates' work as teachers when they are employed?

Management Skills: The Ability to Arrange Engaging Learning Environments

Teacher candidates often cite classroom management as the topic that causes them the most anxiety when considering a career in teaching. School administrators cite the ability to manage a classroom as one of the most important traits of effective teachers. Excellent teachers have

skill in planning and managing the learning environment. They provide structure with flexibility, freedom within parameters, and options for projects and assignments. They actively involve students in learning and classroom decision making and set clear academic and social goals. Students' ideas, opinions, and knowledge are woven into the fabric of the classroom through democratic classroom management strategies. Although it is possible to teach about classroom management, skill development in this area takes shape during the clinical components of a teacher preparation program. It is important that our programs provide candidates with early field experiences that are structured and mediated and that occur in a variety of settings (e.g., urban, rural, suburban) if they are to develop skill in this area.

The Ability to Use Technology as a Teaching-Learning Tool

Effective teachers understand how technology can enhance learning. They are versed in the mechanics of hardware, the content of and possible uses for software and Web sites, and their applications to teaching and learning. They know how to plan assignments that integrate technology, and they know how to use adaptive or assistive technology to help all students learn. Effective teachers use technology to enhance communication between home, school, and community; and they use technology to collaborate with other school professionals across the country and the world.

Effective teachers know of the technology students have at home and their opportunities to use it. To this end, effective teachers are aware of the "digital divide" and evidence a concern for ensuring that all students have access to technology. They know how to find technological resources, writing grants if necessary, to enhance their classroom and school. We often hear students or colleagues saying that technology integration in the teacher preparation program is wasted when candidates are placed in economically poor school districts with few technology resources. We believe such situations provide an excellent opportunity to assess

how well a candidate can locate technology resources to use in the classroom.

Conclusion

Much of what we have said in this short piece is not new. Many of us have struggled to design, implement, and assess our programs to produce the type of teacher candidates and the type of experiences we describe here. We are aware of the pressures faced by many schools and colleges of education to admit more students who are educationally sound, to retain candidates in programs when they exhibit behaviors or attitudes that are problematic but difficult to assess, and to graduate students who the faculty may not feel are adequately prepared. These pressures come from the college and university administration, from candidates and their families, and from a public who deserves a qualified, well-prepared, and culturally relevant teacher in every classroom.

Our hope is that as a community of teacher educators, we commit to the type of longitudinal studies of our candidates' effectiveness in our programs and in the classroom that will help us to understand the impact of our work. The current research base tells us much about the characteristics of effective teachers for all children. It offers us some useful data on individual program components that might make a difference in altering candidates' perspectives about working effectively with the range of diverse students and families who populate our public schools today. What we lack is research on the effectiveness of programs, especially when our candidates enter teaching positions. We need to know what happens when they come face-to-face with students, families, and communities beyond student teaching and implement that which they learned through the programs we designed. We need to know how they interpret the notion of culturally relevant teaching and how that notion is connected to student achievement.

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