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EDUC 876
Reflective Essay

Teacher Education: An Uncertain Future

Just as individual students in every classroom have their own individual stories, teacher education programs widely vary in their approaches and requirements for teacher candidates. With classrooms becoming more diverse, teacher education must adapt to the changing needs of the candidates they enroll, the communities they serve, and the requirements of a standards-driven nation.

Every teacher education program strives to graduate effective, competent, and committed teachers. Every program wants to produce fair teachers. However, within those primary goals three overarching questions should frame every curriculum decision and every policy initiative: 1) What skills do teacher candidates need to have that will directly translate to the classroom; 2) What challenges will teachers face in light of the standards-driven culture when they do enter the profession; and 3) What factors contribute to teachers leaving the profession after they have taken the time to enter it?

Adequately prepared first year teachers must not only convey a prescribed curriculum but must also differentiate instruction to serve multiple levels of students sometimes with differences in learner processing, but at other times with differences in culture, language fluency, and or readiness for learning. These issues, plus the demands of standardized testing and accountability, often stress and weigh down beginning teachers who are often just trying to think about what will happen the next day and stay afloat in a new world of lesson plans, instructional time disruptions, parental communication requirements, and possibly, discipline. In addition, there are faculty meetings, professional development groups, and perhaps grade level collaboration,

Comment [pme1]: Be careful of the word "every." All I need to do is find one program that doesn't meet your description to dismantle your argument.

Comment [pme2]: Just first year teachers?

planning, or assessment time to which starting teachers must acclimate themselves. Even with good clinical or student teaching experiences, new teachers are often overwhelmed. Is it possible for the teacher education programs to incorporate into instruction strategies for novice teachers to use during those important first years?

It is not disputed that teacher candidates need to know subject matter and how to work within curriculum guidelines but teacher education programs also need to take steps to make sure graduates know how to make classroom lessons stimulating and challenging. Continual modeling of inquiry-based instruction and reflective practice will make it more likely that teacher candidates will take these practices into the classroom than to just read about them in education texts. Programs should evaluate courses to ensure that the majority offered are delivered in this hands-on, practical approach, foregoing the time when teacher education programs delivered all educational information through books and theory in the lecture hall.

In addition, teacher education programs should nurture and encourage creativity, allowing teacher candidates to collaborate when possible to use new technological media and explore new methods of lesson delivery as the more opportunities teacher candidates have for practical application to problems the more they will be encouraged to develop coping strategies when something does not go as planned when the ideal outcome is not reached. Novice teachers need to know how to adjust instruction so that the desired result is achieved.

The climate of standardized testing and “teaching to tests” requires many teachers to adapt lessons to suit a particular goal. Teacher candidates are instructed to use rubrics to avoid appearing subjective in evaluating student work but often cannot explain the differences between levels on rubrics, such as the difference between “some understanding” and “adequate understanding” of a concept. Teacher candidates need practical time to discuss the differences

between levels and develop their own understandings of these areas so that they can better convey them to students and parents.

Furthermore, teacher education programs should discuss the process of talking to parents and communicating with students outside of the **classroom**. Many new teachers (especially those who are younger in age) could benefit from some additional guidance on how to interact in the educational environment. This would decrease the tendency of inexperienced instructors to blur the line between the professional and the private, conveying personal and sometimes inappropriate information to students. In addition, since the demands of accountability require parental contact and sometimes have legal issues surrounding testing, beginning teachers would benefit from some training in conducting communication with parents and other stakeholders.

Comment [pme3]: Be careful of personalizing abstractions. Programs can't discuss because they don't have vocal cords. People in the programs can.

Teacher education programs should also **look** at the changing teacher candidate. With multiple paths to licensure and many routes to become a teacher in some states, teacher education programs need to look at the myriad of skills that teacher candidates are bringing into the teacher education program. With federal requirements for highly qualified teachers, teaching candidates come not only from a variety of backgrounds but in some disciplines, from a range of professions. The experiences that teacher candidates have had with education may not have been especially favorable and because of culture, may even have been strikingly different than the educational experiences that teacher education programs are now asking them to convey to students. Care must be taken to ensure that the message and perhaps a new form of delivery, is not lost in translation. Lessons and laboratory experiences should be continually reinforced and practiced to ensure eventual realization in the classroom.

Comment [pme4]: Can't look either...no eyes.

If all of the above were implemented **by-in** teacher education programs, however, would new teachers stay in the classroom longer than the current average of five years? Is there

something else that can be done from the teacher education end to ensure that teachers stay in the profession? Is there a crystal ball that can give all the answers or a “magic rubric” that can evaluate a teacher candidate to assure that if a person scores high enough in enough areas then that the person will stay in the profession? Obviously, no crystal ball or magic rubric exists. Teachers leave the classroom for a variety of reasons – lack of support, lack of resources, family-related issues, and money. Despite those teachers who leave, others choose to remain in the classroom, providing guidance to beginning teachers and educating countless students. As the world becomes more of a global community, teacher education programs need to keep re-examining the three guiding questions outlined above and critically analyze their programs, adapt existing techniques, embrace innovative technology, and develop new initiatives to meet rising challenges.

18 points.