



Critical Issues in Teacher Education

# Critical Issues In Teacher Education

The Journal of the Illinois Association of Teacher Educators

Volume XIX, 2012

ISSN 2165-4913

CRITICAL ISSUES IN TEACHER EDUCATION  
The Journal of the Illinois Association of Teacher Educators  
Volume XIX, 2012

## Table of Contents

### Multi-Thematic

Novice Literacy Teachers and the Enactment of Instruction: Implications for Teacher Education <i>Bette S. Bergeron</i>	4
The Principals' Dilemma: Is Teacher Effectiveness All about Test Scores? <i>Cathy R. Jones, Nancy J. Ratcliff, Emma Savage-Davis, and Gilbert H. Hunt</i>	23
Professional Teaching Portfolios: Immersed in the Constructivist Approach <i>Sherrie Chan Pardieck</i>	33
Challenges for Male Elementary Teachers: Present Status, Perceptions, and Possibilities <i>Paul Egeland, James Sovocool, and Justin Marble</i>	42
ACT Scores as a Predictor of Success on the New Basic Skills Test: A Preliminary Analysis <i>Keith Drew</i>	53
The Illinois Teacher Graduate Assessment: Methods, Results, and Lessons Learned <i>Stephen E. Lucas</i>	59
Middle School Staff Members' Perceptions of Bullying <i>Christina C. Pfister, Katherine R. DiFabio, and Sophia Paljevic</i>	71
Doctoral Candidates' Perceptions of Their Teacher Leadership Preparation Program: A Vygotskian Perspective <i>Harriet J. Bessette</i>	84
Rethinking Federal and State Educational Policies Associated with the Current Standards Movement: A Collection of Selected References to Stimulate Reflections and Dialogues <i>Walter S. Polka</i>	98
<b>Reports, Reviews, and Synopses</b>	
Review of <i>Language and Literacy in Inquiry-Based Science Classrooms, Grades 3-8</i> <i>Reviewed by Andrea Thoermer and Chu-Chuan Chiu</i>	112

Sandy Alber	Oakland University
Adel T. Al-Betaineh	Illinois State University
Debbie Barnes	University of Central Arkansas
Andy Brulle	Wheaton College
Nanette Carli	Eastern Illinois University
Renee Clift	University of Arizona
Ron Copenhaver	Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Julie Rainer Dangel	Georgia State University
Annette D. Digby	Lincoln University
Robert Fisher	Illinois State University
Belinda Gimbert	Ohio State University
Mary Greenlaw	St. Norbert College
W. Robert Houston	University of Houston
Donna Jurich	University of Arizona
Jerry Ligon	National-Louis University
Jane McCarthy	University of Nevada Las Vegas
John McIntyre	Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Paul Paese	Indiana University Kokomo
Timothy Richards	McKendree University
William Stone	St. Xavier University
Patricia Tate	George Washington University
Jim Vandergriff	University of Arizona
Martha Young	University of Nevada Las Vegas

**Critical Issues in Teacher Education** is a double blind reviewed scholarly journal published by the Illinois Association of Teacher Educators. The views presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Illinois Association of Teacher Educators.

# CITE *Critical Issues in Teacher Education*

**Critical Issues in Teacher Education** (CITE) is a double blind reviewed refereed scholarly journal of the Illinois Association of Teacher Educators. CITE will publish empirically based or original research articles, synthesis papers, book reviews, and special reports on topics of interest to teacher educators.

**The purposes of the publication of CITE are to:**

1. Stimulate research and scholarly activity on teacher education;
2. Inform teacher educators about current research, promising practices, and significant issues concerning teacher education; and
3. Provide a forum for discussion of significant issues and problems in teacher education.

**Manuscript Submission**

Submissions must be completed papers (not previously published) and should not exceed 25 pages (including references and appendices, double spaced, 12 pt. Times Roman font, 1" margins). The editors request that pages be numbered. Tables, charts, figures, and illustrations should be kept to a minimum and placed in the text at the appropriate location. Authors should follow APA sixth edition guidelines (2010). Notification of the status of manuscripts will take place after the submission deadline. The journal editors reserve the right to make editorial changes.

**Include the following in your submission:**

1. Cover page: Title of manuscript and complete contact information for ALL authors— name, institutional affiliation, mailing address, e-mail, and phone (office & cell) numbers.
2. Author(s) biographical sketch (50 words max). Include your name, title, department, institution, and a brief description of your current research interests and publications.
3. **One** paper copy of abstract (100 - 150 words) **and** complete manuscript.
4. **Two** self-addressed stamped business envelopes.
5. An electronic version of the requested information (e.g. CD, USB flash drive, etc. in MS Word, pc preferred) as **three separate files**: (a) cover page, (b) biographical sketch, (c) abstract **and** manuscript (prepared for blind review). Provide author name(s), manuscript title, and word processing program on the electronic media. The hard copy of the manuscript and electronic media will not be returned.

**Submit manuscripts to:**

Ed Pultorak, Ph.D., Co-Editor  
*Critical Issues in Teacher Education*  
 911 Donnie Court  
 Joliet, IL 60435-4443  
 email: pultorak@siu.edu

# NOVICE LITERACY TEACHERS AND THE ENACTMENT OF INSTRUCTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

by  
**Bette S. Bergeron**

BETTE S. BERGERON is Dean of the School of Education at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, IL.

## Abstract

*Current debates in teacher education focus on the role of colleges and schools of education in the preparation of qualified teachers and the characteristics of effective programs. The following year-long case study of a novice examines the challenges of preparing effective teachers through the following questions: (a) What specific challenges and professional “stages” do novice teachers experience, and (b) What impacts do teacher education programs have on the enactment of literacy practices by novice teachers? Study data suggests that some novice teachers do apply what they’ve learned in teacher preparation to their classroom instruction, particularly when there is a philosophical consistency between the institutional and school contexts. It is also suggested that not all novice teachers transition through sequential “stages,” and that many challenges for these new professionals are externally situated. This inquiry also offers specific implications for teacher education units that include the infusion of purposeful field experiences and exposing novices to strategies for coping with external policies.*

Today was my first day of teaching. What an experience it was! The children were nervous at first, but it only took a few hours for them to warm up to me... I hope that I have a good day tomorrow. I really want to pique the interest of my students now so that they will be anxious to learn. [Stacey, August 1]

This case study will examine the first year of a novice teacher, Stacey [a pseudonym], in order to inform teacher education regarding the realities and challenges that novices face within today’s classrooms. Stacey’s experiences are not unique, and have specifically been chosen because they reflect a set of conditions commonly faced by new teachers today. Like many novices, Stacey found herself in a classroom that reflected a “majority minority” population of students, predominately of Hispanic heritage, whose first language was not English. And like many novice teachers, the experiences of these students were vastly different from those that Stacey herself faced as a privileged student and young adult. How could a teacher education program adequately prepare Stacey, or any novice, for these realities?

A previous report focused on how Stacey enacted a culturally responsive curriculum and what conditions existed for her success (Bergeron, 2008). For this particular paper, the focus is specific to how literacy instruction was enacted in this novice teacher’s classroom, how her teacher education program prepared her for those experiences, and what challenges were faced during this critical first year. Through this case study, the following questions will be explored: What specific challenges or developmental “stages” do first year teachers experience? What impacts, if any, do teacher preparation

programs have on the enactment of literacy curriculum by novice teachers? These questions are considered in order to determine how to inform the policies and practices of teacher education. In summary, this study seeks to answer the overarching question, “Does teacher education matter in the preparation of novice literacy teachers?”

## Literature Review

The first year of teaching is a unique experience that can be fraught with challenges. In a study of 42 first-year teachers, Meister (2000) found that novices’ perceptions of challenges fell into three broad categories: managing the behaviors and diverse needs of students, dealing with time constraints and work overload, and conflicts with parents and other adults in the school. The greatest concern of these novices related to issues of management, and specifically in their perceived inability to deal with aberrant behavior and the inclusion of students with special needs. Other common stressors include insufficient materials, conflicts with parents, and assessment (Tait, 2008). Ness (2000) found that novice teachers felt under-appreciated by their school administrators, hampered by district bureaucracy, and challenged by the inadequacy of overcrowded schools that did not provide teachers with appropriate materials or support for instruction. Also noted as challenges are the long work hours and after-school responsibilities, negotiating the balance between work and collegial relationships, and the practice in many schools of assigning the most novice teachers to the highest-need students (Murphy, 2005). Liston, Whitcomb, and Borko (2006) suggest that there are three primary sources for novices’ struggles, including a theoretical grounding learned in teacher preparation that does not adequately equip the novice for daily classroom realities, lack of preparation for the emotional intensity of teaching, and teaching in workplaces that are not adequately organized to support the novices’ own professional learning.

Much of the current literature on novices describes or infers developmental “stages” that are encountered as new teachers experience their first year in the classroom. These stages are often categorized as related to survival, tasks, and impact on students. Liston and his colleagues (2006) suggest that the initial survival stage lasts for the first months of the school year, and is defined by issues related to discipline and management. This is followed by a concern with curriculum by the middle of the year, with an eventual focus on student learning. In a twist on conventional stages, Massey (2006) describes a novice’s developmental phases as: What will I teach?, I won’t teach that!, and What do I do now?

Despite the prevalence of theories regarding novice stages, however, other studies suggest that the first year of teaching is not as clearly and consistently defined. For example, in a three-year case study of two novices, it was found that these teachers did not go through a series of stages but instead responded to concerns based within the context of situations that they encountered within their own classrooms (Martin, Chiodo, and Chang, 2001). As noted by Martin et al., “to try to describe all beginning teachers progressing through stages, even if those stages are only general categories, seems to relegate teachers to simply technicians following a diagram, rather than

professionals who rely on their intellect to solve a variety of problems that they face throughout the day” (p. 61).

Despite findings regarding novices’ struggles during the first year in the classroom, there is also evidence that many new teachers are prepared and are adequately effective in supporting students’ learning needs. In a longitudinal study of K-12 novice teachers, it was found that these professionals were considered by their school administrators to be able to teach at desired levels as determined by the districts (Good et al., 2006). Stronge (2002) contends that teachers develop from novices to masters at different intervals over time, perhaps taking up to eight years. It can be suggested that many teacher education programs do prepare effective *novices* that are equipped to address a range of challenges that are faced in the first year of teaching.

### Quality Teacher Preparation

Recent studies have highlighted the critical role that quality teacher education can play in the preparation of effective novices, while also recognizing the inherent difficulties with the design of teacher education research. Some have suggested that little useful data can be drawn from current research on teacher education programs. For example, the American Educational Research Association’s panel on teacher education suggests that, because of inconsistent and contradictory outcomes across studies and various conceptual and methodological problems within studies, the findings of teacher education research are limited (Zeichner and Conklin, 2005). In addition, some reports have publicly criticized traditional colleges and schools of education for not meeting professional obligations regarding quality in preparation, including the recent and highly controversial report conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality (2010) that condemned the preparation of teachers in Illinois. Perhaps most cited is the widely disseminated report by Levine (2006), which criticizes the profession for its lack of “a common vision of how to prepare teachers to meet today’s new realities, leading to the rise of divergent and opposing approaches to reform” (p. 14).

Although critical of teacher education, Levine (2006) does identify excellent programs that embrace practice and practitioners, are committed to preparing excellent teachers, and clearly identify what an excellent teacher needs to know and be able to do. Components of effective teacher education programs identified by Darling-Hammond (2000, 2006) include a common vision of good teaching that guides faculty, well defined standards of performance, a broad-based curriculum that is taught in the context of practice, carefully designed and extended field experiences, university-school partnerships, and the application of learning to real problems of practice. As suggested by her study of high quality preparation programs, “the *kind* of teacher education matters” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 34).

Stronge (2002) contends that a strong predictor of teaching performance is the amount of education coursework teachers have completed in their preparation programs. As Stronge suggests, the more methods courses an individual completes, the more likely the teacher is to emphasize conceptual understanding and hands-on learning in the classroom. Tait (2008) suggests that novices can more effectively cope with their first years of teaching when

preservice programs emphasize supportive connections between classmates. Therefore, it is recommended that preservice programs highlight the collegial nature of teaching, provide opportunities to forge personal and professional relationships, and encourage continuing contacts and networking after graduation. Peer networks that provide support for continuous learning are particularly critical for early career teachers as they navigate pressures associated with school culture and accountability mandates (Flint, Maloch, and Leland, 2010).

One specific area of preparation that appears to have a substantial impact on the success of novice teachers is field experiences. Meister and Melnick (2003) suggest that novices who have had multiple experiences in classrooms feel more prepared than those with minimal experiences. Teacher education programs that are field based and which emphasize these practical experiences seem to have a more positive effect on the preparation of quality novices (Hoffman et al., 2005). The value of field experiences is diminished, however, if those experiences contradict the instructional models of the preparation program (Pimentel, 2007). Teacher education must not leave these critical placements to chance, but instead pair teacher candidates with excellent teachers, in classrooms where their experiences will mirror and reinforce the coursework of the preparation program.

In this case study, a particular focus is placed on literacy instruction within a novice teacher’s classroom. While there is much in the current literature regarding quality teacher preparation in general, how well is the profession preparing effective teachers of literacy? The task of defining quality teacher preparation in literacy has been reflected in the work of the International Reading Association (IRA), which released a national report in 2003 that overviewed what is currently known regarding the preparation of excellent reading teachers. IRA’s Commission selected eight exemplary preparation programs, and identified the following characteristics: a comprehensive curriculum; a variety of course-related field experiences; programs centered around a vision of literacy and quality teaching; sufficient resources to support quality preparation; responsive teaching and an adapted curriculum; institutional advocacy to ensure that students receive a quality experience; an active learning community that is developed with faculty, students, and mentor teachers; and continual evaluation of students, the program, and alumni to guide future program development (IRA, 2003). Results from a follow-up study indicated that teachers that had completed a high-quality preparation program were more effective than their peers in creating text-rich classroom environments, engaging students with texts, and fostering high levels of understanding and valuing of texts (Hoffman et al., 2005). These authors suggest that “participation in a high-quality teacher preparation program that focuses on the teaching of reading positively influences the experience of the teachers entering the profession and the quality of and student engagement with the literacy environments they create in their classrooms” (p. 280).

Deal and White (2006) describe teaching literacy strategies as part of methods coursework, field experiences, supportive supervisors, and coursework on differentiated instruction as aspects of teacher education

programs that contribute positively to novices' beliefs about literacy teaching and learning. In a critique of 82 empirical investigations on teacher preparation for reading instruction, it was found that the impact of teacher education is more profound when a "learning and doing" (p. 276) approach to teaching is used (Risko et al., 2008). Pedagogy in the college classroom should be built around explicit explanations, examples, modeling, focused feedback, and practice both within a university classroom and within the field.

### Research Focus and Methods

The reported case study follows the first year of a novice teacher, who had relocated from the Midwest to the Southwest to assume her first professional position. Stacey completed a traditional undergraduate university-based elementary education program, consisting of a sequence of methods coursework and corresponding field experiences that concluded in a semester-long student teaching practicum. The program included directed field experiences within a variety of urban and suburban school sites that participated in the campus' Professional Development School (PDS) consortium. Stacey herself can be defined as a traditional baccalaureate student in terms of her age (18-20 while in the program) and full-time status, and was self-described as a White woman from a middleclass family. Stacey was exceptional in terms of her own academic success in the program. She was also very active within the campus' student body, serving as president of the student senate, and also was selected as the student representative on the PDS Consortium Advisory Board.

### Teacher Preparation: Stacey's Experiences

Stacey's elementary teacher preparation program was completed at a mid-size regional campus of a large public institution. Discrete methods courses were included for all content subjects, and students also completed two courses specific to special education. Students who were enrolled in any methods course were required to complete a companion field experience, which was held at a partnering Professional Development School (PDS) site. Preservice students were required to complete a minimum of three hours per week in their assigned classroom; classroom assignments changed each semester to ensure placements in a variety of grade levels as well as to provide candidates with the opportunity to practice in ethnically and geographically diverse placements. Depending on the nature of the PDS partnership, some courses were held on-site and included guest speakers from the site's teachers and administrators. As partnerships with university faculty developed, some classroom teachers were selected to team-teach courses with a faculty mentor.

Included in the teacher preparation curriculum were four, three-credit courses specific to literacy. Typical assignments in the literacy courses included activities that related directly to candidates' field experiences. For example, candidates completed field logs of their lesson plans, developed an assessment file with strategies appropriate for their assigned students, completed a critique of a research article that related to tutoring assignments, responded to guided reflections, and produced a final portfolio.

### Study Setting

After completing her undergraduate program, Stacey moved to the Southwest, where she assumed her first teaching assignment in a third grade classroom. The community in which Stacey taught was predominately Hispanic and, economically, was one of the poorest neighborhoods in the district. Of her 27 students, all but two were bilingual and five had been classified as very limited in their English ability. Stacey acknowledged the potential challenges inherent to having a predominance of second language learners in her classroom. On her first day of teaching, Stacey noted:

The language barrier is great for my students. I have about three students that are considered ones on the ESL scale. It's a good thing that I know some Spanish to communicate with them. I also have a few students that are helping me. It's hard to know if they can read very much in Spanish. I will have to find some basic level Spanish books to check into this further.  
[Stacey, August 1]

Even on the first day of school, Stacey was already surveying the needs of her students and planning how best to support their learning.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The reported research uses a case study design in order to address questions related to novice teacher preparation and suggest implications for future practice. Case study research focuses on "the meaning people make of their lives in very particular contexts" (Dyson and Genishi, 2005, p. 9). The focus of this methodology is on particular events or phenomenon, making this line of inquiry useful when exploring practical experiences (Merriam, 1998). Case studies include detailed descriptions, rely on multiple data sources, are bounded by context or setting, and build an in-depth understanding of an event or individual (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, and Morales, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Data analysis, which includes rich descriptions of the case's themes, is inductive and involves sorting interrelated data in order to increase understanding of the phenomenon under study (Dyson and Genishi, 2005).

This study reflects the paradigm of pragmatism, in which conducting research to useful ends takes precedence over finding ways to defend one's epistemology (Dillon, O'Brien, and Heilman, 2000). Danforth (2006) describes pragmatism as emphasizing the primacy of action as the proving ground of belief, through which practical solutions are sought to problems confronting students, families, and others within the study context. Teddlie and Reynolds (2001) suggest that pragmatism supports the use of mixed methods and the triangulation of research from various data sources, and recognizes that values play a large role in interpreting results. As noted by these researchers, pragmatists "believe that true school and classroom change *is possible within socio-political systems as they exist*" (p. 70).

Study data included direct observation within the classroom, through which Stacey's instructional and management practices could be accurately described. Data gathered in this study also included journal reflections recorded individually by the researcher (study author) and informant (Stacey), informal interviews, and samples of student work completed within Stacey's classroom.

Informal interviews included more structured conversations in preparation of the study to determine our goals and participant roles, interviews prior to the beginning of the school year to ascertain Stacey's perceptions of her strengths and challenges as a novice and to share a framework for her literacy curriculum, and post-study interviews to review her perceptions and any changes that had occurred as she compared views held at the beginning of the year with those as the school year concluded. A variety of electronic and face-to-face contacts were also made with Stacey throughout the school year to establish the context of the study and share interpretations of the year's events. Student work included samples of unit projects, free writing (journaling), and notes to me that were spontaneously generated by the students. Also available were artifacts from Stacey's teacher preparation program, including syllabi and assignment rubrics from her literacy courses.

In this study, I assumed the role of participant observer, though the students themselves often drew me into classroom activities. As my relationship with Stacey developed, I also assumed the role of an informal mentor and provided her with professional and emotional support upon her request. As noted by Dyson and Genishi (2005), qualitative researchers often take on multiple roles that change over time as the context and/or participants become more familiar and mutual relationships evolve. The researcher is therefore faced with "maintaining a balance between distance and intimacy" (p. 58).

Reflective journals were used as the primary data source for this inquiry. Through these journals, we recorded and shared our stories as they related to Stacey's experiences as a first-year teacher. As noted by Carter (1993), stories provide a way to capture the "complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of the phenomenon" being studied (p. 6). Stories also reflect the richness of experiences, and provide a lens through which meaning is constructed.

Both Stacey and I maintained separate journals throughout the school year, where we recorded our observations, questions, concerns, and reflections. In constructing my journal, I started with brief descriptive notes recorded on site. After concluding each classroom visit, I would then expand on these observations to include more detailed descriptions as well as my reflections on the events. Stacey recorded her journal entries, which both described activities and her perceptions of the day's events, at the conclusion of the school day. As the year progressed and her involvement in school activities intensified, Stacey opted to complete her entries on a weekly basis. Instead of using dialogue journaling, through which participants extend each other's thoughts via a written communication (Lee and Zuercher, 1993), we chose to keep discrete and separate journals in order to avoid influencing each other's views and therefore more clearly distinguishing the similarities and differences between our perceptions of the same events. We did not review each other's journals until the conclusion of the study. As the school year ended, we independently analyzed our journals for themes that emerged regarding each study question, including the relationship between Stacey's preparation and actual classroom practices, challenges that were faced, and any developmental stages that could be defined.

In order to generate themes, I first read through my journal to highlight portions related to each study question. I then re-read the journal, noting patterns or themes that emerged for the identified question. For the question on novice challenges, for example, five broad themes, with related subthemes, emerged from the data (see Table 1). I then read Stacey's journal, noting corresponding themes in her entries. Consistent with constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) these broad themes were also confirmed through an analysis of secondary data sources, including our informal interviews and email exchanges. The broad themes were identified across all three data sources. In order to generate the common elements of Stacey's preparation program as it related to her enactment of literacy instruction, course syllabi and assignment rubrics were examined and reoccurring themes identified. If themes appeared in more than one course, they were considered as critical instructional elements for the purpose of this inquiry.

### Findings

The literature on novice teachers is filled with anecdotes on the challenges of this very difficult year. Typically, a progression of professional stages is noted, with novice teachers first facing classroom management crises and, later in the year, encountering academic challenges more specific to curricular planning and student learning. Within this scenario, novice teachers complete their initial year in the profession feeling overwhelmed and underserved by their teacher preparation program. Unfortunately, some novices may also end the year with lingering doubts regarding their chosen career path.

In analyzing the data for the current study, however, a very different pattern emerges. Unlike many novice teachers described in the literature, Stacey's experience was perceived as highly successful, as assessed by Stacey herself, Stacey's school administrator, the district evaluator, and me. Although Stacey noted challenges, the most frequently cited difficulty—classroom management—was not a deterrent to her development as a professional or to her interactions with students. Additionally, neither Stacey nor I observed a sequential progression of challenges, changing from one part of the school year to the next. Instead, Stacey faced persistent challenges that were for the most part externally situated. These challenges, including instructional interruptions and district policy mandates, were considered external because their origin existed outside of Stacey's immediate control. Additionally, each of the identified concerns was noted *throughout* the school year; they were not specific to any one period of time. With the exception of school interruptions, Stacey was able to formulate some solutions to these challenges although none were ever resolved to her complete satisfaction.

Table 1 provides an example of the coding that was used to generate themes and related subthemes for the question, "What specific challenges do novice teachers experience?" Also included in Table 1 are the total incidences for each theme as found in our journals as well as secondary sources (e.g., email correspondences and notes from phone conversations).

**Table 1:** Generated Themes for Study Question 1: What Specific Challenges do Novice Teachers Experience?

Theme	Sub-Theme	Incidences
<i>Mandates</i>	State and District Tests	34
	Bilingual Ban	
	Phonics Instruction	
	District-Adopted Materials	
<i>School Function Interruptions</i>	District Professional Dev.	26
	School Obligations/Events	
<i>Meeting Individual Needs</i>	Instructional Interruptions	19
	Classroom Paperwork	
<i>Curriculum Planning</i>	English Proficiency	14
	Varied Levels	
	New/Transitioning Students	
<i>Student Assessment</i>	Lack of Resources/Technology	11
	Curriculum Planning	
	Lesson Preparation	
	Grade Reporting	
	Assessment Strategies	

### School Mandates

The most prevalent challenge for Stacey related to the broad theme of “school mandates,” which were externally situated. For example, Stacey was frustrated with the “testing frenzy” that pervaded her district during the last quarter of the year. For novice urban teachers, learning to teach appropriate curriculum is often neglected in order to prepare children for high-stakes testing (Pardo, 2006). External institutional influences, including high-stakes testing, can result in narrowing a novice’s literacy events and practices (Flint et al., 2010). The intensity of test preparation and ensuing lack of curricular freedom led a novice teacher in Massey’s (2006) study to reach out to a university mentor, who was able to successfully model specific strategies that allowed the novice to become successful even within the limiting expectations of her school’s instructional context.

In addition to state-mandated testing, other school and state requirements also affected and challenged Stacey’s instruction and her ability to meet students’ individual needs. For example, Stacey was provided with district-adopted textbooks, which she often found did not meet the language or experiential needs of her students. Believing that students would benefit more from a hands-on inquiry approach to science, for example, she chose to limit her students’ use of the adopted science text in lieu of inquiry units and quality trade books. A more specific and far-reaching mandate related to bilingual education. The state in which she taught had prohibited the use of bilingual education in public schools in favor of a full immersion model. Within this mandate, public school teachers were not permitted to use languages other than English within instruction. Nonetheless, Stacey embraced and accepted her students’ native literacies, defied the ban by posting instructions in both English and Spanish (the classroom’s dominant language), and sought to find Spanish-language instructional resources for her students.

A more perplexing state mandate related to requirements that explicit phonics instruction be taught in all K-8 classrooms, and the consequential mismatch with Stacey’s own philosophy regarding a more balanced approach to literacy (the phonics mandate was later replaced by a “revised” state policy that required the use of evidence-based reading practices). In order to implement literature-based literacy programs, Bartlett (2001) suggests that teachers must learn to reconcile conflicting messages from politicians, administrators, and school colleagues. Kersten and Pardo (2007) describe a process of “hybridizing,” through which teachers combine the strengths of previous best practices with new impacts, such as district or state policy requirements, to create a novel and original pedagogy. In effect, teachers should take “snippets from multiple sources to teach the skills and strategies” (p. 152) needed by students in order to become successful readers and writers.

*Interruptions*  
A second area of concern that pervaded Stacey’s first year of teaching was coded as “school function interruptions.” Like school mandates, these interruptions were also situated externally. One of these interruptions relates to the deluge of paperwork that demands so much of a new teacher’s time. In a national study of novice teachers, Meister and Melnick (2003) found that a majority of participants were often overwhelmed by time constraints, and only 55% felt prepared for the amount of paperwork required by the job. Tait (2008) echoes this challenge, noting that many novices find day-to-day paperwork as time-consuming and difficult to manage.

From the beginning of the study, Stacey continuously remarked that she was surprised and frustrated by the unexpected workload. For example, Stacey recognized that outside obligations such as committee responsibilities interfered with her planning time after school:

This week was filled after school with committee meetings and classes. I volunteered for the pride committee, which is a district committee. I was kind of pressured into it, but I have had to collect nominations for outstanding teachers from the building. I was also at an auction meeting for the high school students. I had to collect items for a basket. Finally, I took a print shop class at another school for professional development. They sure are keeping me busy here! [Stacey, September 27]

Interruptions also occurred within the classroom itself:

Today was quite a day!... I suppose anything out of the routine can really upset the classroom. They [the students] were really excited about writing and even asked for extra time. However, I had several interruptions within an hour or so. Three staff members came in and the phone rang several times. This became very frustrating because I had to stop what I was doing each time. I was really glad for this day to end, so that we can start over tomorrow. [Stacey, August 17]

Ongoing interruptions included daily school functions, such as phone calls in the classroom during instructional hours, the paperwork that accompanies accountability such as grade reports, frequent “visits” by other teachers or students to request information or materials, and the prevalence of school-wide activities or assemblies in which Stacey believed she was

obligated to participate. The constant school interruptions were a continuous frustration and, instead of becoming more manageable, actually accelerated at the end of the year.

### Individual Needs

A third area of concern that pervaded Stacey's first school year was determining students' academic levels and responding to the individual needs of the children in her classroom. Throughout the school year, Stacey made several notes in her journal regarding her frustration that she did not have more time to work one-on-one with her students. She was also concerned with keeping her instruction at a pace appropriate for her students, noting that it often felt as if she was only reaching a small number of her students effectively. During the third grading quarter, a new child was added to Stacey's classroom that had profound learning disabilities. Stacey was frustrated with the amount of time taken to instruct this one child and, at the end of the year, was again frustrated when the school did not follow her recommendation and opted to socially promote this child due to the administrator's "no-retention" policy. The challenge of meeting individual needs was compounded by the limited English of many of Stacey's students and the transitory nature of these children and their families. Initially, Stacey was concerned by the range and ability of her students' English and Spanish literacy skills, and would often remark that she felt as if she were part of a multi-age classroom. Despite the dearth of instructional services for her students, however, Stacey was surprised by how rapidly her students were able to learn English, a second language for a majority of these children.

### Curriculum Planning

Some concerns emerged in the data related to curriculum and planning. For example, at the start of the school year Stacey had shared her frustration with the perceived lack of instructional direction provided by her district. The primary curricular concern, however, was related to a lack of resources. This was particularly problematic in terms of finding enough appropriate books for her students, specifically those written in Spanish, and having access to instructional technologies. It was not until the end of the year, when the students were involved with a comprehensive animal unit, that Internet sources were incorporated into the lessons. Even then, it was Stacey, and not the students, who generated the references due to the classroom's limited access to a computer.

Stacey also commented on frustrations with not having the time to prepare the kinds of instructional materials that she hoped would provide a broader variety of hands-on opportunities for her students. As Stacey reflected in her journal:

They [learning centers] are difficult to get set up. The problem is creating the independent activities for the children to work on. For example, folder games are good tools to use. As a first year teacher, however, these things are not yet prepared. I would like to have these things in my classroom, but the preparation required for these will have to wait until a later time. [Stacey, November 20]

### Assessment

Concerns related to testing and evaluation are prevalent in the literature when describing the challenges faced by novice teachers. For example, Wilson, Ireton, and Wood (1997) suggest that many novice teachers' fears of testing are a result of the increasing practice of using student test performance as a basis for evaluating teachers. Novices also note that concerns with grading are particularly keen when their own philosophies regarding student assessment were incongruent with school or district policies.

Throughout the school year, Stacey was plagued with issues related to the equitable grading of her students, particularly in literacy. Although teachers at Stacey's school were encouraged not to use the district's reading series, for example, Stacey was unsure how best to assess students' growth while meeting the school's mandate of recording five grades per semester for each subject area. Determining a system for assessment and evaluation in vocabulary and spelling was equally troublesome. Stacey often concluded each grading period by expressing her surprise at how quickly the time was passing, and what little information she had upon which to base her grades.

#### Enacting Instruction in a Novice's Classroom

A second study question focuses on the impact of teacher preparation on the enactment of actual literacy practices. As described previously, Stacey had completed a teacher preparation program that included four discrete courses that were specific to literacy. Theoretically, the literacy preparation courses were holistic in nature and focused on identifying needs of individual children in order to provide instruction that was both developmentally appropriate and reflective of student needs and interests. The use of whole, authentic texts was emphasized, as was the use of a variety of teaching strategies. Table 2 provides a summary of the most common elements of Stacey's classroom literacy instruction.

**Table 2:** Study Question 2: Impact of Teacher Preparation on Enactment of Literacy Instruction

Teacher Preparation: Common Elements of Stacey's Lit. Courses	Enactment of Instruction: Observed Classroom Instruction
Model and demonstrate instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Whole-group guided reading/enlarged texts</li> <li>➤ Shared writing</li> <li>➤ Word Wall activities</li> </ul>
Provide students with guided practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Guided reading used as part of regular literacy instruction</li> </ul>
Provide students with independent practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Silent reading "block"</li> <li>➤ Learning centers</li> <li>➤ Independent journaling</li> </ul>
Build on student interest and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Materials/directions provided in native language</li> <li>➤ Self-selection for author studies/book clubs</li> <li>➤ Choice of topics and final products provided through interdisciplinary units</li> </ul>
Incorporate authentic literacy practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Literacy instruction focused on authentic texts</li> <li>➤ Use of author studies and topical book clubs</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Journaling on self-selected topics</li> <li>➤ Group research for interdisciplinary units</li> </ul>
Provide access to a variety of print materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Permanent classroom library</li> <li>➤ “Book tubs” with range of genre/levels</li> <li>➤ Texts selected for each content unit</li> <li>➤ Multiple resources used for content research</li> </ul>
Vary activities and teaching strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Whole/small groups; independent practice</li> <li>➤ Flexible grouping based on interest, ability</li> <li>➤ Incorporation of “Four Blocks”</li> <li>➤ Writing conferences</li> <li>➤ Hands-on inquiry</li> <li>➤ Learning Centers</li> </ul>
Provide time for review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review included in paired readings</li> <li>➤ Word review part of Word Wall activities</li> <li>➤ Morning meetings</li> </ul>
Create multi-disciplinary experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Themed cross-disciplinary units included world travel and animals</li> </ul>
Match students with text at level of difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Author studies included texts at varied levels</li> <li>➤ Students grouped by instructional level</li> </ul>

The majority of my classroom visits were planned during Stacey’s literacy instruction, which encompassed most of the morning’s schedule. Through these observations, it became evident early in the school year that one of Stacey’s primary instructional concerns was determining how to individualize her instruction in order to match the learning needs of her students. This concern was perhaps most keenly felt in her literacy instruction. Throughout the year, Stacey tried a variety of grouping and instructional formats in attempt to provide students with appropriate instruction at their level of need. Her instruction also reflected much of the preparation she had received in college, and underlined her principal’s commitment to literature-centered approaches to instruction.

Stacey’s primary literacy instruction also included an evolving repertoire of small group literature events. For example, during the first quarter she implemented a Tomie dePaola author study. During one related classroom observation, Stacey shared an enlarged version of the story *Strega Nona* (dePaola, 1975) with her students, and then paired the children to reread the book. She had also gathered multiple copies of a variety of additional titles by this author, which children self-selected to read in small groups or book clubs. Stacey noted that book clubs based around common themes or genres provided students with the opportunity to read close to their instructional level, while giving all students literacy experiences around the same topic.

Stacey also implemented a number of holistic writing practices, including the students’ use of journals for initial drafts. She also implemented shared writing sessions, where she modeled her own writing to emphasize particular genre or language conventions. In addition, Stacey implemented literacy experiences that effectively combined layered elements of language. For example, as early as October her students were engaged in adventure study groups that were responsible for “traveling” around the globe to a select location. Through these simulations, the groups were responsible for a budget

that included housing, food, and purchasing souvenirs while carefully researching each stop on their imaginary journey. At the end of the year, Stacey’s students were engaged in a unit that involved the children in investigating a self-selected animal. A range of resources was used, including magazines, texts, and summaries that Stacey downloaded from the Internet. Final products included a written report, artistic representations, and creative writing that ranged from fictionalized stories to poetry. The information garnered from these reports was also used effectively in integrating math through charting and the creation of story problems. Students exhibited a great deal of ownership over this project, and were very eager to share their newfound expertise with others. Overall, it was evident to the observer that Stacey implemented a variety of instructional practices throughout the school year that clearly reflected the philosophies and methodologies consistent with her undergraduate teacher preparation program.

### Discussion

The first question guiding this study focuses on the “stages” faced by novice teachers. While the literature is replete with various examples regarding the expected developmental stages encountered by novices, this simply was not found in the present study. Stacey did have challenges related to management, curricular planning, and student needs, but these were not manifested or resolved sequentially. During her first week in the classroom, Stacey equally expressed concerns with establishing management routines in her classroom, finding resources that met the instructional needs of her second language learners, and planning curriculum that was both instructive and motivating. As the school year progressed, she gained skill and confidence in each of these areas simultaneously. While some novices might progress through a sequential set of challenges and solutions, this perspective oversimplifies the complexities of learning to teach within the reality of today’s classroom context.

Also guiding the inquiry of this study is determining what impacts, if any, teacher preparation programs have on the enactment of a novice teacher’s literacy practices. One of the fears held by many teacher preparation units is that “typical” university preservice training will not transfer to actual classroom practice. This speculation is in part a result of the enormous pressure put on novice teachers to conform to the philosophy and practices in the school to which they are first assigned. A philosophical mismatch between higher education and PreK-12 schools is often anecdotally noted as the reason why many novice teachers abandon their training once in the classroom on their own. As noted by Flint and her colleagues (2010), while much of what is learned in teacher preparation by some novice teachers is evident in their enacted instruction, for others “this knowledge is overshadowed by district mandates and the dominant discourses in their current environment” (pg. 14).

When the philosophies of the teacher education program and a novice teacher’s workplace align, however, the experience can be very positive. In a study of a first-year science teacher, Sillman and her colleagues found that this novice believed his success was in part due to the consistency between his philosophy of teaching and learning and that of his school (Sillman, Dana, and

Miller, 2000). Within this teaching context, the principal had created an intellectually safe learning environment where the administration and faculty put their shared philosophies into practice.

Because I had served as an administrator in the teacher education program in which Stacey had been enrolled, I had a deep understanding of the experiences and methods to which Stacey had been exposed. Within my journal, I consistently noted that Stacey attempted to use these practices in her own instructional experiences. At least in this case study, the novice teacher's preparation program had a clear and profound impact on the instructional decisions that were made. One reason for this congruency could be the philosophical match between the teacher education program and Stacey's school administrator. It could also be suggested that Stacey's varied field experiences while in her preparation program contributed to the confidence observed once in her own classroom.

Although it could be argued that some teacher preparation programs of the past may have been too grounded in theory and not focused enough on candidate performance in the classroom, this scenario is becoming increasingly rare. As is becoming more evident nation-wide, teacher preparation units are refining programs in close collaboration with professional development sites, aligning programs and courses to professional standards, and demanding a rich array of field experiences prior to the student teaching semester. Practitioners are also becoming more involved with not only the design of new programs, but also in the instruction of methods courses. Additionally, preservice teachers are afforded the opportunity to work within diverse communities and classrooms to observe master teachers implement appropriate and responsive instruction.

The teacher preparation program in which Stacey participated was grounded in professional standards and had the advantage of expertise from a highly collaborative PDS consortium. Stacey learned of the realities of practice at six diverse field experience sites, including urban districts, and from master teachers who led seminars and team-taught her courses. Perhaps even more significant to her success, however, was the support structure that Stacey was able to rely on during her first full year in the classroom. It was evident that there was a philosophical match between Stacey, her teacher preparation program, the school administrator, and a majority of teachers at her school.

### **Limitations**

It should be noted that the reported study does have limitations in regards to researcher bias and generalizability. Because I had previously known Stacey as a student in the teacher education program where I was also the administrator, my access to knowledge about this participant vastly differs from that of other researchers. It could be suggested that my own experiences and expectations for this individual might have affected my observations. In acknowledging the potential for bias, it was my attempt to focus my field notes on what was being observed and on careful narrative descriptions.

Because this case study follows only one individual novice teacher, it could also be suggested that the findings have limited generalizability to other contexts or cases. However, because this individual was "typical" as compared

to many traditional baccalaureate students, it is anticipated that the findings will be reflective of the experiences of many new teachers in classrooms today. It is also hoped that the reported inquiry will inform the current literature on effective teacher preparation, and encourage others to continue the inquiry into the realities faced by a novice's first year in the classroom so that our own practices as teacher educators can be improved.

### **Conclusion**

What can we as teacher educators learn from Stacey's experiences? In the preface to this study, the question was posed whether teacher education mattered in the preparation of teachers. If teacher preparation is to continue to evolve to meet the needs of today's students and tomorrow's teachers, it must also be willing to listen carefully to the unique wisdom offered by our novices. It can be suggested that one of the lessons to be learned by this particular novice is that a teacher's first years have the potential for being more successful when the experiences within the school's context are philosophically matched with those of the teacher preparation program. This was clearly the case with Stacey. Both her teacher preparation program and the school in which she taught shared very common philosophies regarding holistic and child-centered practices, particularly as they related to literacy instruction. Stacey was taught to adapt instruction to meet students' needs and to use a variety of approaches to achieve this goal. Luckily for Stacey, her principal also expected this adaptability.

Realistically, how can teacher preparation units adequately prepare future teachers for the myriad possibilities for educational philosophies? Perhaps teacher education units need to become more holistic themselves, and provide future teachers with exposure to and experiences with a variety of philosophies and approaches. From this variety, future teachers can be empowered to embrace those that are the best match for their own talents and abilities.

Another recommendation that can be drawn from this case study relates to the critical nature of field experiences. Teacher preparation programs need to ensure that each field experience extends over a long enough period of time in order to provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to observe and learn from experienced teachers as they form relationships with students and resolve conflicts. As expressed by Meister (2000), prospective teachers need authentic experiences in classrooms where the "messy uncertainty of teaching is evident" (p. 9). Although Stacey did not share the culture, native language, or heritage of her students, she did have the opportunity to practice teaching in a variety of selected settings during her preparation program. When she assumed her first classroom position, therefore, she was already prepared to support the instructional needs of students even though their personal life stories were vastly different. Selected, guided, and diverse field experiences can be considered one of the most critical components of an effective teacher preparation program.

An additional consideration that can be drawn from this study relates to broader issues of policy and politics. Those things that challenged Stacey the most—including interruptions and policy mandates—were externally situated.

These were not challenges that Stacey created due to her inexperience, nor did her students manifest them. Instead, they existed in large part outside of the classroom and Stacey's instructional control. In their study of two novice literacy teachers, Deal and White (2006) suggest that "non-instructional factors as time, paperwork, and political agendas were unwelcome but constant aspects of literacy learning and teaching" (p. 326). While teacher education programs often provide experiences related to expected challenges including classroom management and lesson planning, which are internally situated, little is done to prepare new teachers for external realities related to policy. Mismatches between various aspects of a new teacher's experiences, including conflicts between his/her own beliefs and external policy mandates, can create tensions for the novice teacher (Pardo, 2006). An understanding of how these tensions affect novices can inform teacher educators in the design of quality preparation programs.

Stacey's case study is one that dispels many myths about teacher education and the expected outcomes of the first year of teaching. Overall, Stacey's first year was remarkable in that the lives of each child were at some point touched and enriched. Stacey herself took what she learned at the university and enhanced her own professional development based on positive, supported experiences. At a time when criticism of teacher education is reinforced through a public debate often devoid of actual evidence, it is important to remind ourselves that teacher education can—and does—make a profound difference in the preparation of successful novices.

### References

- Bartlett, A. (2001). "Call it courage": A first-year teacher learns to teach reading with children's literature. *Journal of Reading Education, 26*(2), 9-13.
- Bergeron, B. S. (2008). Enacting a culturally responsive curriculum in a novice teacher's classroom: Encountering disequilibrium. *Urban Education, 43*(1), 4-28.
- Carter, K. (1993). The place of story in the study of teaching and teacher education. *Educational Researcher, 22*(1), 5-12, 18.
- Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark, V. L. P., and Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*, 236-264.
- Danforth, S. (2006). From epistemology to democracy: Pragmatism and the reorientation of disability research. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*, 337-345.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (Ed.). (2000). *Studies of excellence in teacher education: Preparation in the undergraduate years*. Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Deal, D., and White, C. S. (2006). Voices from the classroom: Literacy beliefs and practices of two novice elementary teachers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 20*(4), 313-329.
- dePaola, T. (1975) *Strega Nona*. Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Dillon, D. R., O'Brien, D. G., and Heilman, E. E. (2000). Literacy research in the next millennium: From paradigms to pragmatism and practicality. *Reading Research Quarterly, 35*, 10-26.
- Dyson, A. H., and Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case: Approaches to language and literacy research*. New York: Teachers College.
- Flint, A. S., Maloch, B., and Leland, C. (2010). Three years in the making: A cross-case analysis of three beginning teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. *Journal of Reading Education, 35*(2), 14-21.
- Glaser, B. G., and Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Good, T. L., McCaslin, M. Tsang, H. Y., Zhang, J. Wiley, C. R. H., Bozack, A. R., and Hester, W. (2006). How well do 1<sup>st</sup>-year teachers teach: Does type of preparation make a difference? *Journal of Teacher Education, 57*, 410-430.
- Hoffman, J. V., Roller, C., Maloch, B., Sailors, M., Duffy, G., and Beretvas, S. N. (2005). Teachers' preparation to teach reading and their experiences and practices in the first three years of teaching. *The Elementary School Journal, 105*, 267-287.
- International Reading Association. (2003). *An Executive Summary of the National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction*. Newark, DE: IRA.
- Kersten, J., and Pardo, L. (2007). Finessing and hybridizing: Innovative literacy practices in Reading First classrooms. *The Reading Teacher, 61*, 146-154.
- Lee, S. L., and Zuercher, N. T. (1993). Promoting reflection through dialogue journals. In L. Patterson, C. M. Santa, K. G. Short, and K. Smith (Eds.), *Teachers are researchers: Reflection and action* (pp. 183-196). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Levine, A. (2006). *Educating school teachers*. Washington, DC: The Education Schools Project.
- Liston, D., Whitcomb, J., and Borko, H. (2006). Too little or too much: Teacher preparation and the first years of teaching (Editorial). *Journal of Teacher Education, 57*, 351-358.
- Martin, L. A., Chiodo, J. J., and Chang, L. (2001). First year teachers: Looking back after three years. *Action in Teacher Education, 23*(1), 55-63.
- Massey, D. D. (2006). "You teach for me; I've had it!" A first-year teacher's cry for help. *Action in Teacher Education, 28*(3), 73-85.
- Meister, D. G. (2000). Making the transition from preservice to inservice teaching: Beginning teachers' reflections. *Action in Teacher Education, 22*(3), 1-11.
- Meister, D. G., and Melnick, S. A. (2003). National new teacher study: Beginning teachers' concerns. *Action in Teacher Education, 24*(4), 87-93.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Murphy, J. C. (2005). The struggles and triumphs of a novice teacher. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 41*(4), 180-183.

- National Council on Teacher Quality. (2010). *Ed School essentials: A review of Illinois teacher preparation*. Accessed 1/17/11 at <http://www.nctq.org/edschoolreports/illinois/illinoisReport.jsp>.
- Ness, M. (2000). A first-year teacher tells it all. *The Education Digest*, 66(2), 8-12.
- Pardo, L. (2006). The role of context in learning to teach writing: What teacher educators need to know to support beginning urban teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57, 378-394.
- Pimentel, S. (2007). *Teaching reading well: A synthesis of the International Reading Association's research on teacher preparation for reading instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Risko, V. J, Roller, C. M., Cummins, C., Bean, R. M., Block, C. C., Anders, P. L., and Flood, J. (2008). A critical analysis of research on reading teacher education. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(3), 252-288.
- Sillman, K., Dana, T., and Miller, M. (2000). The first year of teaching science: Ready or not? *Action in Teacher Education*, 22(3), 56-63.
- Stronge, J. H. (2002). *Qualities of effective teachers*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Tait, M. (2008). Resilience as a contributor to novice teacher success, commitment, and retention. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(4), 57-75.
- Teddlie, C., and Reynolds, D. (2001). Countering the critics: Responses to recent criticisms of school effectiveness research. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 12, 41-82.
- Wilson, B., Ireton, E. J., and Wood, J. A. (1997). Beginning teacher fears. *Education*, 117, 396-400.
- Zeichner, K. M. and Conklin, H. G. (2005). Teacher education programs. In M. Cochran-Smith and K. M. Zeichner (Eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education* (pp. 645-735). Washington, DC: AERA.

## THE PRINCIPALS' DILEMMA: IS TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS ALL ABOUT TEST SCORES?

by  
Cathy R. Jones, Nancy J. Ratcliff, Emma Savage-Davis,  
and Gilbert H. Hunt

CATHY R. JONES, NANCY J. RATCLIFF, EMMA SAVAGE-DAVIS, AND  
GILBERT H. HUNT are on faculty at Coastal Carolina University, Conway, SC.

### Abstract

*Principals in low performing school districts are in very stressful situations as it relates to school improvement. Are principals of schools classified as low performing influenced primarily by their desire to employ teachers who can create a classroom climate that promotes high student performance on standardized tests? In this study, ten principals of elementary and intermediate schools in a southeastern school district designated as low performing under No Child Left Behind were interviewed to ascertain the criteria they use to measure teacher effectiveness. The results of this research highlight the importance of looking beyond student test scores to identify the essential characteristics of effective teachers.*

Outside factors during this era of accountability exert powerful pressures on teachers because school districts are evaluated on the degree to which all students demonstrate mastery of both district and state standards. Many school administrators are functioning under the added stress that comes when their schools fail to obtain expected levels of student achievement resulting in those schools being classified as low performing. Often the assessment of teacher effectiveness, in this age of high accountability, is linked primarily to student performance on standardized achievement tests. Since it is typically the job of the school principal to evaluate teachers in the public school arena, it is important to determine if principals of low performing schools use product evaluation based on student achievement test scores as the primary measure of teacher effectiveness (Kresyman, 2010). The purpose of this study is to explore this important question.

There is general consensus among educators that the essence of education is teaching and that teachers themselves are, perhaps, the most significant influence on student performance. Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, and Keeling (2009) found that a student assigned to an effective teacher for a single school year may gain up to a full year's worth of additional academic growth compared to a student assigned to a very poor teacher. One could infer from this line of reasoning that when the quality of teaching improves, the quality of student performance would be expected to increase. A number of studies have been conducted to investigate the qualities of effective teachers. From these studies, three specific categories emerged: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content pedagogical knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Shields et al, 2001; Shulman, 1986; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Content knowledge is defined as subject knowledge while pedagogical knowledge is defined as the art of teaching (Mitchell, Allen, & Ehrenburg, 2006). Shulman (1986) proposed that the two cannot really be separated but suggested instead the term pedagogical content knowledge should be used to

describe the way in which subject matter is represented and formulated to make it comprehensible to others.

Teachers have high expectations placed on them from a variety of sources both within and outside of the formal school system. The ability to realize success related to these expectations is impacted by factors that include, but are not limited to, school size, class size, school resources, socioeconomic status of the students, geographical location of the school, and family involvement in student learning (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Flowers & Hancock, 2003; Kelly 2004). Educators, for example Marzano (2000), have encouraged parents to have high expectations that teachers will provide a learning environment where their children can develop academically, emotionally, socially, and physically while enjoying the school experience.

### Judging Teacher Effectiveness

The evaluation of teachers has been viewed as essential to the development of quality learning environments. In the 1980's, the National Commission for Educational Excellence (NCEE) produced *A Nation at Risk* for President Reagan which was very critical of public school education (NCEE, 1983). The National Commission for Educational Excellence purported that, instead of rewarding teachers financially for the number of years they have been working or the degrees held, teacher raises should be directly linked to assessments of teacher excellence.

This position immediately generated a great deal of attention on principals' ability to adequately assess teacher excellence. Medley and Coker (1987) found that positive, but relatively small, correlations existed between principals' evaluations of teachers and student academic performance. However, more current research (Bolino & Turnly, 2003; Varma & Stroh, 2001) suggested that principal evaluations were frequently influenced by non-performance factors such as whether principals liked the teachers on a personal level or perceived the teachers to be similar to the principals themselves. Additionally, Jacob and Lefgren (2006) reported a consistent finding in the research that non-performance factors such as age, gender, and likeability influence principal evaluations. In this important study, the authors went on to point out that, although principals' evaluations tend to discriminate against males and untenured teachers, principal evaluations of teaching performance are good predictors of future student academic achievement. Principals' ratings, the researchers reported, are useful for identifying the *best* and *worst* teachers when predicting their students' academic success. These findings held true whether or not the principals were asked to give an overall rating of the teachers or to focus the rating on the teachers' abilities to increase student achievement. However, it should be noted that the researchers found that principals were unable to distinguish abilities of that broad range of teachers who fell between *best* and *worst*.

Although some literature has suggested (Copland, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1986; Sullivan, Mousely, & Gervasoni, 2000) that principals' subjectivity cannot be ignored even when detailed evaluation tools are utilized, there is also a body of literature that deems principals are appropriate judges of teacher quality for a variety of reasons which include the fact that principals

have the opportunity to review teachers' lesson plans and observe how plans are implemented, to access to test scores, and to interact with other professionals who work with these teachers. Additionally, principals are thought to have the background, skills and knowledge for evaluation plus experience as classroom teachers themselves (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; and Nagy & Moorhead, 1990).

### Context of the Study

The concept for this study evolved from questions that arose as the data were analyzed from a larger, yearlong observational study in a school district that had been designated as a low performing school system under *No Child Left Behind* (Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, Sheehan & Hunt, in press; Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt, in press). The larger yearlong study included 34 classrooms, 17 of which were second grade and 17 of which were fourth grade. For the yearlong study, principals were asked to identify *strong* and *needs improvement* teachers in both the second and fourth grade. Principals were given minimal criteria of three years teaching experience and the designation of highly qualified under *No Child Left Behind* to make the determination of which teachers were chosen and how each was designated.

For the study being reported here, the researchers sought to answer the question: Are principals of schools classified as low performing influenced primarily by their desire to employ teachers who can create a classroom climate that promotes high student performance on standardized tests? In other words, were the factors influencing the principals' decisions about teacher quality (i.e., was a given teacher *strong* or *need improvement*) primarily based on student outcomes? Since no established rubric was given to the principals by the researchers or the district personnel, what criteria had the principals used when choosing the teachers for the study? How had the criteria been applied? To answer these questions, the principals were interviewed individually and asked what they believed constituted the characteristics of effective teachers and in doing so they highlighted the differences they perceived between strong teachers and teachers who needed improvement.

Most of the ten principals were seasoned administrators; all had been in the field of education for more than ten years. These principals formed the entire population of elementary school principals in the school district under study. Eight of the principals were in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade schools, one was in a pre-kindergarten through second grade school, and one was in a fourth through sixth grade school. Of the ten principals interviewed, five were female, all of whom were African American, and five were male, two of whom were African American and three of whom were Caucasian.

The data in this study were collected by a single researcher using structured telephone interviews to answer the research question for this study: what factors did principals consider when determining teacher effectiveness? After the classroom climate data had been collected and analyzed, the principals were contacted and interview appointments were made. Interviews, which lasted between 20 to 30 minutes each, were conducted over the phone, digitally audio recorded, and transcribed by the researcher. Each principal was asked to answer questions about the process he or she had used to designate

teachers as *strong* or *needs improvement* for inclusion in the year-long study. The following questions were asked to answer the research question.

1. What do you consider to be excellence in teaching?
2. As you considered the teachers that would be included in the study, what were your primary considerations for designating some teachers as *strong* and others as *needs improvement*?
3. Do you have an opinion about why those teachers have become the kind of teachers they are? Are good teachers born or made?
4. Did you use any specific criteria when categorizing the teachers?
5. Were non-instructional factors considered? If so, could you elaborate?
6. Was one criterion more important than another?
7. In your school, is any consideration given to which students are placed in which teacher's room based on criteria such as the ones we have discussed?

### Interview Results

After the transcription process was complete, the researcher analyzed the interviews looking for common threads and outliers in the data. The principals were asked to be candid in their responses and were guaranteed anonymity while assuring that no one statement would be attributed to any specific principal without his or her written permission. Three themes emerged from the research. They were as follows:

- the characteristics of effective teachers,
- the relationship between disposition and skill, and
- the implications for principals in the support of teacher effectiveness to achieve student success.

### The Characteristics of Effective Teachers

These principals phrased their comments around key ideas related to the characteristics of strong, effective teachers. The key ideas were 1) the teachers' ability to view effective teaching as more than academics, 2) the teachers' preparedness, experience, and knowledge, and 3) the teachers' rapport with families. Principals conceptualized the strong teacher by a variety of descriptors: *passionate*, *caring*, *knowledgeable*, *prepared*, and *able to teach the whole child*. One principal stated that teachers need to reach the entire child. She elaborated, "[The teacher must] be able to understand that some parents just aren't going to do [anything to get involved] and some parents just are doing all that they can when they are doing what they are." Several of the principals used the words *whole* or *entire child* as an important part of teaching. Significantly, the idea of teaching academics only was never present in any of the interview responses. This was an interesting finding in light of the stress being placed on using academic test scores to assess quality teaching at both the national and state levels through legislation such as *No Child Left Behind*. The principals emphasized compassion and a love for children, as well as the idea that teachers should be team players and prepared.

Strong teachers were described by the principals as those teachers who were knowledgeable and had a love for the art of teaching. These teachers

were depicted as being innovative and creative. The *strong teacher*, according to one principal, "holds the child's attention and allows them to sparkle." Personal academic achievement was characterized as important to strong teachers. According to these principals, *strong teachers* used a variety of strategies, were in tune with best practices and were committed to what they did as they delivered instruction so that the students consistently had higher test scores when they left their classroom. *Strong teachers*, the principals reported, often went the extra step to get additional credentials such as national board certification. Family connections were also a consideration for principals as they differentiated between *strong* and *needs improvement* teachers. *Strong teachers* were seen as having an excellent rapport with families, understanding the needs of young children within the context of their families, and working to establish a relationship with their students' families.

On the other hand, the *needs improvement* teachers were not deemed to be in tune with best practices. Traditionally these teachers had students with lower test scores, according to the principals who were interviewed. "There is not connectivity there, no energy in the classroom and the kids are just there simply sifting." As opposed to *strong teachers*, the principals expressed a concern that too frequently *needs improvement* teachers had students who entered their classrooms doing well academically, but the students too often failed to make adequate academic progress during the school year. Therefore, it should be noted that academic performance was not referred to when principals discussed strong teachers, but low test scores were stressed when principals discussed teachers who needed to improve.

Experience was seen as a mixed influence for *strong* and *needs improvement* teachers. Principals described some of the *needs improvement* teachers as "young and still learning a lot." Teachers were categorized both positively and negatively based on the number of years they had taught, but the defining number of years varied; some chose more than 20 years and less than 20 years while others used ten years of service as the deciding factor. The principals also discussed the fear that less experienced teachers might be influenced by teachers that were not positive role models for excellence. One principal expressed, "She is a young teacher. I [hope] that she doesn't get confused with traditional teaching and today's true teaching where you differentiate instruction, where you engage in small groups, where you use a variety of instructional strategies to... address all learners." The principals voiced concerns that sometimes veteran teachers "get stuck" in practices that are not in tune with today's students. These veteran teachers, as described by the principals, continued to use strategies for teaching that may have worked many years ago but fail to take into account the changing demographics of families, technological and media influences on children, and different societal attitudes toward teaching from when these veteran teachers began their careers. Throughout their careers, the principals acknowledged that teaching has evolved into a more stressful occupation.

While standardized test scores were not the only criteria for selecting teacher participants in the larger study, principals did consider the results of a variety of standardized tests to measure student success. These measures were couched within a larger issue of overall student success. Principals also

considered the teacher's history of student progress and whether the teacher offered a productive environment in the classroom. *Strong teachers*, in their opinions, had an excellent grasp on state standards, methodology, and assessment while maintaining a positive rapport with students and families. *Needs improvement* teachers were seen as typically having weaker tests scores, less positive family interaction, and more frequent and significant classroom management issues.

The principals shared that they do not rely heavily on formal teacher evaluations when assessing the strengths and weaknesses of faculty. More frequently, principals relied on informal evaluation processes that were often validated by other professionals, typically in the same building, who work with those same teachers. Principals noted that they did track the progress of students who had been assigned to these teachers and used those students' success in subsequent years as a barometer of the teacher's effectiveness.

When asked if one criterion was more important than another in assessing teacher competency, the principals almost unanimously reported that, in today's public school culture, little credence is given by the media, society, and the federal government to factors other than test scores. As a follow up question, the principals were asked to give their opinion of prioritizing test scores as the main measure of teacher quality. "Sadly, I think more times we are judged on the outcomes of test scores as opposed to relationships teachers have with students," one principal lamented. "Sometimes we have teachers that have excellent rapport with students but the outcomes of the test don't show that side of it. Whereas we have teachers that are actually disconnected from their students, but their students perform well on tests. It is very frustrating."

### **The Relationship of Disposition and Skill**

The researcher then asked, "So are good teachers made or born?" All ten principals reported that they believe good teachers are both made and born. One principal commented, "I think there has to be a combination of both of those. I think that training has to go on and on and on, but if you really want to be a teacher, it's already in there." Principals acknowledged that teachers must possess the content and pedagogical knowledge necessary to teach; however, it was obvious that they believed a passionate disposition for teaching was essential. "I think it is a combination, but I think what actually makes them a stellar teacher or an excellent teacher is their relationship with the students. We have teachers who bring their all, every single day no matter what is going on in their personal lives. What separates them from being a good or bad teacher is simply the effort they put into teaching." Another principal characterized strong teachers as having the "intrinsic motivator" to want all of your students to succeed. Teaching was referred to as an art, a calling, and a passion. "It should not just be a job," claimed one principal. "It has to be in you."

### **Implications for Principals in the Support of Teacher Effectiveness**

To this end, the question was asked of the principals how they used their knowledge about what makes effective teachers. Nine of the ten agreed that they did use this information especially when placing students and deciding

which grade levels teacher should teach. The tenth principal had no choice; he only had one teacher per grade level most years. Most of the principals sought a balance of racial, ability, and gender diversity in the classrooms. Few of the principals considered parent requests for specific placements when assigning students to specific classrooms. Often, the decisions were not made by the principal alone but through consultation with the teachers themselves, other teachers in the building, and/or other professionals who were involved in the academic and support services in the school.

The principals were adamant that they tried very hard not to let a student have two *needs improvement* teachers in a row. One principal remarked, "The research I have looked at in the past has said that one year with a subpar teacher doesn't really hurt a student, but to have consecutive years when you have a subpar teacher will affect that student and have a long term effect. I am very careful. I know who my stronger teachers are and I know who my subpar teachers are. I am already very carefully placing students to make sure those gaps are filled in. You know it is sad that we have that, but it is the reality of our education system. I just try my best to minimize the damage that is done."

The principals' attitudes were somewhat resigned to the realities of their roles. "I try to fit personalities as well as the academic needs or wants." "I try really hard to give the kid the best chance at being successful and then growing academically." "My job is not just for the students. I am the instructional leader and my job is to coach these teachers. I am here for them as well." Principals conveyed an attitude of trying to meet the needs of all entities yet sometimes failing to accomplish that goal. Special consideration was given to students with emotional, social, academic or other special needs.

The principals in the study recognized that teachers, whether *strong* or *needs improvement*, need continued support to achieve and maintain effectiveness. Teachers who were not as effective as they could be were often placed in teams with stronger, more effective teachers who could model effective strategies and serve as mentors. Principals had also found that teachers who are not as effective at a particular grade level might be more effective at another grade level. Seldom, but occasionally, these principals had counseled teachers who were not effective to seek other careers.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Principals affect the lives of many students, yet their voices and viewpoints are not always heard in the pressure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) along with daily responsibilities of carrying out their professional duties. These interviews represent a more detailed look at teacher effectiveness from their points of view through the eyes of these ten principals. Therefore, the following discussion and implications should be viewed in this context especially in the Southeastern United States.

The principals' characterization of *strong*, effective teachers and *needs improvement* teachers gave insight into what skills, knowledge, and dispositions they valued and clarified what these principals felt were important characteristics of an effective learning environment. Clearly, the principals believed the following three characteristics of those teachers designated as

strong are essential for student success: 1) to view effective teaching as more than academics, 2) to be prepared and have knowledge of the content, and 3) to develop rapport with families. Although principals emphasized that strong teachers must possess content and pedagogical knowledge, they stressed that strong teachers must also have a passion for teaching. Principals used this information for placing students with teachers and teachers at specific grade levels. Thus, the principals interviewed defined effective teachers as teachers who have content pedagogical knowledge and are passionate, knowledgeable, caring, and able to address the needs of the whole child. Implications for this research are useful to professionals at all levels of the education system.

Educators responsible for the employment process of teachers from application and hiring phases to the mentoring and evaluation phases could learn from what these principals had to say. First year or beginning teachers should aspire to embody these characteristics to obtain and retain a teaching position and become effective teachers. Principals and others who interview potential teachers could benefit from building their hiring process from the criteria highlighted in this study. From their separate interviews, the principals were unified in the criteria they valued in effective teaching as it impacts the education of all children. This information could guide the development and implementation of a mentoring process to help new teachers work toward developing their teaching effectiveness. Obviously, teacher educators can use this information to better prepare and acculturate teacher candidates in order to help them adjust to the teaching and learning environments commonly found in the public school arena.

Even though the principals in this study were cohesive in their opinion that strong teachers have an attitude and personality that enhances and perhaps predisposes them to be good teachers, they were also adamant that *strong teachers* can become stronger and *needs improvement* teachers can improve with meaningful interventions and support. Based on the previously discussed findings, the following recommendations are appropriate.

1. Those responsible for personnel oversight must be aware of what the teacher does on a daily basis including student teacher interaction, family teacher interaction, co-worker interaction, and teacher-supervisor interaction.
2. Principals should consider the strengths and challenges of teachers when placing the teachers in teaching teams and with particular groups of children. Teachers must understand their role as pivotal to student success and seek the resources and support to reinforce their pedagogical content knowledge.
3. Professional development is critical, but it must be delivered in a variety of ways that are based on the needs of the teachers. This means “one size fits all” professional development is less likely to provide sustainable influence to improve teaching than professional development that utilizes data from a variety of sources and is tailored to individual or small groups of teachers.
4. Implications exist for colleges of education as well. Educational leadership programs should have as a goal strengthening the skills and knowledge of principals in evaluating and supporting teachers. The skill

set necessary to help teachers reach their full potential as effective managers of teaching/learning environments is one of the most important skill sets that public school principals can master. Also, as principals develop these skills, they will be better able to help teachers gain access to meaningful and sustained professional development while supporting their teachers’ professional growth. Additionally, teacher educators should use this information to better understand the role of the principal in supporting teacher effectiveness. An understanding of what principals are looking for as they build an effective faculty is important information for teacher candidates and novice teachers alike as they become acculturated into the profession.

### Summary

Principals in this study were clear in their opinions about what characterizes effective teachers and their beliefs about the relationship between innate dispositions and learned skills and knowledge. The principals were more varied in how they used that knowledge. This study has allowed the researchers to gain insight into the original question: *Are principals of schools classified as low performing influenced primarily by their desire to employ teachers who can create a classroom climate that promotes high student performance on standardized tests?* Test scores of children were not viewed as an adequate measure of teacher effectiveness, but these scores were seen as one important facet of the measure. As research continues, principals should be an integral part of both the questions and the answers. It is hoped that this research adds to the knowledge base that helps promote a better understanding of the impact of school and school district ratings on the ratings of teachers who teach in those schools and districts.

### References

- Bolina, M.C., & Turnly, W.H. (2003). Counternormative impression management, likeability, and performance ratings: the use of intimidation in organizational settings. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 24(2), 237-250.
- Copland, M.A. (2001). The Myth of the Superprincipal. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 82. 528-533.
- Danielson, C. & McGreal, T.L. (2000). *Teacher Evaluation to enhance professional practice*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1986). A proposal for evaluation in the teaching profession. *Elementary School Journal*. 86. 531-551.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). *Solving the dilemmas of teacher, supply, demand, and quality*. New York: National Commission on Teaching and American’s Future.
- Darling-Hammond, L. & Synder, J. (2000). Authentic assessment in teaching in context. *Teaching and Teacher Evaluation*, 16, 523-545.
- Flowers, C. & Hancock, D. (2003). An interview protocol and scoring rubric for evaluating teacher performance. *Assessment in Education: Principals, Policy, & Practice*, 10, 161-168.



- Jacob, B., & Lefgren, L. (2006). When principals rate teachers. *Education Next*. Spring.
- Kelly, S. (2004). Are teachers tracked? On what basis and with what consequences. *Social Psychology of Education*, 55-72.
- Kresyman, S. (2010). Principal stress: Working in conflicting paradigms from Newtonian to new science. *UNLV Theses/Dissertations/Professional Papers/Capstones*. Paper 316.  
<http://digitalcommons.library.unlv.edu/thesesdissertations/316>.
- Marzano, R. J. (2000). *A new era of school reform: Going where the research takes us*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Medley, D.M. & Coker, H. (1987). The accuracy of principals' judgments of teacher performance. *Journal of Educational Research*, 80 (4), 242-247.
- Mitchell, A., Allen, S., & Ehrenburg, P. (2006). *Spotlight on Schools of Education: Institutional Responses to NCATE Standards 1 and 2*. Washington, DC: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.
- Nagy, P., & Moorhead, R. (1990). Administrative response to classroom testing data: A problem-solving perspective. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 36, 18-24.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE). (1983). *A nation at risk: The importance of educational reform*. [www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html).
- Peel, S., & Inkson, K. (1993). High school principals' attitudes to performance evaluation: Professional development or accountability. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 28, 125-141.
- Ratcliff, N., Jones, C., Costner, R., Savage-Davis, E., & Hunt, G. (in press). The elephant in the classroom: The impact of misbehavior on classroom climate. *Education*.
- Ratcliff, N., Jones, C., Costner, R., Savage-Davis, E., Sheehan, H., & Hunt, G. (in press). Teacher classroom management behaviors and student time-on-task: Implications for teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education*.
- Shields, P.M., Humphrey, D.C., Weschler, M.E, Riel, L.M., Tiffany-Morales, J., Woodworth, K., et al. (2001). *The status of the teaching profession 2001*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning.
- Shulman, L. S. (1986). "Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching." *Educational Researcher* Feb. 1986: 4-14. (AERA Presidential Address).
- Sullivan, P. Mousley, J. & Gervasoni, A. (2000). Caution: Classroom under observation. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 28, 247-260.
- Varma, A. and Stroh, L.K. 2001. "The Impact of Same-sex LMX Dyads on Performance Evaluations", *Human Resource Management*, 40(4), 309-320.
- Weisberg, D., Sexton, S., Mulhern, J., & Keeling, D. (2009) *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act of Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*. The New Teacher Project.
- Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy. (2001). *Teacher preparation research: Current knowledge, gaps, and recommendations*. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. Executive Summary.

## PROFESSIONAL TEACHING PORTFOLIOS: IMMERSED IN THE CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

by  
Sherrie Chan Pardieck

SHERRIE CHAN PARDIECK is on faculty at Bradley University, Peoria, IL.

### Abstract

*Professional teaching portfolios are being used in education programs and institutions across the country. Educators and school administrators know that portfolios provide an authentic venue for assessment, statements of educational philosophy, teaching practices with student samples, and are used for open discourse which allows for reflection of teaching and incorporation of improvement practices. Portfolios display a teacher's development as an educator and achievements within a content area or a field of education. The theoretical framework for professional teaching portfolios is grounded in the constructivist approach that espouses learning with understanding the content, application of learned information, connecting meaning to content in order to problem solve, and building new thought concepts for identification of teaching and improvement practices. Professional teaching portfolios are immersed in the constructivist approach as teachers document their continued professional development as educators.*

### Teaching Portfolios

Teaching portfolios are being used in all areas of education and provide opportunities for continued documentation of lifelong learning experiences (Jensen & Kiley, 2005). Educators are finding great value and purpose for using these visual documents (Batson, 2010). Portfolios are documents that visually offer a reader the opportunity to understand a person's best work or achievements in a given field of study (Kellough & Roberts, 2001) and they provide concrete evidence and growth of specialized learning (Gipe, 2002). Portfolios display an in-depth view of a person's philosophy of education, thinking skills, and behavior within professional endeavors. They are records of a person's *best work* as portfolios communicate learned skills and work samples through inclusion of artifacts presented in a visual document (Bullock & Hawk, 2005).

Professional teaching portfolios are unique to their owners and assist with providing evidence of instructional effectiveness and improvement practices (Jensen & Kiley, 2005). Through their portfolios, teachers can document demonstrated skills, knowledge, attitudes, teaching, and reflection practices that they used during the teaching and learning process and provide evidence of their achievements for specific audiences (Bullock & Hawk, 2005).

Bitter and Pierson (2002) suggested that a teaching portfolio is a compilation of a teacher's effort, current educational beliefs, accomplishments, and achievements. A teacher's quality work is displayed and presented for a job interview, tenure, or teacher evaluation. Teaching portfolios are also being used for self-assessment and improvement of instructional practices for accountability in the field of education, applying for grants, award nominations, state certification, and certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (Reese, 2004).

Education professionals have been incorporating teaching portfolios into their teacher evaluation process as an alternative form of teacher assessment (Kellough & Roberts, 2001). There has been a growing interest in the use of teaching portfolios as an assessment tool to stimulate reflection practices with tenured and preservice teachers (Bullock and Hawk, 2005). Bitter and Pierson (2002) referred to portfolios as an assessment tool. They are appropriate for use with all age groups and grade level classrooms for the evaluation of a learner's thought processes and learning outcomes. Portfolios encourage collaboration or discussions about its contents and feedback about teaching methods and strategies that help teachers with the self-reflection process (Mullen, Britten, & McFadden, 2005).

The teaching portfolio is a formative and authentic assessment; it is an alternative way of presenting teaching responsibilities and skills in a meaningful context from classroom experiences (Martinello & Cook, 2000). Wolf and Dietz (1998) stated that traditional standardized testing and summative assessments are invalid measures of a teacher's instructional performance. Numbers and letter grades do not accurately describe classroom teaching and learning practices. Alternative assessments are necessary to identify teacher knowledge and teaching practices in real classroom settings. Portfolios record what has been taught in an organized, visual document. They display and emphasize instructional development and improvement. Teacher knowledge and skills are infused throughout a professional teaching portfolio which documents and validates field experiences (Pardieck, 2002). The portfolio contains recorded artifacts of a teacher that is purposeful, selective, diverse, ongoing, reflective, and collaborative in nature (Wolf & Dietz, 1998).

Along with being identified as an authentic form of assessment, teaching portfolios are viewed as a performance based assessment because they display, in a visual format a teacher's knowledge of specialized subject matter, problem-solving abilities, pedagogical skills, knowledge of the teaching and learning process, and attitudes toward their own learning experiences. Teaching portfolios demonstrate a teacher's growth, efforts, and instructional practices as they work with individual, small, and whole group learning activities and assessment needs of their students (Shaklee, Barbour, Ambrose, & Hansford, 1997).

Schonwetter, Sokal, Frisen and Taylor (2002) offered that portfolios should include a teaching philosophy statement. Identification of pedagogy is important for professional growth as an educator and documentation of beliefs which become action in the classroom. Pedagogy includes a teacher's beliefs and values about the teaching process and classroom management connected to educational theories, methods and strategies for student learning and behaviors, and assessment of learning. Pedagogical skills identify knowledge and expertise of subject matter for teaching. The teacher should be able to communicate well to afford understanding of the subject matter to all learners. Lesson plans and visual instructional practice materials assist with the displaying of the teacher's skills. Curriculum skills show a teacher's approach to planning, understanding of purposeful education, delivery, and assessment practices of instruction. The ultimate goal is to identify and improve teaching (Bullock & Hawk, 2005).

Teaching portfolios track a teacher's professional growth, skills, and accomplishments combined with an analysis of instructional decision making in the classroom (Heath, 2003). The self-analysis or reflection process is a self-assessment tool and helps teachers and administrators to understand instructional successes and encourages change with the teaching and learning process.

Professional and individual growth is evidenced through the use of teaching portfolios (Morrison, 2006). Skills and accomplishments are reported, along with teacher reflection, which assists with ownership of the learning and confirmation of teaching decisions in the classroom (Bitter & Pierson, 2002). Cook-Sather (2008) suggested that one goal of educational reform was to help teachers to become reflective practitioners. Reflection or self-analysis of teaching assists teachers with understanding why a lesson may or may not have been successful. Reflection provides opportunities for the identification of remediation practices, or suggestions for revisions to improve instructional decision-making in the classroom (Pardieck, 2002). Including a reflection section, in a professional teaching portfolio assists the reader or evaluator with the understanding of instructional planning, teaching practices, completed subject assignments, and assessment methods used with classroom instruction (Jensen & Kiley, 2005). Arends (2007) concluded that teaching portfolios should include a reflection for teachers to better understand completed work assignments and assessment practices for their continued growth as an educator.

### **The Constructivist Approach**

Anderson and DeMeulle (1998) stated that teaching portfolios are grounded in the constructivist theory. Constructivism promotes a building of knowledge within a social framework, active participation in learning, a community of learners, and assessment as an ongoing process for the identification of development and growth. Through interactive learning, cognitive learning, and changes in traditional assessment, teaching portfolios have developed from the constructivist theory into an alternative assessment tool for the identification of educational performance. Mullen, Britten, and McFadden (2005) stated that teaching portfolios create a link between curriculum planning, instructional practices, and assessment methods of teaching and the teaching process. The portfolio process embodies clear purpose, specific learning goals, direct assessment, and reflection with collaborative learning opportunities.

The constructivist theory has a rich history and has been designated as an approach to learning derived from the work of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner (Milbrandt, Felts, Richards & Abghari, 2004). Constructivism arose from everyday problem solving of students' needs, interests, and experiences in school (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000).

The pioneering fathers said that individuals interact with their environment to build personal meaning into their learning experiences as they reshape or build on previous learning experiences (Kellough & Roberts, 2001). Individuals construct understandings as they accomplish goals in a social setting by discussing and exploring ideas (Cohen & Cowen, 2011). Emphasis is on the

experience and the dialogue of the learner acquiring and constructing knowledge (Borich, 2000).

The learner makes connections or assigns personal meaning through past and present learning (May, 2006). Individuals construct new learning utilizing decision-making, goal-setting, thought relationships, and collaboration, for active, and experiential learning activities (Lockard & Abrams, 2004). By providing real learning experiences, immersion, and participation in a safe learning environment, individuals have the opportunity to reinvent and reconstruct their own understandings (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). Wiseman, Cooner, and Knight (2000) called constructivist learning an apprenticeship where individuals work and learn in an authentic context. As individuals construct reality and make meaning through active participation, they are able to adapt to their environment and implement change when needed (Arends, 2007).

Individuals make connections between the new learning and their own lives which extends the new learning in many directions (Zemelman et al. 1998). Roe and Ross (2002) defined the constructivist approach as placing importance on thinking skills, understanding information, and behavior control. Making good choices, becoming an independent learner, working well with others, and becoming a lifelong learner are some of the directions that may transpire within an individual's own learning (Bruner, 1996).

Discovery learning is a form of constructivist thought (Arends, 2007). Importance is placed upon understanding key ideas and using active participation as a means to discover personal meaning. Cruickshank, Bainer, and Metcalf (1999) suggested using discovery-learning strategies to assist the learner with active participation, manipulation, and gaining meaning from the new learning by:

- using higher-order thinking, analysis, evaluation, and problem solving skills;
- high interest and inquiry;
- using learning activities that involve independent and collaborative activities;
- self-discovery of concepts;
- providing opportunities for students to connect meaning to content; and
- cooperative learning, the sharing of information, feelings, and problem-solving.

Constructivist learning involves valuing student viewpoints, asking higher level questions, and understanding student thought processes (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000). According to Cruickshank et al. (1999), learning will take place when students have the opportunity to:

1. Manipulate ideas and objects,
2. Use comparisons and predictions for inquiry purposes,
3. Think and react to new learning and perspectives of their peers, and
4. Reflection of the new learning.

The constructivist theory supports the belief that learning is active, engaging, and stimulates curiosity (Arends, 2007). Comprehension will occur if the learner

applies interactive methods, questioning, exploration, and discovery to construct new meaning (Borich, 2000).

### **Teaching Portfolios Immersed in Constructivism**

The constructivist theory espouses that learners need to experience new learning and connect their past learning to reinvent or build new concepts (May, 2006). Using new learning experiences and combining them with past knowledge, allows learners to build upon and elongate known concepts to create new meaning as they make sense of their learning experiences. Learners reinvent, build, and expand previously known information (Zemelman, et al. 1998).

Bruner (1996) offered that people construct meaning or create reality through the building of ideas from the traditions and cultures in which they live. Experiential learning or actively participating in new learning experiences helps people with the construction of new meaning and an extension of a new reality or way of thought. Through the active construction of meaning and reality, learners adapt to their world.

Teaching portfolios support the constructivist approach by allowing the learner to apply problem solving, inquiry, learning activities, value, assessment strategies, and responsibility for self-learning (Kellough, 2003). According to Roe and Ross (2002), they permit the learner to engage in: content study, self-analysis or reflection of the learning, documentation of learning, authentic assessment, and open discourse for reporting teaching successes and incorporation of improvement strategies.

The professional teaching portfolio is an authentic assessment constructed from real-life classroom teaching that is activity based and documents the learner's interactive learning experiences (Bullock & Hawk, 2005). Bolles (1999) offers that teachers develop and transform their learning to problem-solve and build new ideas in a real-life teaching situation. Portfolios represent the recorded accounts of teachers' experiences in the classroom setting. Teachers display their qualities, characteristics, and classroom behaviors within a teaching portfolio (Jensen & Kiley, 2005).

Acknowledgment of the importance of teaching portfolios began in response to the need for richer, alternative teacher assessment (Mullen et al. 2005). Portfolios assist with the documentation of work to allow evaluators to view teaching methods and strategies used with classroom teaching. Through the collection of artifacts, evaluators view progress over time to identify teaching strengths and areas for improvement (Lever-Duffy, McDonald & Mizell, 2003). The incorporation of standards-based assessments which identifies benchmarks for student learning, connects teaching objectives, and student outcomes, assists evaluators toward the identification of preservice teachers' practical and theoretical knowledge of teaching (Bullock & Hawk, 2005). Portfolios, used as an assessment tool provides an effective form of evaluation for the improvement of instructional practices and the professionalization of teaching. Riner (2000) offered that the constructivist theory looks at purpose, process, and outcomes with knowledge and meaning building. Shaklee, Barbour, Ambrose, and Hansford (1997) asserted that the constructivist learning theory can be found in portfolio usage through:

- teachers interacting with their environment;
- teachers assigning meaning from their experiences;
- teachers being actively involved with resources and ideas;
- using pre and post-testing for student learning;
- students' active participation in learning activities in large, small, and individual groupings.

According to Mullen et al. (2005), teaching portfolios combine process and product. The *process* is comprised of rationalization, evaluation, and reflection components and the *product* section includes an organized collection of artifacts which displays professional development, content knowledge, pedagogy, child development knowledge, and teachers' professional and personal contributions to teaching. Teaching portfolios should include contents collected over time (Wiseman et al. 2000). Included teaching content documentation of artifacts from teaching and attestations collected from a variety of sources. Artifacts are items from the teaching and learning process which are included in a portfolio as documented evidence of classroom teaching and learning (Pardieck & McMullen, 2009). Artifacts may include dated photographs, with captions from assigned performance assessments and lesson plans. Attestations may include teacher evaluations and notes from parents or administrators praising their teaching efforts, any artifacts which identify proud moments or achievements (Bolles, 1999) that have transpired during the teaching and learning process. The constructivist theory is evidenced through the recording of the teacher's planning, decision making, social interactions, and validation of classroom teaching experiences. Teachers continually document and reflect upon their learning experiences as they assume the role of a "shareholder" in their own learning process throughout their career (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000).

Arends (2007) offered that teaching portfolios are an authentic assessment and allow for subjective, personal, and professional elements to enter the objective measure. Using a variety of methods and materials to gather evidence of learning, self-assessment, and a clear purpose allows an individual to understand different perspectives of learning and to take responsibility or ownership for their learning (Jensen & Kiley, 2005). Teachers connect their beliefs with assessment strategies and program goals. Anderson and DeMeulle (1998) stated that positive teacher attitudes toward lifelong learning were promoted through teaching portfolios as preservice teachers collaborated about problem solving strategies and corrective feedback. Making these connections with their instructional practices assisted teachers toward reconstruction of their knowledge about the teaching and learning process. Teaching portfolios assisted preservice teachers with articulation of their educational beliefs, instructional practices, and improvement strategies. The collaborative nature of teaching portfolios affords more communication or discussion about teaching beliefs and instructional practices with educational peers (Cruickshank et al. 1999).

Individual learning needs are taken into consideration before curriculum revisions, instructional methods and strategies, and assessment practices that are implemented in the classroom (Shaklee et al. 1997). Educators use

relevant problem solving, student voice and inquiry, thematic units, reflection, and ongoing assessment practices with the teaching and learning process (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000). (Zemelman et al. 1998) offered the following guidelines for evaluating and reporting progress across the curriculum, which follows the constructivist philosophy by using descriptive evaluation, teacher reflection, triangulation of assessments, differentiated learning, teacher observation, conferences, and collecting data. Evaluation practices should be embedded in instruction for identification of individual student learning outcomes. Herrell (2000) indicated that as teachers use portfolio assessments, they should apply the following steps to identify areas for self-reflection and setting goals:

1. Identify curricular areas and a baseline.
2. Portfolio guidelines should be clearly stated for selection of artifacts.
3. Date and use captions for included artifacts.
4. Keep portfolio current with updated information and samples.
5. Schedule conferences to review contents and celebrate accomplishments.

Assessment should be a natural process that flows from constructing authentic classroom activities and blending educational theory for student-centered learning environments. Constructivist classrooms look at assessment and teaching as a single concept. Classrooms are student centered and use student and teacher interactions, observation, and problem-solving to understand what information a student has internalized (Batson, 2010). Implementation of meaningful tasks or purpose for teaching assists with the identification and application of skills and comprehension of learning, which can be identified during the assessment process within professional teaching portfolios.

### Conclusion

The constructivist approach is interwoven throughout professional teaching portfolios as they meet the needs of today's professional educators. Using authentic situations for active problem solving provides a bridging and reconstruction of knowledge to create new meaning with incorporation of collaboration skills and ongoing formative assessment practices. The constructivist theory espouses that learning is active, engaging, and stimulates curiosity for learning new concepts by connecting meaning and expanding previously known concepts. Comprehension will occur if the learner applies interactive methods, inquiry, exploration, and discovery to construct new meaning with learning activities.

Teaching portfolios are grounded in the constructivist theoretical framework. The visual documents embody the constructivist approach as they include teaching philosophies, instructional methods and strategies, learning activities, resources, assessment practices, and reflection of real teaching experiences. Teaching portfolios emphasize instructional development and improvement with the teaching and learning process. Teacher knowledge and skills are displayed and embedded within professional teaching portfolios as they authenticate and validate classroom teaching experiences.

Portfolios are documents that visually offer a reader the opportunity to understand a person's professional achievements, skills, beliefs, and teaching style as a professional educator. Teaching portfolios contain artifacts and a section for reflection or self-analysis of teaching which assists teachers with understanding strengths and weaknesses of a taught lesson or unit of study and identification of improvement strategies or curriculum changes for future teaching. The intent is to identify development and growth of individual learners using a variety of methods and materials to gather evidence of learning, self-assessment, and clear purpose which allows for individual ownership of learning and incorporation of improvement practices.

### References

- Anderson, R. S., & DeMeulle, L. (1998, Winter). Portfolio use in twenty-four teacher education programs. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 25 (1), 23-31.
- Arends, R. I. (2007). *Learning to teach* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Batson, T. (2010, January). E-portfolios: Let me count the ways. *Campus Technology* [online] [http://campustechnology.com/articles/2010/01/06/eportfolios-let-me-count-the-ways.aspx?sc\\_lang=en](http://campustechnology.com/articles/2010/01/06/eportfolios-let-me-count-the-ways.aspx?sc_lang=en)
- Bitter, G. & Pierson, M. (2002). *Using technology in the classroom*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bolles, R. N. (1999). *The 1999 what color is your parachute?* Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Borich, G. D. (2000). *Effective teaching methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bullock, A. A. & Hawk, P. P. (2005). *Developing a teaching portfolio: A guide for preservice and practicing teachers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Cohen, V. L. & Cowen, J. E. (2011). *Literacy for children in an information age: Teaching reading, writing, and thinking* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2008). Returning to the mirror: Reflections on promoting constructivism in three educational centers. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 38 (2), 231-245.
- Cruikshank, D. R. , Bainer, D. L., & Metcalf, K. K. (1999). *The act of teaching* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill College.
- Freiberg, H. J. & Driscoll, A. (2000). *Universal teaching strategies* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Gipe, J. P. (2002). *Multiple paths to literacy: Classroom techniques for struggling readers* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Heath, M. (2003). Telling it like it is: Electronic portfolios for authentic professional development. *Library Media Connection*, 21 (6), 38-40.
- Herrell, A. L. (2000). *Fifty strategies for teaching English language learners*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Jensen, R. A., & Kiley, T. J. (2005). *Teaching, leading, and learning in pre-k-8 settings: Strategies for success* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Kellough, R. D. (2003). *A resource guide for teaching k-12* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Kellough, R. D., & Roberts, P. L. (2001). *A resource guide for elementary school teachers: Planning for competence* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). NY: Macmillan College Publishing Company.
- Lever-Duffy, J., McDonald, J. B., & Mizell, A. P. (2003). *Teaching and learning with technology*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Lockard, J. & Abrams, P. D. (2004). *Computers for twenty-first century educators* 6<sup>th</sup>, ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Martinello, M. L., & Cook, G. E. (2000). *Interdisciplinary inquiry in teaching and learning* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- May, F. B. (2006). *Teach reading creatively: Reading and writing as communication*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Milbrandt, M. K., Felts, J., Richards, B., & Abghari, N. (2004). Teaching to learn: A constructivist approach to shared responsibility. *Art Education*, 57 (5), 19-24, 33.
- Morrison, G. S. (2006). *Teaching in America* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Mullen, L., Britten, J., & McFadden, J. (2005). *Digital portfolios in teacher education*. Indianapolis, IN: JIST Publishing, Inc.
- Pardieck, S. (2002). Development of job search teaching portfolios for preservice teachers. *Journal of Reading Education*, 27 (2), 24-30.
- Pardieck, S. & McMullen, D. (2009). Digital preservice teaching portfolios: One teacher education program's solution. *Critical Issues in Teacher Education*, 16, 13-21.
- Reese, S. (2004). Teacher portfolios: Displaying the art of teaching. *Techniques: Connecting Education and Careers*, 79 (5), 18-21.
- Riner, P. S. (2000). *Successful teaching in the elementary classroom*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Roe, B. D. & Ross, E. P. (2002). *Student teaching and field experiences handbook*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Schonwetter, D. J., Sokal, L., Frisen, M., & Taylor, K. L. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 7 (1), 83-97.
- Shaklee, B. D., Barbour, N. E., Ambrose, R., & Hansford, S. J. (1997). *Designing and using portfolios*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Wiseman, D. L., Cooner, D. D., & Knight, S. L. (2000). *Becoming a teacher in a field-based setting: An introduction to education and classrooms*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Wolf, K., & Dietz, M. (1998). Teaching portfolios: Purposes and possibilities. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 25 (1), 9-22.
- Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A. (1998). *Best practice: New standards for teaching and learning in America's schools* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

# CHALLENGES FOR MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS: PRESENT STATUS, PERCEPTIONS, AND POSSIBILITIES

by

Paul Egeland, James Sovocool, and Justin Marble

PAUL EGELAND is on faculty at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. JAMES SOVOCOOL is a classroom teacher, Philadelphia, PA. JUSTIN MARBLE is a recent graduate of Wheaton College's Elementary Education program.

## Abstract

*Males constitute a miniscule minority of elementary school certified teaching staff. There appears to be evidence that their numbers have not increased in recent years. What might be the challenges or obstacles that discourage men from pursuing elementary education as a profession? This study explores the experiences of fifteen, male classroom teachers presently teaching in grades 1-5 in public schools in suburban communities in the Midwest. Their discourse provides clues to their personal persistence in a profession that does not appear to be attractive for many males. These clues, such as supportive families and previous experience, may suggest how other men may be drawn to consider elementary teaching as a worthy endeavor.*

Over the past decade and among the general public there has been a small, but growing awakening to the dearth of male elementary teachers, as evidenced through articles by the general media (Blanchard, 2005; Cox, 2008; Vaznis, 2008) and educational reports (Johnson, 2008; National Education Association, 2004; Nelson, 2002). While the estimates of the number of certified males that are teaching in public, K-12 schools vary by state and community and may reflect different criteria, the available national statistics seem to point toward a low number of male teachers (Johnson, 2008). The NEA's 2010 School Statistics provide a ranking of the states' teachers based on 2009 data. The percentage of male, K-12 public school teachers ranges from 16% in Arkansas to 33.2% in Kansas, the mean being 24.0% while the median is 24.3% (National Education Association, 2009). MenTeach, an organization that specializes in collecting and disseminating information about male teachers, uses the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics to annually calculate the percentage of men teachers. They compute that the yearly percentage of male teachers in elementary and middle school (K-8) during the past decade has ranged from a low of 17.0% in 2002 to a high of 19.1% in 2007 (MenTeach, 2010). However, for males teaching in the elementary grades (K-5/6), these percentages tend to be even lower, around 9% (National Education Association, 2004).

Is it a concern that fewer than one of every ten elementary school teachers is male? Should more men be recruited for teaching positions in elementary schools? Why do so few men presently pursue this profession? What might be the real or perceived issues that may curb their interest? What might male teachers contribute to the elementary school classroom, culture and community? For those males who currently teach in elementary schools, what experiences and perspectives may be unique? While this study does not attempt to answer all of these questions, it does provide some insights to the present status and experience of male elementary teachers who teach in a

particular context, with an view toward uncovering clues to their persistence as teachers in K-5 classrooms.

## Literature Review

The interests, research and concerns of educators and scholars have spawned the exploration of related questions of which at least two are pertinent for this study: 1) Why are the number of males in K-12 (and specifically elementary grades) so low? And 2) What might male elementary school teachers contribute to elementary school contexts and their students? Theoretical frameworks and recent studies have posited some credible factors that may influence the number of males teaching in elementary schools or K-12 schools. To summarize, these factors generally include low wages/low status and/or issues of masculinity, including the concern regarding physical contact with children (Cushman, 2005).

In terms of low wages, Johnson (2008) concludes that comparative salary data may discourage men from even considering elementary education as a profession. This idea is supported by the findings of a survey of members of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Nelson, 2002). And once in the field, over three-fourths of beginning teachers cite poor salary as their primary reason for leaving the field (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). This is possibly exacerbated due to the expectation of some males that they should be the primary wage earners. Many male (and female) teachers augment their teaching salary with weekend and/or summer employment (American Federation of Teachers, 2008/2009). Furthermore, in states such as Illinois that have individual school districts rather than county-wide districts, it is not uncommon for the community high school to be in a separate school district than local elementary and/or middle schools. In these communities, elementary school teachers generally have lower salary schedules than similarly qualified and experienced secondary school teachers and this disparity may reflect a lower cultural status or prestige for elementary teachers. The current demographic patterns of elementary teachers in the United States may be linked to these historically lower salaries (Clifford, 1989) and their influence may be difficult to overcome (Wiest, 2003).

Low status or prestige parallels the meager wages for elementary teachers, regardless of the extent of their professional preparation. This is a complex sociological issue that is often based more on perceptions than quantifiable evidence. Low status tends to be influenced by public attitudes, morale, low pay, and working conditions (St. John-Brooks, 2001). For example, working conditions such as excessive paperwork, supervisory responsibilities, and lack of autonomy likely contribute to the perceived low status and lack of professionalism in any field. Williams suggests that these kinds of factors often motivate or push men teachers up the "glass escalator" toward higher-paying management and leadership roles (1992). In contrast, one study, conducted in Ireland, found that males from rural areas who were teaching elementary grades had higher perceptions of their status career choice than the male elementary teachers from urban areas (Drudy, Martin, Woods & O'Flynn, 2005). This may be related to comparative employment opportunities available in these rural and urban contexts. Clearly many diverse, regional, and evolving

factors contribute to the perception of the relative status or prestige of any profession.

The role of gender expectations has been interpreted by many as contributing to the low numbers of male elementary teachers. The disparate number of male and female elementary teachers leads some educators to conclude that elementary schools have become feminized arenas (Drudy, Martin, Woods & O'Flynn, 2005; Nielsen, 2006). Sargent notes, however, that men are less likely than women to see themselves as influenced by gender (2001) and therefore may be less conscious of gendered behaviors. Furthermore, caring behaviors that are associated with teaching young children or nursing are not traditionally regarded as common characteristics of men (King, 1998). Finally, males who teach in the upper primary grades are more likely than those who teach the lower primary grades to adhere to more traditional views of masculinity (Skelton, 2003). This factor overlaps somewhat with the perceived low status or prestige of teaching in general and teaching elementary grades in particular. It also may relate to the fears expressed by some male elementary teachers regarding physical contact with children.

When alone with children or in relation to physical contact, men tend to be scrutinized more closely than their female peers by the school community (Sargent, 2001). Notwithstanding Noddings' challenge for all teachers to care (2005), King (1998) describes the caution men must exhibit even though the males in his study believe care is communicated through *appropriate* touching of primary children. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NEAYC) member survey reports that the fear of being accused of abuse often discourages men from applying for work with young children (Nelson, 2002). Johnson concludes that "physical contact with children" is a significant factor why men decide against teaching (2008). This issue, which is an extension of gender expectations, combined with the low salaries and low status of teachers, appears to inhibit the number of males entering the teaching field, and more specifically, the elementary grades.

The second question considered in this study is "what might male elementary school teachers contribute to elementary schools and their students?" The research that may address this question tends to be more theoretical and speculative. This is due, in part, to the lack of empirical evidence for the positive impact of male elementary teachers on the academic achievement of their students (Dee, 2005). The results of the few studies examining a teacher's gender and student achievement tend to focus on secondary education and are either mixed or inconclusive, whether they involved student perceptions of the teachers or were based on the results of academic exams (Driessen, 2007; Thornton & Bricheno, 2006). This research counters the popular current argument that a perceived crisis in boys' academic achievement would be addressed through an increase in male teachers.

Another common response to the question concerning the contribution of men teachers to the elementary school classroom is that positive male role models are needed for younger-aged boys (Johnson, 2008). This argument is partially a reaction to the demographics that reveal the high number of children currently being reared in homes without a father or male caregiver (Bergman, 2007). A larger body of research exists that suggest that

the student behavior of boys differs than that of girls and often differs in problematic ways (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006). How male teachers may impact the behavior of boys is complex. For instance, boys' behavior tends to worsen as they proceed through grade levels, while the number of male teachers also increase in the higher grades (Ofsted, 2005). This inverse correlation certainly does not suggest that having more male teachers will improve student behavior! Nevertheless, some authors cite the absence of positive male role models as related to the academic underperformance of boys in school (Cleveland, 2011).

Others argue that increasing the number of men teachers may break down occupational stereotypes that may inhibit men from entering the profession (Sadker & Sadker, 2003). The types of roles that male, preservice, elementary teachers construct reveals the extent of normative behaviors that these men expect of themselves (Montecinos & Nielsen, 2004). These behaviors include "(a) to be a male role model, (b) to be a sports coach, (c) to appeal to reason, and (d) to prepare oneself for occupations within the field of education that carry more status" (p. 3). While these roles may be necessary, they are not empirically associated with improved school achievement or behavior. Therefore, further exploration will be necessary to determine what motivates some males to pursue elementary teaching certification and how they respond and interpret their K-5 teaching environments in light of their role expectations and motivations.

### **Purpose and Methodology**

This study explored the roles and unique challenges described by fifteen male elementary teachers in suburban schools districts. The research team consisted of a small group of male undergraduates who were pursuing elementary education as a college major. In one recent cohort at this institution, of 37 elementary education students were preparing for student teaching, with 36 females and one male. Consequently and in response to the low numbers of men teaching elementary schools, the initial research question was "How might we increase the number of male elementary education teacher candidates?" During the 2008-2009 academic year, these students and their professor/mentor read the literature that described issues related to being a male elementary teacher. In delving into studies and articles about education and male teachers, and in recognition that it is unwise to recruit males into education who may be weak teachers, the research question evolved to "What are the present roles and challenges facing male elementary school classroom teachers?"

Through this process and with further reflection, the research team determined that it would be helpful, both professionally and personally, to interview a number of current male elementary teachers in order to identify these challenges and to better understand their roles. The motivation was to compare past research findings with current practices and circumstances and to gain a more realistic understanding of what they may face as prospective elementary teachers.

After a vigorous debate about sample criteria and influenced by time and resource constraints, a consensus emerged to interview male, K-5

classroom teachers currently teaching in suburban public schools in a limited geographic region of Illinois. Within 20 miles of this institution, 130 male, K-5 public school classroom teachers were identified out of 1,511 (8.6%) using information found on individual school websites. This percentage is comparable to national averages of 9% (National Education Association, 2004). From this pool, introductions and invitations were emailed to all male K-5 elementary teachers in three local, suburban, public school districts. Follow up emails were sent to those who did not respond. Initially, seventeen teachers agreed to be included and all but two were ultimately interviewed.

An initial set of interview questions was crafted and revised, and sixteen questions piloted with a current male elementary teacher. Research protocols were also established for communication prior to the interview, during the interview, and after the completion of the interview. Interviews took place from December 2009, through March 2010. Each 30-60 minute interview was digitally recorded and later transcribed. The initial interviews were conducted by the undergraduate student/researcher with the support of the professor. The remaining interviews were entirely led by the student researchers. Interview locations were suggested by the interviewees and included their own classrooms, nearby coffee shops, and their homes. All interviews occurred during regular school days, typically after the teachers' students had been dismissed.

The men interviewed represented a wide age and experience range. Four were ages 21-30; five were 31-40; three were 41-50; and three were 51 years old or older. The small sample size in each age category did not allow for comparisons based on age. The mean for the number of years of their classroom teaching experience was 15.4 years. Two were first year teachers while two others had each taught for more than 30 years. In terms of the grades they were presently teaching: five taught in grades 1-3, with each of those three grades represented, and ten taught in grade 4 or grade 5. However, thirteen of the fifteen indicated their preferred teaching grades were 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade. In spite of the racial diversity in many of the public schools in these suburbs, all 15 male teachers were Caucasians.

Transcriptions of each interview were carefully read and a thematic analysis often utilized by research-clinicians was conducted (Aronson, 1994). The focus was on noting identifiable themes and patterns in the experiences described captured by the transcriptions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This was organized in the following manner: each of the three student researchers read ten entire interview transcripts, not based on random selection but on the interviews that were conducted by the other two student researchers. This exposed each researcher to the specific experiences and responses of the male elementary teachers that they had not personally interviewed. This likely reduced personal bias that might be inherent in analyzing the transcripts of the teachers each researcher interviewed. The lead researcher, who led the initial practice interview, read all fifteen transcripts. This resulted in each entire interview transcript being analyzed by three different researchers. Data summaries were created for the responses to each question by each individual researcher to help identify possible themes or trends in the transcripts. From these summaries, the researchers met together to present, discuss, debate,

and defend the key themes or patterns that appeared to emerge from their interview transcripts. These emerging themes were also compared with the existing descriptions in the literature, of men teaching in elementary grades, as well as with their own preconceptions and expectations.

## Results

One of the current situations facing men teaching in elementary grades is the reality that they are likely one of only a few male teachers in the building. For example, one interviewed teacher was the only male teacher in a building with 35 classroom teachers. In contrast, another interviewee was one of four male, K-5 teachers in a K-5 building with 25 classroom teachers. Many elementary schools still have no male certified classroom teachers. Earlier in this paper, several reasons for the low numbers of men teachers were suggested. A number of interview questions related to this issue and pertain to the motivations and experiences and careers paths of the teachers. These include: *What motivated you to consider teaching elementary grade students and what other career paths did you consider? What previous experiences with children have you had and how have they impacted your decision to be a teacher? How did your family and friends respond to your choice to teach elementary school? Have there been any changes in their perspectives over time?*

In terms of career paths, of the fifteen interviewees, four completed college and worked in other careers before returning for teacher certification. Another six switched to elementary education from a different major while in college. In short, the majority (67%) considered other options prior to deciding on elementary education. Their recurring, primary motivation for gravitating to elementary education was their enjoyment of teaching and the students. Twelve of the fifteen teachers (80%) had extensive experience with children prior to becoming a teacher. They suggested this either had an impact on their decision to teach or reinforced that particular direction. Working with children in summer camps and church programs were cited most frequently, although three also helped care for younger siblings. Twelve of the fifteen sets of parents and family (80%) responded favorably to the interviewee's career choice of elementary teaching. While family members communicated strong support, friends' reactions were more likely to include some teasing. Three experienced negative responses from their families, but their expressed concerns were for financial considerations with the teaching salary perceived as being inadequate for the primary income for a family.

One of the possible challenges men face as teachers in elementary schools involves the roles they may be expected to fulfill. The question, *Are there different expectations for you than for other elementary teachers in your building?* explored how the interviewees may be treated somewhat differently than female teachers in elementary school contexts. Discussing expectations with these teachers evoked a distinct hesitancy, reflecting the legal necessity for administrators not to discriminate on the basis of gender. The majority of the interviewees maintained that expectations were the same for them as they were for any other teacher in the building, male or female; the fact of gender had nothing to do with their professional treatment as a teacher. While none



cited lower expectations for the *quality* of their teaching, three expressed that it was not uncommon to be held to different standards concerning the way that their classroom operated, with recognition from colleagues that a classroom run by a male teacher might be organized or managed in a different manner than a classroom with a female teacher in charge. Gender did not necessarily cultivate disrespect from colleagues, but more readily promoted an acceptance of differences in teaching styles and classroom management.

There was no consensus on particular roles these teachers had within their elementary building. Three mentioned they were expected to address problem students more effectively. Four were identified as technology experts in their building. Two were viewed as science experts. Four others took leadership roles involving athletics with the students. And three expressed they were role models or father figures for many students. It is difficult to discern whether these behaviors stem more from societal expectations for gender roles or from genetic, personal characteristics. A follow up study of role stereotypes among elementary teachers might also be a worthy pursuit.

In responding to a prompt exploring how these teachers related to their male and female students, a common theme was that these teachers *do* treat male and female students differently, although most teachers espoused treating students equally regardless of gender. Eleven of fifteen teachers (73%) admitted that they treat boys and girls differently. As an example, one teacher responded that he saw in boys a need for “moving around, moving from place to place, get[ting] up and get[ting] a drink, whatever, and being more tactile with their activities, where girls are fine; generally, there’s always exceptions, but girls are generally fine sitting, writing, doing a book activity for a longer period of time than boys are.” “School is definitely geared more for girls.” Another teacher observed that girls are generally better students, particularly in terms of work habits. Two teachers mentioned their effort to call on boys and girls equally even though noting girls raised their hands more frequently.

The majority of teachers interviewed noted the need for caution when working with students in any situation that could be misconstrued as inappropriate interaction or misconduct. One teacher advised to “never be alone with a student.” He also mentioned that male teachers must be more careful with physical touch than female teachers. Other ways in which male teachers treat female students differently include being more sensitive, softening the tone of voice, being more gentle, lacking patience for female conflict or grudges, and allowing girls to “go first.” Some differences in the treatment of males include calling on boys even when their hands aren’t up, being “harder” on boys, and participating in sports with predominantly male groups of students at recess.

Two interview questions considered challenges the teachers might face while working with colleagues, most of whom are female: *How would you describe your relationships with the other teachers in your building? Have you faced any challenges in working in a context where most of your coworkers are females? If so, please describe.* The majority of the teachers valued professionalism in relationships with their coworkers. Identified challenges include feelings of isolation in a predominantly female environment, communication style differences resulting in miscommunication, and a general

frustration with the prevalence of what the men described as “gossip.” Overall, most of the teachers reported positive professional relationships with female coworkers but did not generally seek relationships with them outside of work, regardless of the male teacher’s marital status.

In terms of their job satisfaction, all fifteen interviewees expressed positive support for encouraging males to consider elementary teaching as a profession. They felt the relatively low pay can be offset by the incredibly rewarding and rich experiences. However, several added caveats that men need to possess strong character and be passionate about working with children. Ten of the fifteen (67%) intend to continue teaching in the elementary grades in the coming years. Two were about to retire while the other three (20%) were contemplating other moves within the field of education, including administration and teaching in the middle grades.

### Conclusions

As previously stated, one significant challenge facing male elementary teachers is being a minority. Men must buck cultural stereotypes and expectations and be willing to have few male colleagues in the profession. In analyzing motivations, it is important to note the dominant cultural image of elementary school teachers. Our first conclusion is that males must address and overcome current societal expectations in order to pursue a career in elementary school teaching. Present cultural norms do not seem to encourage males to consider elementary school teaching as a vocational option. Men are generally not expected to go into elementary education in a similar way to how men are not often expected to babysit as a teen or to become a nurse as an adult.

Our second conclusion is that positive experiences with elementary-aged children seem to encourage or at least support males in the pursuit of a vocational choice to teach elementary school. This inference is based on the number of the interviewees who described their experiences working with children prior to majoring in elementary education as well as the impact they perceived these opportunities had on eventual career choices.

We also conclude that family members tend to support males in their vocational choice of K-5 teaching. Parents, spouses, and siblings who understood that an interviewee was pursuing a career for which he had passion generally provided their encouragement and support. This reinforces the findings of a recent study of the motivations of men in an elementary teacher education program also in a Midwestern university in the United States (Sanatullova-Allison, 2009).

Our study does not indicate that men bring a unique set of skills or unusual expertise to elementary grade classrooms. Men, like women, have particular academic knowledge, distinct pedagogical and management skills, and individual personalities that serve them as teachers. But men are likely to have perspectives, associated with their gender, that color or filter their perceptions. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these perspectives as males may impact how they relate to their students, colleagues, and even parents of their students. These impacts, while difficult to capture, suggest further study might be instructive.

## Discussion

Before discussing any inferences from the responses provided, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations to this study. While the sample of fifteen men who responded to the invitation to be interviewed represented grades 1-5 and the range of novice to highly experienced teachers, they may not be representative of male teachers in other regions of the United States, in other parts of Illinois, or even in the suburbs of one major metropolis. The sample is also subject to selection bias as these fifteen may have had motivations that differed from those who did not respond to the invitation to participate. Furthermore, in spite of efforts to craft questions allowing a wide spectrum of responses, some interview questions may have been leading and resulted in responses skewed in a particular direction. Finally, bias is always inherent in self-reporting. This was evident when one interviewee admitted he had discussed the interview questions with several female colleagues and found some of their responses (for him) differed significantly from how he had framed his answers.

Societal expectations have a strong impact on motivation, effectively restricting a demographic of those who might have considered elementary teaching. The choice for many men to enter the elementary teaching field is often deliberate and driven by an intrinsic motivation; these interviewees noted that their decision to teach was driven, in part, by their enjoyment of working with students. If males gain opportunities to work with elementary students in various structured and informal contexts, their motivation for working with children might increase. Hence, it might be prudent to encourage young men to interact in positive, healthy, and appropriate ways with children. This may be accomplished through service learning, employment opportunities, and volunteering. Accurate and appealing information on these kinds of opportunities should be available for young men in their schools and communities. The *Call Me MISTER* Program at Clemson seeks to encourage and facilitate these types of strategies (Cunningham & Watson, 2002). Once in their own classrooms, male teachers can be supported through participating in organizations such as Mizzou Men for Excellence in Elementary Teaching (MMEET) or MenTeach (Johnson, 2008). In our community, we have observed male college athletes recruited to read to K-5 students in some local classrooms, with seemingly positive results.

In terms of family support for male elementary teachers, the caution expressed by three families of the interviewees were more a reflection on the structural barriers that many teachers face, a logistical roadblock that possibly makes teaching appear to be an unsustainable, financially suspect, career option. Increasing pay structures in general, or through specific incentives and performances, may help address these expressed concerns.

The generally optimistic outlook on the teaching perspective of these who were interviewed appears to be encouraging. However, perhaps those who did not respond to the invitation to be part of this study lack that same enthusiasm. If the number of quality, male elementary teachers is to increase in the coming years, young men are likely to benefit from positive experiences with children, the support of their family and friends to pursue teaching, and the

reduction of societal structures that may be restrictive for male elementary teachers.

## References

- American Federation of Teachers. (2008/2009). Men who teach. *American Teacher* 93(4), 12-20.
- Aronson, J. (1994, Spring). A pragmatic view of thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 2(1), Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/BackIssues/QR2-1/aronson.html>
- Blanchard, J. (2005, December 19). It's elementary: Male teachers rare. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved June 12, 2009, from [http://www.seattlepi.com/local/252612\\_maleteachers19.html](http://www.seattlepi.com/local/252612_maleteachers19.html)
- Bergman, M. (2007, March 27). Single-parent households showed little variation since 1994. *U.S. Census Bureau*. Retrieved June 20, 2011, from [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/families\\_households/cb07-46.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/families_households/cb07-46.html)
- Cleveland, K. P. (2011). *Teaching boys who struggle in school: Strategies that turn underachievers into successful learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Clifford, G. J. (1989). Man/woman/teacher: Gender, family, and career in American educational history. In D. Warren (Ed.), *American teachers: Histories of a profession at work*. (pp. 293-343). New York: MacMillan.
- Cox, L. (2008, August 28). The mistrusted male teacher. *ABC News*. Retrieved October 23, 2010, from <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=5670187&page=1>
- Cunningham, B., & Watson, L. W. (2002). Recruiting male teachers. *Young Children*, 57(6), 10-15.
- Cushman, P. (2005). Let's hear it from the males: Issues facing male primary school teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 227-240.
- Dee, T. S. (2005, September). Teachers and the gender gaps in student achievement (working paper 11660). *National Bureau of Economic Research*. Retrieved May 14, 2010, from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w11660>
- Driessen, G. (2007). The feminization of primary education: Effects of teachers' sex on pupil achievement, attitudes, and behaviour. *Review of Education* 53, 183-203.
- Drudy, S., Martin, M., Woods, M., & O'Flynn, F. (2005). *Men and the classroom: Gender imbalances in teaching*. New York: Routledge.
- Ingersoll, R., & Smith, T. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 30-33.
- Johnson, S. P. (Winter, 2008). *The status of male teachers in public education today*. Indiana University: Center for Evaluation & Education Policy.
- King, J. R. (1998). *Uncommon caring: Learning from men who teach young children*. New York: Teacher's College.
- MenTeach. (2010). *Data about men teachers*. Author. Retrieved June 13, 2011, from [http://www.menteach.org/resources/data\\_about\\_men\\_teachers](http://www.menteach.org/resources/data_about_men_teachers)
- Montecinos, C., & Nielson, L. E. (2004). Male elementary preservice teachers' gendering of teaching. *Multicultural Perspectives* 6(2), 3-9.

- National Education Association. (2010). *Rankings & estimates: Rankings of the states 2009 and estimates of school statistics 2010*. Retrieved June 7, 2011, from <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/010rankings.pdf>
- National Education Association. (2004). *Are male teachers on the road to extinction?* Retrieved December 11, 2008, from <http://www.nea.org/newsreleases/2004/nr040428.html>
- Nelson, B. G. (2002). The importance of men teachers: And reasons there are so few. *A Survey of Members of NAEYC*. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Nielsen, L. E. (2006, Fall). Female like me. *Universitas, 2*, 1-7. Retrieved November 13, 2009 from [www.uni.edu/universitas/fall06/pdf/art\\_nielsen.pdf](http://www.uni.edu/universitas/fall06/pdf/art_nielsen.pdf)
- Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York: Teacher's College.
- Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education). (2005, February 2). *Annual report of her majesty's chief inspector of schools 2003/04*. Retrieved June 15, 2011, from <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0304/>
- Sadker, D., & Sadker, M. (2003). Gender bias: From colonial America to today's classrooms. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds.) *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 125-151). New York: Wiley.
- Sanatullova-Allison, E. (2009). Why men become elementary school teachers: Insights from an elementary teacher education program. *Action in Teacher Education, 31*(4), 28-40.
- Sargent, P. (2001). *Real men or real teachers? Contradictions in the lives of men elementary school teachers*. Harriman, TN: Men's Studies.
- Skelton, C. (2003). Male primary teachers and perceptions of masculinity. *Educational Review 55*(2), 195-209.
- St. John-Brooks, C. (2001, September 7). What they want is a little respect. *Times Educational Supplement*, 26-27.
- Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meanings*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Thornton, M., & Bricheno, P. (2006). *Missing men in education*. Sterling, VA: Trentham.
- Vaznis, J. (2008, November 18). Hunt is on for more men to lead classrooms. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved March 19, 2009, from [http://www.boston.com/news/education/k\\_12/articles/2008/11/18/hunt\\_i\\_s\\_on\\_for\\_more\\_men\\_to\\_lead\\_classrooms/?page=full](http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2008/11/18/hunt_i_s_on_for_more_men_to_lead_classrooms/?page=full)
- Wiest, L. R. (2003). The current status of male teachers of young children. *The Educational Forum, 68*, 62-70.
- Williams, C. L. (1992). The glass escalator: Hidden advantages for men in the "female" professions. *Social Problems, 39*(3), 253-267.

## ACT SCORES AS A PREDICTOR OF SUCCESS ON THE NEW BASIC SKILLS TEST: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

by  
Keith Drew

KEITH DREW is on faculty at Judson University, Elgin, IL.

### Abstract

*In an era of increasing demands on those wishing to enter the education profession, it is beneficial to have some means of identifying levels of proficiency associated with success on certain certification requirements. This research investigates the use of ACT scores (subscores and composite) as a predictor of success on four components of the Basic Skills Test (BST), the initial assessment required of prospective teachers in the state of Illinois. Through a correlational analysis, statistically significant relationships were found between various parts of the ACT and subsections of the BST. A particular level of ACT performance best associated with passing this first of three certification exams is identified. The results are beneficial for students considering teaching as a career, high school counselors, higher education faculty involved in the pre-service education of teachers, and educational policy makers at both the institutional and state levels.*

The winds of change blowing across the educational landscape in this country are more than gentle breezes, they are more comparable to gale-force onslaughts. Budget crises in many states are calling for a re-examination of teacher contracts and retirement systems for those currently in the classroom, and real or perceived deficiencies in those planning to enter the profession are serving to constrain the number of those wishing to become teachers.

Indeed, much is required of educators. They must be knowledgeable about child and adolescent development, academic content, and pedagogical skills. And to teach effectively, some have said that educator talents must include being an actor, a manager, developer of curriculum, and marketer of their content (Swerdlow, n.d.), all for a captive audience who may or may not share in the teacher's love of content and children.

The expectations for educators are certainly steep, and accordingly there is a set of increased requirements for those entering the profession. In many states, this rightly or wrongly starts with some kind of assessment of fundamental skills.

### The Basic Skills Test

In Illinois, the initial certification exam required for entrance into any teacher preparation program is the Basic Skills Test (BST). This assessment has separate scores reported in four areas: Reading Comprehension, Language Arts, Mathematics, and Writing, where an essay is actually written during the testing period as a part of the BST. Until recently, the minimal scoring was determined as follows, with results translated into a scaled score between 100 and 300 (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2004, p. 6): Reading Comprehension, 50% of questions correct; Language Arts, 50% of questions correct; Mathematics, 35% of questions correct; and Writing, score of 5 out of 12. Additionally, all four sections had to be passed at the same time during a

single testing session with the needed scaled score of 240 for each subarea, and prospective teachers had an unlimited number of opportunities to take and pass the BST.

Perhaps in response to the controversial National Council on Teacher Quality's [NCTQ] negative evaluation of the state's ability to deliver well prepared teachers (NCTQ, 2009), and perhaps as a part of the state's entry into the Race to the Top federal funding for education, in 2010 the ISBE announced significant changes in this initial certification exam (Pearson Education, 2011; ISBE 2010b, ISBE 2010c). First, the minimum scores for each subarea were adjusted as follows (Tomlinson, 2010): Reading Comprehension, 79% of questions correct; Language Arts, 79% of questions correct; Mathematics, 75% of questions correct; and Writing, Score of 5 out of 12. This change in scoring was recognized by the NCTQ (2010) as a noted policy change. Second, the test results were re-scaled. While a score of 240 is still needed to pass, this number reflects the new pass rates. Third, each subsection is now scored independently, and passing scores can be earned on individual sections and "banked" without the need to pass all subsections concurrently. Finally, the maximum number of attempts to take the entire test or any portion of the test was "capped" at five.

The effect of these changes may be observed by comparing the results under the "old" and "new" scoring systems as presented in Table 1. While this comparison is based on only one test date under each scoring system, as might be expected the percentage of those passing each subtest decreased under the revised methodology, in some cases markedly so. Should such a trend continue, it would ironically undermine the state's ability to address a second concern identified by the NCTQ (2009): the need to *expand* the teaching pool (emphasis added).

**Table 1:** Comparison of Passing Rates between "Old" and "New" Scoring Methodologies

Basic Skills Test Category	"Old" Pass Rates	"New" Pass Rates
	December 16, 2010 (ISBE, 2010a)	February 12, 2011 (ISBE, 2011)
Reading	57%	52%
Language Arts	52%	40%
Mathematics	61%	47%
Writing	88%	85%
All 4 subareas concurrently	36%	28%

At least in part because of the notable decrease in passing scores in some areas resulting from this new scoring system, some are calling for a reexamination of the new "cut scores" and requesting an alternative to the BST (Victoria Chou, et. al., personal communication via e-mail, March 15, 2011, in an open letter to Jesse Ruiz, Chair, Illinois State Board of Education and Chris Koch, Superintendent, Illinois State Board of Education). One suggestion in this recommendation was to accept an ACT score of 22 in lieu of the BST. As passage of this first of three state certification exams is required for admission into any teacher preparation program in the state, it would be most beneficial to

have some early means of determining if this is an acceptable substitute and, if so, identifying what criteria are associated with those who are able to pass the various portions of the BST. It is for this reason that the current research is being conducted, the initial results of which will be presented below.

### The Basic Skills Test and ACT Scores

One potential indicator of results on the BST can be ACT scores. This set of measurements was selected because of their near-universal use within the state for college admissions, because some BST subareas provide initial face value potential of correlating with the ACT subscores (in addition to a composite score, individual results are reported for English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning), and simply because of score availability.

### Methodology

The data were collected after the first three BST administrations following the implementation of new scoring procedures in September, 2010, and data were gathered from two main sources. First, within the institution where this research was conducted student ACT scores were available through the student advising system. These were combined with print test results made available to the institution by the Illinois Certification Testing System. Second, in an effort to increase the number of scores examined the offer was made to other institutions to submit data for their students. Data was received from one other institution, resulting in a pool of 51 records. No effort was made to eliminate multiple scores from single students (in the case of BST re-tests in individual subarea), and no effort was made to discern whether each subtest was passed on the first or subsequent date. As a result, some individuals may have had multiple entries in the data set.

### Procedure

A correlation matrix was constructed for the four subareas of the Basic Skills Test (Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, and Writing), and the five subscores of the ACT (English, Mathematics, Reading, Science Reasoning, and an overall Composite score). For individuals with partially complete records (as in the case of a BST re-test where not all sections would need to be retaken), records without the needed scores were not included in the computation for that particular correlation. When pairs of scores within this matrix produced a statistically significant correlation coefficient, the regression equation was established and utilized to determine the ACT score that would be the best predictor of passing performance on each section of the BST.

### Results

The correlation matrix is presented in Table 2. The Basic Skills Test subareas of Reading, Language Arts, and Mathematics were all strongly correlated to all 5 ACT scores ( $p < .001$ ). The BST Writing subarea was somewhat correlated to four of the five ACT scores, with no statistically significant relationship between the BST Writing and ACT Science.

Given the strong correlational relationships, the next step was to utilize regression equations to identify what ACT scores would be necessary to earn a passing score of 240 in each area of the BST. The following ACT scores were

associated with a passing score on each of the four BST subareas: an ACT English subscore of 25; an ACT Mathematics subscore of 26; an ACT Reading subscore of 25; an ACT Science subscore of 27; an ACT composite score of 25.

**Table 2:** Correlation Matrix between Basic Skills Test Scores and ACT Test Scores

ACT Scores	Basic Skills Test Scores			
	Reading (n = 42)	Language Arts (n = 44)	Mathematics (n = 44)	Writing (n = 35)
English	r = .703****	r = .718****	r = .664****	r = .484***
Math	r = .676****	r = .720****	r = .783****	r = .348*
Reading	r = .658****	r = .671****	r = .684****	r = .351*
Science Reasoning	r = .624****	r = .700****	r = .525****	r = .243
Composite	r = .736****	r = .769****	r = .739****	r = .410**

All two-tailed tests: \* p < .05 \*\* p < .02 \*\*\* p < .01 \*\*\*\* p < .001

### Discussion and Conclusion

It is particularly curious that the BST Writing subarea was most weakly associated with each of the five ACT scores. It would seem to reason that if one had strong ACT scores in English and/or reading that these would translate into a corresponding BST score in writing, but this was not at all the case. One possible explanation of this phenomenon is that on the BST an actual essay is written as a part of the assessment. Any comparable process or product scores available through the ACT were unobtainable for this data set thus rendering traditional multiple choice assessments in other areas a relatively poor predictor of how one would perform in an actual writing task.

Some clarification may be in order on how the above ACT predictors were established. First, each ACT subscore was associated with each of the four BST measures. For instance, the ACT Mathematics subscores needed to pass the BST sections on Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics and Writing were 23.6, 25.3, 22.0 and 17.4 respectively. If the ACT Mathematics subscore were to be used as the single predictor for passing all sections of the BST, the maximum of these four ACT scores, in this case 25.3 would be required. While ACT scores are rounded using the conventional method (ACT, 2011) and thus reported in whole numbers only, because rounding down (to 25) would fall short of the projected BST passing score, the ceiling function was applied to obtain a

most conservative ACT estimate. That is,  $\lceil 25.3 \rceil = 26$ , the value reported above. For purposes of discussion, the actual decimal values will be used below.

An interesting pattern was that, without exception, each of the ACT predictors was determined by the BST subarea topic in Language Arts. Referring to the ACT Mathematics predictor above, the 25.3 ACT score was in the area of Language Arts. As another example, the ACT Composite scores needed to pass each section of the BST are as follows: Reading: 23.1, Language Arts: 24.4, Mathematics: 22.2, and Writing, 18.7. The largest of these ACT scores establishes the minimum needed to pass all four BST subsections, and again this occurs in the area of Language Arts.

For two reasons it seems preferable to utilize the ACT Composite score as a predictor of success on the BST: First, the ACT Composite is the mathematical average of the four subscores (ACT, 2011). Therefore, this one number already reflects performance in the other areas. Second, the ACT Composite score is by far the most common one used to communicate results on this test. Therefore, the data seem to indicate an ACT Composite score of 25 ( $\lceil 24.4 \rceil = 25$ ) is best associated with the ability to pass all four sections of the BST. This is three points greater than that recommended by Chou et al. (personal communication via e-mail, March 15, 2011).

As the title of this article indicates, these findings are preliminary and subject to change as more data are accumulated. Regardless, there are very clear trends evident in the data that may be useful to teacher educators, high school guidance counselors, teachers, and others as they advise students considering education as a profession. The results of this study are also important to colleges and schools of education throughout the state as they consider admissions requirements into their respective programs. While a college or university may determine minimal requirements for admission into the institution, this data implies that much higher standards may be required for those entering into a specific program leading to an initial teaching certificate in the state of Illinois. Of course, while correlation does not show causality, the relationships that exist do indicate certain levels of ACT performance that are associated with scores needed to pass the initial state certification examination in the state of Illinois. As a result, the required higher levels of performance on the BST may well significantly constrain the number of those who are able to enter the education profession.

### References

- ACT. (2011). *Understanding your scores*. Retrieved from <http://www.actstudent.org/scores/understand/index.html>
- Illinois State Board of Education. (2004). *Illinois Certification Testing System Study Guide: Basic Skills*. Amherst, MA: Illinois Certification Testing System / National Evaluation Systems, Inc. (Available on-line at [http://www.icts.nesinc.com/PDFs/IL\\_field096\\_SG.pdf](http://www.icts.nesinc.com/PDFs/IL_field096_SG.pdf))
- Illinois State Board of Education. (2010a). *December 16, 2010: Basic Skills Test Administration*. Retrieved from [http://www.isbe.net/certification/pdf/basic\\_skills\\_test\\_results\\_12-10.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/certification/pdf/basic_skills_test_results_12-10.pdf)

- Illinois State Board of Education. (2010b). *New Basic Skills Test Design*. Retrieved from [http://isbe.net/certification/pdf/basic\\_skills\\_changes\\_2010.pdf](http://isbe.net/certification/pdf/basic_skills_changes_2010.pdf)
- Illinois State Board of Education. (2010c). *Illinois Certification Testing System: 2010-2011 Registration Bulletin*. Retrieved from [http://www.icts.nesinc.com/PDFs/IL\\_20102011RegistrationBulletin.pdf](http://www.icts.nesinc.com/PDFs/IL_20102011RegistrationBulletin.pdf)
- Illinois State Board of Education. (2011). *February 12, 2011: Basic Skills Test Administration*. Retrieved from [http://isbe.net/certification/pdf/basic\\_skills\\_test\\_results\\_021211.pdf](http://isbe.net/certification/pdf/basic_skills_test_results_021211.pdf)
- Pearson Education, Inc. (2011). *2010-2011 ICTS Registration Bulletin*. (Retrieved from [http://www.icts.nesinc.com/IL15\\_passingrequirements.asp](http://www.icts.nesinc.com/IL15_passingrequirements.asp).) Amhurst, MA: Evaluation Systems, Pearson.
- National Council on Teacher Quality. (2009). *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*. Washington, DC: NCTQ.
- National Council on Teacher Quality. (2010). *Blueprint for Change in Illinois: State Teacher Policy Yearbook, 2010*. Washington, DC: NCTQ.
- Swerdlow, R.M. (n.d.). *The Complete Teacher Program*. Retrieved from <http://completeteacher.com/>
- Tomlinson, L. (2010, October). *Teacher Education in Illinois: A Changing World*. Presentation to the Illinois Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, Springfield, Illinois.

## THE ILLINOIS TEACHER GRADUATE ASSESSMENT: METHODS, RESULTS, AND LESSONS LEARNED

by  
Stephen E. Lucas

STEPHEN E. LUCAS is Chair of the Department of Secondary Education and Foundations at Eastern Illinois University and Director of the Teacher Graduate Assessment for the Illinois Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education.

### Abstract

*The Illinois Teacher Graduate Assessment is a voluntary, collaborative effort of the twelve university members of the Illinois Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education. This annual survey of first-year teachers and their supervisors seeks to ascertain the degree to which beginning teachers are prepared to be successful in the classroom. During the first seven years of the project, 15,126 first-year teachers and their supervisors have been invited to participate and 57 percent have completed surveys. This article reports (a) the goals of this project; (b) how the survey has been developed and implemented; (c) some of the survey's major findings during its first seven years; and (d) the major important lessons learned about the survey's process, results, and uses.*

The Illinois Teacher Graduate Assessment began in 2004 with the primary purpose of providing data that could inform teacher education program improvement at each of the twelve participating colleges of education. A secondary purpose was to be responsive to calls for educational accountability related to teacher preparation and effectiveness. The primary assessment questions that were examined in the development of this project were: (1) How are teacher preparation programs performing in the preparation of students related to understanding and using professional teaching and student learning standards in the state of Illinois? (2) What is the usefulness or value of instruction, pre-student teaching, and student teaching from the perspective of recent graduates?

By surveying first-year teachers and their supervisors, the Teacher Graduate Assessment generates information that can be used for teacher education program improvement and that is responsive to broader state education needs. Specifically, the project aims to:

1. Provide a standardized assessment of new teacher graduates of all public colleges in Illinois.
2. Provide a specific examination of teacher skills related to the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards and the Illinois Learning Standards for the purpose of identifying areas of improvement for teacher preparation programs and for ongoing new teacher professional development needs.
3. Provide institutions with institution-specific data on student learning in teacher education programs that will assist with program improvement efforts.
4. Proactively respond to calls for accountability related to teacher preparation by gathering information that can inform policy makers and

the public about teacher preparation programs in Illinois and new teacher practice in the first year of teaching.

Representatives from the state's twelve public colleges of education, along with representatives from the state's board of education, board of higher education, and teacher data warehouse, began meeting in 2004 to collaboratively develop a survey to be mailed to teachers completing their first year of certificated professional work and the immediate supervisors of these new teachers. The first administration of the surveys was conducted during the spring of 2005; the surveys have been administered each of the years since, with the most recent administration (2011) representing the seventh consecutive year of the survey.

This paper describes five major aspects of this project: (1) how Illinois's twelve public colleges of education collaborated to develop and fund the project; (2) the processes used to administer the survey; (3) an overview of some of the more important survey results; (4) how the colleges of education have used the survey results for both individual and collaborative program improvement; and (5) lessons learned after seven years of the project.

### Literature Review

The Teacher Graduate Assessment project is situated within the teacher education reform movement that began with the Holmes Group and Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession during the *A Nation at Risk* era (Wiggins, 1986) and continues today with the requirements for "highly qualified teachers" in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Throughout this era, competing and conflicting ideas have abounded regarding what best constitutes "learning to teach" (Eisenhart, 1991), with many questioning the ability or willingness of university-based teacher education programs to prepare educators for the new realities facing public schools (Levine, 2006).

Many of these new realities are centered on the increasingly complex student body new teachers are asked to teach. As just one example, the number of English language learners in public schools increased by 30 percent during the 1990s (Dong, 2004). Consequently, many school districts, particularly urban systems with large proportions of poor, second language, or ethnic minority students, face a critical shortage of teachers that has been well documented (Follo, Hoerr, & Vorheis-Sargent, 2002). Teacher education programs are thus faced with the need to radically alter their preservice preparation programs to ensure that their graduates have at least a reasonable chance of success in their initial placements (Barnes, 2006). Fortunately, it appears that more and more school districts—sometimes in formal partnerships with colleges of education—are providing supports for new teachers, most often with mentoring programs and increased professional development offerings targeted toward novice educators (Marlow & Inman, 2004; Gilbert, 2005).

Research is emerging which identifies promising teacher education practices that prepare candidates for the new, dual realities of high accountability and an increasingly complex social situation (Poplin & Rivera, 2005). Additionally, the United States Department of Education has established criteria for identifying effective teacher education programs, including licensure

requirements, standards, accreditation, P-12 partnerships, and continuous improvement. The focus on continuous improvement—directly relevant to the aims of the Teacher Graduate Assessment project—includes fostering commitment to using data for improvement, building partnerships and connections, modeling effective communication and collaboration, and promoting participation in the evaluation system (Dean, Lauer, & Urquhart, 2005).

Finally, the literature also points to the role that colleges of education, and their leaders, can play in improving teacher education through program evaluation and continuous improvement. One dimension of this challenge lies in coordinating the efforts of preparation institutions, schools, and teachers (Haworth, 1983). Dillon and Starkman (1981) proposed a model of teacher education program evaluation that has much value today, incorporating such aspects as program modification, field-based perspective, longitudinal approach, involvement of all related program personnel, and the use of reliable and comprehensive data. More recent writers (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2006), are optimistic about the improvement of teacher education as they note such trends as a focus on teacher quality, using research to guide the teacher education curriculum, the documentation of preparation practices, and focusing on desired outcomes, such as student learning.

### The Illinois Teacher Graduate Assessment Project

The Illinois Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education (IADPCE) is comprised of the deans of the colleges of education in Illinois's twelve public universities: Chicago State University, Eastern Illinois University, Governors State University, Illinois State University, Northeastern Illinois University, Northern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Illinois at Springfield, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Western Illinois University. The members of the IADPCE meet regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern and to coordinate activities of mutual benefit, such as lobbying state and national legislators and governing agencies.

Partly in response to the "highly qualified teacher" provision of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, but also with a desire to develop a truly state-wide assessment of the state of teacher preparation in Illinois, the members of the IADPCE in 2004 decided to develop, fund, and seek outside funding for a common assessment of graduates of the universities' teacher preparation programs. Among the first decisions made was that the assessment must seek to measure the degree to which graduates were prepared in accordance with the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, which were formalized in 1999 and to which all preparation programs were to be aligned by 2003 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2003). A director for the project was hired, as well as clerical and graduate research assistants; this staff was housed at Eastern Illinois University and reported directly to EIU's Dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies. The members of the IADPCE named an advisory committee to oversee the development of survey instruments, administration protocol, and data reporting. This committee is comprised of a

representative from each member institution, as well as representatives from the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Teacher Data Warehouse, and the director of the Teacher Graduate Assessment project. The committee was charged with developing the initial survey instruments as well as reviewing and updating the instruments on a periodic basis.

Over the first seven years of the project, funding has come from three types of sources. The first source has been the twelve member institutions themselves. Each college of education is assessed a prorated annual fee based on the number of graduates of its teacher education program. The second source of funding has been two state agencies—the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE). The funding from the IBHE has been included in the annual *No Child Left Behind* grant process. The final source of funding—accessed only during the first year of the project—was a major private philanthropic organization focused on educational quality in the Chicago area.

### **Survey Administration and Data Analysis**

*Survey Recipient Identification.* The Illinois Teacher Data Warehouse (TDW) was developed in response to Title II of the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education act. This data tracking system is housed at the University of Illinois and annually receives data from two sets of institutions. The first set of institutions is comprised of the colleges of education which prepare and graduate new teacher candidates, and the second set of institutions is comprised of the state's approximately 950 public school districts. By the end of January each year, the TDW has received, in electronic format, comprehensive demographic and professional information on every teacher education program graduate and every certified teacher employed in a public school in the state. Once all of these data have been received, the TDW sorts and matches the data to produce a database in which every teacher completed a teacher education program and received his or her initial teacher certification in the preceding academic year and was employed in a certified teaching position in an Illinois public school during the current school year. Once this database is compiled, the TDW matches each teacher's record to school name, address, phone number, and principal's name for the teacher's assigned school of record. The TDW then generates unique log-ins and passwords for each teacher and principal and forwards the file electronically to the director of the Teacher Graduate Assessment project at Eastern Illinois University. This process is typically completed by the end of February.

*Survey Preparation and Mailing.* Concurrently with the process of developing the survey recipient database, the Teacher Data Warehouse also updates the existing web-based survey, which is housed on a server at the University of Illinois. Survey participants—both teachers and principals—have the option of completing a traditional paper survey and mailing it to the project office at Eastern Illinois University, or completing an online survey using an assigned log-in and password. During the month of February, project staff at Eastern Illinois University prepare the sets of survey materials that will be mailed out beginning in March. Each survey participant receives a “pre-minder” post card (about one week before the survey begins), a survey invitation packet

(containing an invitation letter, paper survey, and instructions), and up to two “reminder” post cards (about two and four weeks after the survey packet is mailed). Project staff use mail-merge software and the letterheads of the participating institutions to “personalize” the pre-minder, invitation packet, and reminder materials to the greatest extent possible. Survey incentives, in the form of gift cards and digital music devices, are offered for completing surveys. The goal each year is to have the survey invitation packet mailed out by mid-March, which allows about a six-week window for receiving completed surveys by the end of April.

*Survey Receipt and Follow-up.* There has typically been a six-week window for receiving completed surveys. Surveys may be completed by using the online, web-based survey interface or by completing a mailing the paper survey included in the survey invitation packet. Paper surveys are read by project staff and entered directly into the on-line survey interface. During the window for data collection, the project's director reviews survey responses using the on-line interface and updates institution-specific lists of graduates who have and have not responded. On a weekly basis, the director emails an updated list to each participating institution. This list contains the names of graduates and principals who have not yet responded, as well as the school name and phone number. Participating colleges of education are encouraged to use clerical and student staff to place reminder phone calls on a weekly basis to non-responding teachers and principals in order to increase the overall and institution-specific response rates.

*Data Analysis and Reporting.* The receipt and entering of all data from both teachers and principals is typically completed by the middle of May. Project staff then use the months of June and July to inspect the data, correct any problems, and perform descriptive analyses of the data at both the institution-specific and state aggregate levels. By August 1, the director delivers to each college of education a report containing charts and tables representing descriptive analysis of all questions in the survey. Each institution's report contains these analyses in longitudinal form for the most recent three years for both the institution and the state aggregate. Also included in the report are the raw narrative responses to a set of open-ended questions for teachers (three questions) and principals (one question). For the most recent (2011) administration of the survey, these reports were approximately 200 to 350 pages long for each institution. Institutions also receive their reports in an electronic form, as well as their raw data in Excel and SPSS formats. An overview of the major findings of the survey, in PowerPoint format, is also included in electronic form.

### **Overview of Important Survey Results**

In the most recent form of the survey (2011), the teacher survey contains a total of 111 items to which participants may respond, and the principal survey contains 60 items. With the inclusion of other demographic and professional data included from the Teacher Data Warehouse database, this yields 171 data points for each teacher for whom there is a completed teacher and principal survey. Thus, this report contains only an overview of some of the more important results of the first seven years of the survey. Additionally, to



simplify the results, all data have been aggregated for the first seven years of the survey, unless otherwise noted.

*Population, Response Rates, and Survey Formats.* During the survey's first seven years, 15,126 first-year teachers and their principals have been invited to participate. The largest survey pool was 2,482 teacher-principal pairs (2008); the smallest was 1,333 pairs (2011). Principals have responded at a higher rate than teachers, ranging from a low of 59 percent (2006) to a high of 69 percent (2010). Teacher response rates have ranged from a low of 43 percent (2007) to a high of 57 percent (2010). During the first year of the survey (2005), 33 percent of all responses were made via the online survey format; this rate was 45 percent in 2008 and 80 percent in 2011.

*Participant Demographics.* The demographic characteristics of responding teachers have closely mirrored what is known about the demographic characteristics of beginning teachers. Over the first three years of the project, 76 percent of the respondents have been female, 88 percent have been white, 4 percent African-American, 2 percent Asian-American, and 5 percent Hispanic. 35 percent of the responding teachers have been high school teachers, 25 percent middle school/ junior high teachers, 32 percent elementary teachers, and 8 percent have been assigned to multiple grade levels. About 19 percent of respondents have indicated that they are special educators.

*Career and Program Satisfaction.* Teacher participants were asked to assess the degree to which they were satisfied with (1) their decisions related to entering the teaching profession and (2) the quality of the teacher preparation program. A four-point Likert scale (very satisfied, satisfied, unsatisfied, very unsatisfied) was used to measure student responses. In relation to their career decisions, during the first seven years of the survey, 98 percent have reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their each of the following decisions: (a) to become a teacher, (b) their choice of grade level (e.g., elementary, middle school, high school), and (c) their choice of subject area (e.g., English, physical education, multiple-subjects/self-contained, special education). With regard to satisfaction with the quality of their teacher education programs, the results have been more varied. 92 percent have been "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the overall quality of their program; 94 percent have been "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their interaction with program faculty; 92 percent have been "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their student teaching supervision. The least satisfactory aspect of their experience has been with program advising, with which 82 percent of students were "satisfied" or "very satisfied."

*Professional Teaching Standards.* The survey uses the State of Illinois's eleven professional teaching standards, two technology standards, one literacy standard, and the Illinois Learning Standards (represented as a holistic item) to assess the teachers' self-reported understanding and use or practice of standards-based competencies during their first year of teaching. Thus, a set of fifteen standards-based items are presented for response. Principals are also asked to report their perception of their new teachers in relation to these items. For the understanding of the standards a four-point Likert scale (not at all, somewhat, mostly, completely) is used; for the use or practice another four-

point Likert scale (not at all, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time) is used.

Teachers report that they "mostly" or "completely" understand the standards in a range from 83 percent (literacy strategies) to 98 percent (professional conduct). Other rates of "mostly" or "completely" understanding the standards were: content knowledge (93 percent), human development (92 percent), student diversity (95 percent), instructional planning (94 percent), student motivation (92 percent), instructional strategies (93 percent), effective communication (92 percent), assessment strategies (92 percent), working with community and parents (89 percent), being a reflective practitioner (96 percent), technology hardware and software (86 percent), technology integration (86 percent), and the state's student learning standards (94 percent).

Teacher responses for using or practicing the standards "most" or "all" of the time during the first year are more varied, with a range from 61 percent (technology integration) to 98 percent (professional conduct). Other rates of using or practicing the standards "most" or "all" of the time were: content knowledge (87 percent), human development (86 percent), student diversity (89 percent), instructional planning (91 percent), student motivation (90 percent), instructional strategies (86 percent), effective communication (87 percent), assessment strategies (86 percent), working with community and parents (75 percent), reflective practice (91 percent), computer software and hardware (65 percent), literacy strategies (77 percent), and using student learning standards (91 percent).

While principals were also asked about the extent to which they perceived their new teachers understood the professional teaching standards, only the degree to which they perceived that the new teachers used or practiced these standards is reported here. Of interest here, of course, is the difference that can be ascertained between the teachers' self-reported use or practice of the standards and the perception of the principals. Principals reported that the lowest use or practice of a standard was that of technology integration (74 percent, but this was 13 percent higher than what teachers self-reported), while the highest use or practice of a standard was that of professional conduct (92 percent, but this was 6 percent lower than what teachers self-reported). Other rates of using or practicing the standards "most" or "all" of the time were: content knowledge (87 percent; same as teachers' self-report), human development (85 percent; 1 percent lower than teachers' self-report), student diversity (81 percent; 8 percent lower than teachers' self-report), instructional planning (86 percent; 5 percent lower than teachers' self-report); student motivation (84 percent; 6 percent lower than teachers' self-report); instructional strategies (82 percent; 4 percent lower than teachers' self-report), effective communication (84 percent; 3 percent lower than teachers' self-report); assessment strategies (81 percent; 5 percent lower than teachers' self-report); working with community and parents (72 percent; 3 percent lower than teachers' self-report), reflective practice (82 percent; 9 percent lower than teachers' self-report), computer software and hardware (79 percent; 14 percent higher than teachers' self-report); literacy strategies (78 percent; 1 percent

higher than teachers' self-report); and using student learning standards (89 percent; 2 percent lower than teachers' self-report).

*Preparation Program Objectives.* The survey includes a section of preparation program objectives common to the participating institutions. Both teachers and principals are asked about the degree to which the graduate had been prepared to be a successful new teacher; responses were measured with a four-point Likert scale (not at all, somewhat, moderately, extremely). Responses for being "moderately" or "extremely" prepared ranged from a combined low of 23 percent (teachers) and 54 percent (principals) for teaching English language learners to a combined high of 86 percent (teachers) and 89 percent (principals) for developmentally appropriate instruction. Other rates of being "moderately" or "extremely" prepared were: workplace environment (74 percent teachers; 91 percent principals), multicultural strategies (57 percent teachers; 71 percent principals), accommodating students with exceptionalities (71 percent teachers; 84 percent principals), using technology (70 percent teachers; 86 percent principals), addressing socioeconomic diversity (65 percent teachers; 81 percent principals), student assessment (85 percent teachers; 87 percent principals), managing student behavior (63 percent teachers; 81 percent principals), establishing classroom equity (74 percent teachers; 90 percent principals); teaching of content (82 percent teachers; 95 percent principals); teaching of reading in content area (63 percent teachers; 82 percent principals); working with school administration (42 percent teachers; 92 percent principals); working with parents and guardians (48 percent teachers; 88 percent principals), and working in a high accountability environment (60 percent teachers; 86 percent principals).

*Student Teaching.* Program graduates were asked whether certain aspects of their student teaching experience were "not at all," "somewhat," "moderately," or "extremely" valuable. 87 percent of graduates reported that their cooperating teacher was "moderately" or "extremely" valuable in observing their student teaching efforts; 81 percent of graduates reported that their university supervisor was "moderately" or "extremely" helpful in this regard. 84 percent of graduates reported that their cooperating teacher was "moderately" or "extremely" valuable when discussing their lesson plans, while 75 percent of university supervisors were "moderately" or "extremely" helpful. Finally, 91 percent of graduates reported that their cooperating teacher was "moderately" or "extremely" valuable in discussing the student teachers' performance, while 84 percent of university supervisors were "moderately" or "extremely" valuable here.

*Career Intentions.* The concluding section (other than the open-ended responses) of the survey asked teacher respondents to project their anticipated career plans. 61 percent of the teachers indicated that they planned to remain in teaching for "as long as possible." 15 percent planned to remain in teaching but intended to seek a position in another building or district. 11 percent indicated that they would remain in teaching but would take a break at some point to care for family; 7 percent planned to remain in education but to seek a role other than teaching; 5 percent indicated that they would remain in teaching for a "few years"; and 1 percent responded that they planned to leave teaching "as soon

as possible." Thus, about 94 percent of first-year teachers responding indicated that they intended to remain in education as a life-long career.

*Open-ended Responses.* Both teachers and principals had the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions. Teachers had three questions: (1) "Describe one element in your program that was most valuable in your preparation for teaching. Briefly tell what made that element valuable for you in your preparation." (2) "Describe one element in your program that was least valuable in your preparation for teaching. Briefly describe what made this element of the program the least valuable to you." (3) "What specific improvement do you think should be made in the teacher education program where you earned your teacher certification?" Principals had one question: "Describe an area of strength and an area of weakness that is in your view related to this teacher's preparation program." The responses to these questions are captured by the on-line survey site (whether entered by the survey respondent or program staff using completed paper surveys) are reported in their entirety to each individual institutions. These responses are not reported in the state aggregate report.

### **Use of Results by Colleges of Education**

*Use of Aggregate Results.* The Illinois Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education (IADPCE) has used the aggregate (state-wide) results in three main ways. First, the deans have used the results in internal discussions of the IADPCE to gauge the state of teacher preparation programs in the state of Illinois. The IADPCE is a unique entity in its voluntary yet comprehensive nature, with all twelve institutions participating and supporting the association without any formal mandate from the state itself. This voluntary and comprehensive relationship has led to a high degree of collaboration and openness concerning the state of teacher education and the challenges facing the institutions during this era of educational change and accountability. The aggregate results of the Teacher Graduate Assessment have enabled the deans to use a common vocabulary and set of measures to monitor, on a continuous basis, the most immediate, concrete results of their efforts to prepare new teachers for the state's schools.

Second, the IADPCE has used the assessment's results to inform external stakeholders and constituencies, including community groups, governmental agencies, and legislators. While the results of the assessment point out areas of concern, on the whole the assessments paints a positive picture of teacher preparation in the state's public colleges of education. The deans are able to show stakeholders and the public that both graduates and those who hire the graduates are pleased with the initial preparation of teachers, and that even in areas of concern (e.g., preparation to teach English language learners), progress is being made and steps are being taken to improve the situation (see below).

Third, the deans have used the state-wide aggregate results to identify and prioritize high need improvement areas. For instance, it has been plainly evident that the preparation of teachers to work with students who are English language learners is a pressing, not distant need. Thus, the deans have collaborated to develop strategies and fund initiatives for the first steps in

remedying this situation, i.e., identifying experts who can begin advising the IADPCE about strategies for program improvement in relation to ELL issues and putting on an initial state-wide workshop for education faculty about this area. The deans are committed to continuing to use the aggregate data to further monitor progress in both this area and in other areas that come to be identified as priorities for improvement at the state-wide level.

*Individual Institutions.* Each participating individual receives each year a report of longitudinal data for both the institution and the state-wide aggregate. Thus, each institution is able to track its results across several years and in relation to the state as a whole. Additionally, each institution receives its data in raw, electronic (Excel and SPSS) formats so that further analysis, including disaggregation by program (e.g., elementary, special education, certification area) can be performed if desired. The actual use of these data has been varied by institution. Although there has been no systematic research about this matter, anecdotal evidence reveals that some institutions do, in fact, perform detailed disaggregation of the electronic data, while others are satisfied with distributing and discussing the received hard-copy annual report. Perhaps the most prominent use of the data from the assessment has been by institutions in the midst of formal accreditation processes, such as that of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which is placing increased emphasis on the use of data in general and of data related to program graduate satisfaction and competence specifically.

### **Lessons Learned**

*1. Lessons Related to Collaboration.* Perhaps more important than the actual results of the assessment has been the way the assessment process and conversations about the results have served as agents for developing collaboration among the twelve participating institutions. While any collaboration among twelve relatively autonomous institutions is bound to have ups and downs and rough spots, this project—now in its fourth year—has experienced consistently strong support and cooperation by the participating universities. While both deanships and the assessment advisory committee membership have experienced typical turnover during the four years, the assessment has proceeded smoothly and seems to be improving in both process and outcomes each year. The lesson learned is that it is possible for institutions to voluntarily come together to create a process and product that is both more comprehensive and powerful than those which could be produced by any individual institution, or even a subset of the twelve institutions. Key factors in enabling this accomplishment included sufficient funding raised both internally (the twelve institutions) and externally (state boards of education and higher education; private foundation), which enabled the IADPCE to hire staff entirely dedicated to facilitating and launching the assessment during the start-up phase of the project.

*2. Lessons Related to Processes Used to Administer the Survey.* Now that the project is beyond the “start-up” phase and in an “on-going” mode, it is evident that the annual process of developing the survey recipient database, producing materials, collecting data, analyzing data, and report-writing takes about seven months per year. During the start-up phase (first two years), a full-

time director, half-time secretary, and one or two graduate assistants were employed year-round. During years three through seven, a half-time director and half-time secretary have been able to complete the project each year. Heading into the project’s eighth year, the staff is comprised of a quarter-time director, a year-round half-time graduate assistant, and another half-time graduate assistant to assist in summer report writing. The most intense time of work for the project is late February through mid-May (survey mail-out and data collection) and June-July (data analysis and report writing). The lesson learned is that although the initial year or two of the survey required heavier staffing and greater expenditures, the current phase of the survey (on-going and established) required lighter staffing and less expenditures. It was important to make the shift in terms of staff and expenditures in order to enable the project to proceed as an on-going process without undue fiscal demands. A key component was identifying a faculty member who was willing and able to direct the project as either a part of his or her workload or in addition to that workload, as it was not feasible to hire a person to solely direct the project. Fortunately, because the workload most demanding of the director’s time and energy occurs during summer (data analysis and report writing), this works well with having a faculty member teaching during the academic year and focusing on the project during the summer months. Additionally, it now seems important to have a director who is (a) familiar with teacher education, (b) able to manage and/or perform data collection, analysis, and report writing, and (c) facilitate the work of the advisory committee, project staff, and staff at the Teacher Data Warehouse.

*3. Lessons Related to Survey Results.* Overall, the institutions participating in the assessment are pleased with the degree to which the assessment’s survey is capturing the kinds of data of information that are helpful at both the aggregate and individual institution levels. Evidence for this assertion includes the fact that each annual revision of the survey has resulted in fewer changes being made. Additionally, anecdotal feedback from both advisory committee members and deans indicates a high level of satisfaction with both the process and the use of results for internal improvement and accreditation efforts. Each year efforts have been made to improve the usability of the reported results, and suggestions for improvement of the report have been incorporated. The lesson learned is that, indeed, an assessment survey collaboratively developed and refined by participating institutions can prove to be of high value and use, particularly if there is a process whereby project staff systematically gather, synthesize, and incorporate feedback annually into survey revisions. Another, emerging lesson that is being learned is that perhaps the most powerful data that are emerging from the survey’s results are the longitudinal data, which enable university faculty and administrators to gauge trends and progress as they make incremental changes to their preparation programs.

*4. Lessons Related to the Use of Results.* While the use of the aggregate state-wide results by the IADPCE has been fairly consistent, anecdotal feedback indicates that the use of the results from institution to institution has been more idiosyncratic. This is probably attributable to a handful of factors: (1) by definition, institutions have differing views of the value and use

of assessment, data, and continuous improvement processes; (2) the use of assessment results and data can be very complex and even contentious in organizations comprised of professional faculty, especially if these processes are novel to them; (3) there have been changes in deans at the majority of the participating institutions during the project's seven years, leading perhaps inevitably to varying degrees of use of the assessment results in the individual colleges of education. The lesson learned here is that, while it is tempting from the "project's" point of view to press for a somewhat systematic, uniform use of the assessment results in the individual institutions, it is probably unrealistic and unwise to expect this to happen. To be sure, there is only anecdotal information at this time that leads project staff to believe that the use of the assessment results at the individual institutions is "uneven."

### References

- Barnes, C. J. (2006). Preparing preservice teachers to teach in a culturally responsive way. *The Negro Educational Review*, 57(1-2), 85-100.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (2006). Ten promising trends (and three big worries). *Educational Leadership*, 62(6), 20-25.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2005). Prepping our teachers for teaching as a profession. *Education Digest*, 71(4), 22-27.
- Dean, C., Lauer, P., and Urquhart, V. (2005). Outstanding teacher education programs: What do they have that the others don't? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(4), 284-289.
- Dillon, J. T., and Starkman, S. S. (1981). A 'model' approach to evaluation of teacher education programs. *Education*, 101(4), 366-371.
- Dong, Y. R. (2004). Preparing secondary subject area teachers to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students. *The Clearing House*, 77(5), 202-206.
- Eisenhart, M. (1991). Learning to teach: Developing expertise or rite of passage? *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 17(1), 51-71.
- Follo, E., Hoerr, B., and Vorheis-Sargent, A. (2002). Where will urban high school teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century come from? *American Secondary Education*, 30(3), 2-22.
- Gilbert, L. (2005). What helps beginning teachers? *Educational Leadership*, 62(8), 26-39.
- Haworth, S. L. (1983). Leadership in teacher education: The challenge of coordination. *Education*, 104(2), 188-192.
- Inman, D., and Marlow, L. (2004). Teacher retention: Why do beginning teachers remain in the profession? *Education*, 124(4), 605-614.
- Levine, A. (2006). Will universities maintain control of teacher education? *Change*, 38(4), 36-43.
- Poplin, M. and Rivera, J. (2005). Merging social justice and accountability: Educating qualified and effective teachers. *Theory into Practice*, 44(1), 27-37.
- Wiggins, S. P. (1986). Revolution in the teaching profession: A comparative review of two reform reports. *Educational Leadership*, 44(2), 56-59.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL STAFF MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF BULLYING

by

Christina C. Pfister, Katherine R. DiFabio, and Sophia Paljevic

CHRISTINA C. PFISTER is on faculty at the Lally School of Education at the College of St. Rose, Albany, NY. KATHERINE R. DIFABIO and SOPHIA PALJEVIC are students majoring in elementary education at the College of St. Rose, Albany, NY.

### Abstract

*This paper presents results of a study involving the faculty and staff at one middle school and their perceptions and definitions of bullying. Using survey methodology, participants were asked to define bullying, to recount incidents of bullying, and to report the methods they used when confronted with a bullying situation between children. Results indicate that participants in this study (1) had a more nuanced understanding of the issues surrounding what constitutes bullying than has previously been reported in the literature, and (2) believed that children in their school were bullied less often than the average middle school child. Although there are many methods participants indicated they used when handling a bullying situation, an implication of this study is that perhaps a unified approach to addressing bullying situations would create a safer learning environment for children. Additional implications for practicing teachers and teacher education are included.*

In the past 30 years the popular understanding of bullying among school children has changed and it is no longer considered a "normal" part of childhood and adolescence. The current understanding of bullying defines it as destructive behavior with potentially far reaching impact on children's lives (Griffin & Gross, 2004; Juvonen, J. Wang, Y. & Espinoza, G., 2011; Olweus, D., 1996; Smith & Hoy, 2004; Vaillancourt, et al., 2010).

Bullying is a multifaceted problem that affects school communities on every level and persistent bullying can undermine the mission of every school. The negative effects of bullying have been researched extensively, and it has been well documented that if a child is bullied, s/he is likely to suffer anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010; Sullivan, 2000; Swearer, Grills, Haye, & Cary, 2004). This is perhaps most problematic in the middle school years. Juvonen, Wang, and Espinoza (2011) determined that a bullying victim could suffer a decrease in his/her academic achievement of more than a letter grade during middle school. Thus, the effects of bullying can be extremely severe and can psychologically affect an individual child throughout all aspects of his/her life.

Juvonen and Graham edited a book (2001) that compiled research findings on identifying and supporting victims. The seventeen articles within this text extensively explored the family lives of bullying victims and the types of students who were chronically victimized. The articles describe how bullying appears differently for students of different ages and grade levels and the work also identifies consequences and long-term effects of bullying for the victims.

Similar findings were confirmed nearly a decade later in a recent report compiled for the Institute of Educational Sciences (Petrosino, et al., 2010) where the authors discuss the affects of bullying on children's health. In

particular they cite “depression and poor health” as factors that are caused by a child being bullied (p. i).

Although bullying may manifest itself in different ways as children grow, there is clear agreement among researchers that it has detrimental effects on the lives of those children involved.

### Literature Review

Much of the current research on bullying is targeted at understanding or assisting victims of bullying. That is, it provides an understanding from a child's perspective, but to date, less research has focused on how teachers actually understand and view bullying themselves and within context of their own school setting. The literature that does exist in this area has two overarching themes; literature that looks at how teachers *define* bullying and literature that describes how teachers *perceive* bullying and its impacts on their students.

As we consider how teachers and other school staff members define bullying, we must keep in mind how researchers have defined it. Olweus (1996) defined bullying to be a situation where a child is “repeatedly exposed over time to negative actions by one or more students...” (p. 331). In general, studies report that teachers define bullying in several ways. First, it is important to look at what teachers believe bullying is and is not. Studies such as Craig, Henderson, and Murphy (2000) and Boulton (1997) reported that acts of actual or threatened physical violence are likely to be viewed by teachers as serious issues or defined as bullying. It is these physical acts (or threats of physical violence) that are seen as serious enough that teachers feel they should address these behaviors and consider them bullying. However, what teachers sometimes do not include in their personal definitions of bullying is relational bullying such as leaving someone out or other forms of exclusion (Brauman & Del Rio, 2005; Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006). This study reported that nearly 10 percent of the teachers they surveyed included only physical acts in their definition of bullying. This is consistent with the findings of Boulton as well as Craig, Henderson, and Murphy who noted that it is far more difficult for teachers to determine how to classify verbal or exclusionary behaviors because they are more difficult to see and interpret.

In summary, it appears that teachers generally define bullying in broad terms, but are more likely to include physical attacks or threats of the same in their definitions than they are to include excluding others or verbal attacks.

Within the general category of how teachers perceive bullying, the literature notes two important areas of study. First, who a teacher is as a person influences what s/he considers bullying and how serious an individual action is perceived to be. Who a person is may include personality factors, gender, and amount of experience as a teacher. Secondly, the literature points out that teachers, and other adults as a whole, tend to hold overall perceptions of bullying that differ from those held by children.

When considering teachers' perceptions, it is important to first look at individuals who happen to be teachers or other school personnel. Interestingly, studies that have looked at personal factors such as gender of the teacher as a factor largely report no significant differences between what men and women perceive as bullying (e.g., Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Smith & Hoy,

2004). It appears far more likely that the teacher's personality and own experiences with bullying will impact how s/he perceives bullying.

Several studies found that the teacher's own experiences and personal perceptions impact what s/he believes constitutes bullying and how these behaviors are differentiated from good natured teasing or “normal” play among children. Indeed, teachers' own experiences were found to be “...predictive of their attitudes toward bullying...” (Bradshaw, Sawyer, O'Brennan, 2007, p. 361). Teachers who may have experienced bullying as children themselves tend to handle incidents of bullying differently than do their counterparts with less personal experience. Additionally, since teachers are human beings, their own understandings of morality impact how they view bullying. Ellis and Shute (2007) reported significant differences between teachers scores on Caputo's (2000) Sanctioning Voice Index. Specifically there were differences in the responses of those who scored in the category of “care” moral orientation versus those who scored in the “justice” category. According to these researchers, the moral orientation of a teacher impacts how s/he will react to and intervene in a bullying situation as well as how serious s/he believes a situation to be. This is consistent with other literature and indicates that a teacher's definition of and response to bullying is dependent on the individual.

In addition to looking at teachers and school personnel as individuals, it is also important to consider them collectively as they represent the adults with whom children spend much of their daily lives. Those studies that address teachers' views report an apparent disconnect between the perceptions of adults and those of children. That is, a number of studies have looked at the perceptions of different groups and found great disparity in how bullying was perceived by teachers and other school staff members, parents, and children.

Studies such as Craig, Henderson & Murphy (2000) found that while teachers identify and define bullying broadly, they perceive it actually occurs far less than children report. Children also report that teachers are less likely to intervene in a bullying situation than the teachers themselves report. These findings were confirmed in studies by Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, and Sarvela (2002; and cited in Holt & Keyes, 2004), and Waasrop, Pas, O'Brennan, and Bradshaw (2011) where teachers and students were asked to self-report the prevalence of bullying in their school. In these and other studies, the teachers reported significantly lower prevalence rates than students did even though they were in the same school. It is possible that what children see as a lack of response from their teachers may actually be because teachers do not share the same perceptions of what constitutes bullying. A teacher witnessing the same event as a child may not believe it is serious enough to warrant intervention. This is particularly true of less physical types of bullying such as exclusion (Maunder, Harrop, & Tattersall, 2010).

It appears that who a teacher is impacts what s/he perceives as bullying. Yet it is also clear that teachers, regardless of personal characteristics, understand bullying differently than do children.

### Rationale for the Current Study & Research Question

Within the school day, teachers and school staff members have great ability to control the climate of the building and how children relate to one another.

The extent to which a child feels s/he will not be bullied and is in a safe learning environment depends largely on the ability of teachers and other staff members to prevent inappropriate or dangerous behaviors. To understand the seriousness of bullying in today's world, one need not look further than the numerous recent news stories involving children and young adults who ended their lives tragically when they felt they could no longer handle the bullying they were being subjected to.

While some research has been done to determine how teachers define and perceive bullying, clearly more is needed. Researchers such as Marshall (2009) call for further research to develop "a better understanding of teachers' direct experiences and perceptions of bullying..." (p. 155). Thus it is clear that additional understandings of how teachers in different contexts perceive bullying can help teachers, teacher educators, and others create safe classroom environments with a caring and fair atmosphere for all learners. Waasdorp, Pas, O'Brennan, and Bradshaw (2000) further the call for more information by commenting that detailed information from many different school settings is needed to develop a deeper understanding of the problem and one that is less dependent on the specifics of a particular school setting.

The primary focus of our research was to answer the question, "Given numerous recent news stories and general awareness of bullying, how do staff members at one middle school (a) define and perceive bullying, and (b) how do they respond to bullying?"

### Method

The context for this study was a small interfaith K-12 private school located in a medium sized city in the northeastern United States. Although this school mirrors public schools in the area in terms of length of school day and structure, parents do pay tuition for their children to attend this school and the school population is drawn from numerous area public school districts. While some children start at this school as first graders and progress through high school graduation, many more transfer to the school during their elementary and middle school years.

The participants were nine faculty and staff members who taught at the middle school level. Because this is a small school, these nine represent a majority of the middle school staff members. Their professional roles ranged from staff members whose primary teaching duties include math, science, social studies, and English language arts to the school librarian and nurse. Five respondents (approximately 56%) were female, while four (approximately 44%) were male. Four staff members identified themselves as being 21-35 years old and five reported they were 50+ years old. Four of the respondents were novice teachers having worked at the school for five or fewer years. The other five were more experienced having worked there for at least six or more years with two of these five noting that they had been there for sixteen years or more.

#### Study Design

Data were collected through a 16-item internet-based survey instrument. Through the survey, staff members were first asked several general demographic questions and were then asked a series of open-ended and closed-ended questions designed to elicit (a) their personal definition of

bullying, and (b) for them to identify and reflect on instances of bullying seen in their school. A final section asked participants several open-ended questions regarding the types of anti-bullying efforts in their school.

The open-ended questions were used because they would not constrain the participant to selecting from a list of possible responses (Fowler 2002). This was particularly important to us in understanding how the teachers and staff members defined bullying. The survey was emailed to prospective participants and they were invited to respond at a time and place convenient for them.

#### Data Analysis

Surveys were analyzed to develop a picture of who the participants were (gained through the demographics questions) and their definitions and understanding of bullying. The closed-ended questions were analyzed to determine which responses were selected most often. The open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively for patterns in the data. In analyzing these open-ended questions, we followed the tradition of qualitative methods to code for themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### Results

This section is organized to report results related to our research question. We look first at how teachers and school staff members define bullying. We then look at how they perceive bullying in both their own school and more broadly. Finally, we describe how participants felt about their own personal responses and their collective school response to incidents of bullying and bullying prevention.

When asked to define bullying on their own terms, participants indicated that bullying is intimidation in some form, be it physical violence or emotional abuse and most noted that the victim was made to feel inferior or uncomfortable as a result of the bullying. Two respondents included the additional mention of exclusion in their definition. For example, one male participant included the following as part of his definition, "...or even constant snubbing." One participant brought up the idea that bullying involves an inherent power differential when he defined bullying in part as, "...a person in a position of power teases, pesters, picks on, or assaults..." While responses varied from very broad definitions such as, "any abuse towards another person or group" to much more specific mentions of particular behaviors that constitute bullying, they all alluded to the idea of pressure or fear one individual exerts on another.

In order to get a sense of how staff members perceive bullying, we approached this part of the research in two ways. First, we posed an open-ended question asking participants to describe the most recent incident of bullying they had witnessed. We then asked several closed-ended questions aimed at discovering the frequency with which children reported bullying to them, and the locations and types of bullying that are both reported by children and personally witnessed by the staff member. To get a sense of the participants' attitude about their school, we also asked them to tell us how often they believed the average American middle school child is bullied and how often the average child in their school is bullied.

Six of the nine participants answered this question by describing a recent incident that they felt was bullying. Three of these descriptions could clearly be characterized as verbal harassment. The staff members described their students as victims of name-calling, laughter, or offensive names. For example, one staff member indicated the most recent incident he had seen occurred when, "... student called another student an offensive name, which [sic] eventually led to a fight in the locker room." While there is a physical element to this incident, it seems clear that the physical violence was precipitated by a verbal attack.

The reported non-verbal incidents included a situation where a female teacher reported one of her students had been bullied when information about her "popularity" was text messaged to other students. Another teacher reported a situation she had witnessed where one child had "taken charge over" another. It was unclear if this was a verbal or physical incident and it may well have included both.

In looking at the frequency with which bullying happens, what areas within the school are most often locations where bullying takes place, and the nature of the bullying happening, we presented staff members with several closed-ended questions. These contained choices as to the frequency and locations where they had witnessed bullying or it had been reported as well as the nature of the bullying.

Two-thirds of the respondents reported that they are informed about incidents of bullying zero times per week, and the remaining third reported they are informed about incidents of bullying between one and three times per week. No staff member indicated s/he was informed of an incident of bullying more than three times per week.

Staff members indicated that students report bullying mostly happening outside of class, although during school hours. This would include times such as lunch, recess, or between classes. Staff members also indicated that these were the locations they personally saw most incidents of bullying.

We asked staff members several questions regarding the type of bullying they had seen. Since we had already asked them for their personal definitions of bullying, for this question we presented them with general categories of types of bullying. These were physical, emotional, and sexual bullying and were drawn from the literature. All nine staff members reported that their students are victims of emotional bullying. Five staff members felt their students were also victims of physical bullying, but no staff members felt that their students were victims of sexual bullying.

When asked for further details, eight staff members responded that their students reported face-to-face conflicts with bullies. Additionally, five participants indicated they had heard reports of cyber-bullying including two staff members who had heard reports of web, email, or internet chat bullying, and three staff members had heard reports of harassment via text messages.

In order to determine further details regarding the nature of bullying that staff members had children reporting to them, we presented a list of types of bullying drawn from the literature. Participants were asked to consider all the bullying reported to them (not just the most recent incident as we asked in the

first part of this section). Participants were free to check off as many as they felt were applicable, so percentages add to more than 100.

With nearly equal frequency, half of the participants checked off types of name calling such as commenting on an ability or disability or physical appearance. Additionally, two thirds of participants indicated that spreading rumors or other gossip about a peer had been reported. One hundred percent of the staff members indicated "exclusion" was a bullying tactic reported to them. Only one staff member felt that bullies made threats of physical violence and no staff members reported they had heard that bullies used racial, ethnic, or religious remarks.

### **Average Child Versus a Child in This School**

Participants reported they believe the average American middle school child, that is, a child at another school, is bullied more frequently than the average child at their school. Only about 22 percent believed the average child is bullied "about once a week," and two thirds believe the average child is bullied "a few times a week." The remaining 12 percent believe the average child attending middle school is bullied "almost every day." In comparison, sixty-six percent of participants indicated that they believed children in their school are bullied "about once a week" while the remaining third believe children are bullied a "few times a week." The belief that children at their school are bullied less frequently than the average child may be due to the individual responses of teachers to bullying and school-wide anti-bullying measures.

This section reports how participants indicate that they respond to bullying both when personally observing it or being made aware of it when it is reported by a child. This section also addresses school-wide anti-bullying measures and teachers perceptions of it.

We provided participants with a list of possible responses to bullying when they witness it or it is reported to them. This list was drawn from the literature of common responses and staff members were free to select multiple options. Eight of the nine staff members reported that after a student informs them of bullying, they typically will "speak to the students involved" and "enforce consequences for the students involved," although only five staff members indicated they would speak to the class about bullying after an individual victim reports an incident. Only five staff members reported that they share the information with superiors or colleagues, or that they would contact parents. However, these individuals must sometimes be involved because one staff member described a school-issued "Learning Packet," that requires signatures from staff members, parents, and the involved students.

When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their personal anti-bullying actions using a Likert-type scale, the majority of participants rated themselves on the lower end of the scale. Two-thirds of staff members felt that their actions were "somewhat effective" in preventing bullying from occurring again. Only two staff members felt that their anti-bullying actions were "mostly effective," and no staff members felt their actions were "very effective." While staff members had mixed opinions about the actual effectiveness of their personal anti-bullying actions, they were very positive when reporting their school's anti-bullying efforts.

Seven of the nine staff members shared a description of their school's overall anti-bullying education methods. It appeared that this school has several strong anti-bullying policies and events designed to reinforce their policies. Four staff members mentioned the school's focus on anti-bullying that included a special day-long event held each spring. Three staff members also mentioned that the school has several days each year where students sit with different groups at lunch as a way to meet and interact with new faces. Two staff members mentioned a "peace table," where students can sit to mediate a conflict. One staff member mentioned the "feelings code" the school created to outline how students should treat each other respectfully. These structures and policies appear to impact favorably how teachers feel about their school's overall methods of addressing bullying.

### Discussion & Implications

In an effort to add to the knowledge base on how teachers define and perceive bullying, this study looked at middle school teachers' responses to a survey about bullying. In their definitions of bullying, responses of participants in this study showed a more nuanced understanding of the issues than has previously been reported in the literature. While the literature (e.g., Boulton, 1997; Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Maunder, Harrop, Tattersall, 2010; Naylor, Cowie, Cossin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006) generally reports that teachers often either do not categorize relational bullying, such as exclusion, as actual bullying or at least to not rank it as seriously as other forms, our results indicate that school staff members may be beginning to think of bullying in terms of both the physical and psychological. Although only two specifically brought up the idea of exclusion as a form of bullying, it could be implied in the more general definitions provided by several other staff members. These findings imply that teachers' definitions of bullying may be changing. This may be due to increased education or knowledge about bullying.

The staff members in this study described definitions that were largely consistent with Olweus (1996) in that they refer to aggressive behavior directed by one child at another, but they do not include Olweus' description of the behavior happening repeatedly over a period of time. It is likely that participants in this study may have been thinking more immediately of isolated incidents rather than patterns of behavior.

While researchers such as Bradshaw, Sawyer, and O'Brennan (2010) note that school staff members often underestimate the frequency of bullying in their schools, our research found that this may depend on whether staff members are asked about how much bullying is *reported* to them rather than how much they *suspect* is actually happening. Our participants' perceptions of how often bullying happens indicate they believe it is happening at higher rates than it is actually being reported to them. Clearly, what this suggests is that adults believe children are underreporting acts of bullying. This may, in fact, be the case because children may believe adults are incapable or unwilling to stop acts of bullying (Harris & Willoughby, 2003) or that the bullying they are subject to is better than the potential ramifications of asking for help in dealing with a problem (Newman & Murrar, 2005). While it is unlikely that most teachers would purposefully ignore an act they believed was bullying, we have

previously discussed the possibility noted in the literature that the adults may hold different definitions of and perspectives of bullying than do children (e.g., Maunder, R., Harrop, A., & Tattersall, A., 2010; Stockdale, M. S., Hangaduambo, S., Duys, D., Larson, K., & Sarvela, P. D., 2002; Waasdorp, T. E., Pas, E., O'Brennan, L. M., & Bradshaw, C. P., 2011). What a child sees as bullying may not be seen as very serious to an adult observing the same events.

It is also possible that bullying is happening outside of the eyes and ears of staff members. Our participants indicated that they believe bullying often happens at times and in locations where they have less ability to intercede. Our participants indicated the majority of bullying they personally witness or is reported to them happens during lunch, recess, or other times and locations outside of classes. This is consistent with other studies that have found recess and lunch to be locations of increased bullying (e.g., Vaillancourt, et al., 2010). The implication of this finding is that because certain times and events are predictably less structured, staff members have a responsibility to be hyper vigilant during these times.

While reports in the news media frequently refer to cyber-bullying, and bullying is certainly developing a new digital aspect, the bullies who revel in face-to-face conflict cannot be ignored. Participants in our study reported that their students bring forward stories of in-person conflicts and referred to primarily in-person events when describing the most recent incident of bullying they had witnessed. Although cyber-bullying may get a lot of discussion in the news media, our research indicates that more traditional face-to-face bullying is still the most frequently occurring type that children encounter.

#### Perceptions of Effectiveness of Anti-bullying

Most literature indicates that teachers are often not confident in their ability to prevent bullying (Boulton, 1997) and pre-service (PSTs) or novice teachers seem to be especially affected by this and report feeling unprepared, or at least underprepared, to properly address bullying when they encounter it within their classroom or school contexts. Several studies have indicated PSTs and novice teachers have a desire for more education regarding bullying in general (e.g. Bauman & Del Rio, 2005, 2006) and cyber-bullying in particular (e.g., Yilmaz, 2010). This may well apply more broadly to include experienced teachers, too, because our participants generally rated themselves on the lower levels of an effectiveness scale. One possible reason for this is that while the participants indicated they had multiple different ways of dealing with bullying, few staff members had similar answers. In response to an incident, some staff members indicated they would assign detention, some would contact parents, and some would assign reflection questions to the child. This shows that the teachers are not unified in their approach to disciplining bullies. All of these steps are effective methods of dealing with bullying, but they can become more effective when combined strategically. So, even for a school like the one where this research was conducted where there are a variety of accepted methods to fight bullying, the teachers may benefit from a more unified approach.

Interestingly, although participants rated themselves as less effective, they also felt the students in their school were being bullied less than the average middle school child. This suggests that participants may believe overall school



efforts to be successful even if staff members themselves are overly critical of their own personal abilities to address bullying. As we described in the results section, this school has a variety of events and approaches to address bullying including a school-wide “feelings code” and “peace table” designed to help students treat each other respectfully and several days throughout the year devoted to meeting new people. The implication here is that, at least from the perspective of staff members, bullying is less frequent in this school than the average school and other schools should develop similar school-wide approaches.

### Limitations

It is important to note the limitations of this research. While our results are generally consistent with those of other researchers and a majority of the staff members in this school participated in our research, it is important to note that data were collected through a relatively small sample at one school. Secondly, we relied on school staff members' self-reporting. It is possible that teachers and other staff members purposely misreported or underreported incidents of bullying in an effort to make their school “look good.” Finally, this school may represent a unique demographic in that many children transfer to this school from public schools each school year. Thus, there is a higher percentage of new students each year than would typically be found at a public school.

### Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

While it is likely that bullying is happening at the times, locations, and in the ways teachers suggest, previous research indicates it is also likely that the problem is more pervasive than teachers may perceive. An important conclusion of our research is that school staff members must be made aware of the times and locations that children are likely to be victimized by bullying. As members of the school community, staff members are responsible for the safety and security of children at all times they are on school grounds, so they should be made aware of the times and locations where bullying most frequently occurs so they can provide additional supervision. This may be especially critical for newer staff members who may not be as aware of likely locations and times for bullying.

It is clear that bullying continues to be a serious problem. Threats of physical violence must be considered just as important as more subtle exclusion and school staff members still need to be aware of students' behavior during times outside of class. Student safety and security are concerns for all members of the school building including staff and teachers.

Although programs that prepare school counselors typically include bullying awareness and anti-bullying in their curricula, it is less commonly included as part of a pre-service teacher education program. Our results indicate that there may be a benefit to including more awareness with teacher education programs so teachers feel more prepared to address bullying in their own classrooms. Knowledge of the importance of early intervention will demonstrate to the children that the staff member is attentive and responsive to their needs, that in turn improves the children's level of comfort in the classroom.

We know from the literature that staff members should be sympathetic to the needs of bullying victims, and develop tactics to counter bullying that children can use effectively (Harris & Willoughby, 2003; Olweus & Limber, 2010; Roberts & Coursol, 1996; Rigby, 2001; cited in Doll, Song, & Siemers, 2004). While our research indicates that the staff members considered their schools' anti-bullying strategies to be effective, a possible concern is whether staff members over-rate their schools' effectiveness and future research should be done to evaluate the effectiveness of school-wide bullying programs as children see them.

Bullying is a problem that plagues schools worldwide, and yet only schools that recognize this issue can productively attempt to eliminate it. For children, a school staff member is often the first line of defense against a bully so it is in the best interest of all children for staff members to be well prepared to adequately address bullying. Our research has aimed to develop a deeper understanding of how staff members understand bullying.

### References

- Bauman, S. & Hurley, C. (2005). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about bullying: Two exploratory studies. *Journal of School Violence, 4*(3), 49-61.
- Bauman, S. & Del Rio, A. (2005). Knowledge and beliefs about bullying in schools: Comparing pre-service teachers in the United States and the United Kingdom. *School Psychology, 26*(4), 428-442.
- Bauman, S. & Del Rio, A. (2006). Preservice teachers' responses to bullying scenarios: Comparing physical, verbal, and relational bullying. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(1), 219-231.
- Boulton, M. (1997). Teachers' views on bullying: Definitions, attitudes and ability to cope. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 67*(2), 223-233.
- Bradshaw, C. P., Sawyer, A. L., & O'Brennan, L. M. (2007). Bullying and peer victimization at school: Perceptual differences between students and school staff. *School Psychology Review, 36*(3), 361-382.
- Caputo, G. A. (2000). The “voice of justice” vs. the “voice of care” in the assignment of criminal sanctions. *Current Psychology: Developmental, Learning, Personality, Social, 19*(1), 70-81.
- Craig, W. M., Henderson, K., Murphy, J. G. (2000). Preservice teachers' attitudes toward bullying and victimization. *School Psychology International, 21*(5), 5-21.
- Doll, B., Song, S., & Siemers, E. (2004). Classroom ecologies that support or discourage bullying. In D. Espelage & S. Swearer (Eds.), *Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention* (161-183). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ellis, A. A. & Shute, R. (2007). Teacher responses to bullying in relation to moral orientation and seriousness of bullying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 77*, 649-663.
- Fowler, F. J. (2002). *Survey research methods* (Third ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Griffin, R. & Gross, A. (2004). Childhood bullying: Current empirical findings and future directions for research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 9*, 379-400.
- Harris, S. & Willoughby, W. (Summer 2003). Teacher perceptions of student bullying behaviors. *ERS Spectrum, 11-18*.
- Holt, M. & Keyes, M. (2004). Teacher's attitudes toward bullying. In D. Espelage & S. Swearer (Eds.), *Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention (121-139)*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Juvonen, J., Wang, Y., Espinoza, G. (2011). Bullying experiences and compromised academic performance across middle school grades. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 31(1)*, 153-173.
- Marshall, M. (2009). Teacher responses to bullying: Self reports from the front line. *Journal of School Violence, 8(2)*, 136-158.
- Maunder, R., Harrop, A., & Tattersall, A. (2010). Pupil and staff perceptions of bullying in secondary schools: Comparing behavioural definitions and their perceived seriousness. *Educational Research, 52(3)*, 263-282.
- Naylor, P., Cowie, H., Cossin, F., de Bettencourt, R., & Lemme, F. (2006). Teachers' and pupils' definitions of bullying. *British Journal of Psychology, 75*, 553-576.
- Newman, R. S. & Murray, B. J. (2005). How students and teachers view the seriousness of peer harassment: When is it appropriate to seek help? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 97(3)*, 347-365.
- Olweus, D. & Limber, S. P. (2010). Bullying in school: Evaluation and dissemination of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 80(1)*, 124-134.
- Olweus, D. (June 1996). Bully/victim problems in school. *Prospects, 26*, 331-359.
- Patchin, J. & Hinduja, S. (2010). Cyberbullying and self-esteem. *Journal of School Health, 80*, 614-621.
- Petrosino, A., Guckenburg, S., DeVoe, J., & Hanson, T. (2010). *What characteristics of bullying, bullying victims, and schools are associated with increased reporting of bullying to school officials?* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2010 – No. 092).
- Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Laboratory Northeast and Islands. Retrieved from: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.
- Roberts, W. B. & Coursol, D. H. (1996). Strategies for intervention with childhood and adolescent victims of bullying, teasing, and intimidation in school settings. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, 30(3)*, 204-213.
- Smith, P. A. & Hoy, W. K. (2011). Teachers' perceptions of student bullying: A conceptual and empirical analysis. *Journal of School Leadership, 14(3)*, 308-326.
- Stockdale, M. S., Hangadumbo, S., Duys, D., Larson, K., & Sarvela, P. D. (2002). Rural elementary students', parents', and teachers' perceptions of bullying. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 26(4)*, 266-277.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*. Thousand Oaks: CA. Sage Publications.
- Sullivan, K. (2000). *The anti-bullying handbook*. Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Swearer, S., Grills, A., Haye, K., Cary, P. (2004). Teacher's attitudes toward bullying. In D. Espelage & S. Swearer (Eds.), *Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention (121-139)*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Vaillancourt, T., Brittain, H., Bennett, L., Arnocky, S., McDougall, P., Hymel, S. et al. (2010). Places to avoid: Population-based study of student reports of unsafe and high bullying areas at school. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 25(1)*, 40-54.
- Waasdorp, T. E., Pas, E., O'Brennan, L. M., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2011). A multilevel perspective on the climate of bullying: Discrepancies among students, school staff, and parents. *Journal of School Violence, 10(2)*, 115-132.
- Yilmaz, H. (2010). An examination of preservice teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science & Technology Education, 6(4)*, 263-270.

# DOCTORAL CANDIDATES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TEACHER LEADERSHIP PREPARATION PROGRAM: A VYGOTSKIAN PERSPECTIVE

by  
Harriet J. Bessette

HARRIET J. BESSETTE is on faculty at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA.

## Abstract

*Today's schools need impactful leaders at all levels to produce and nurture sustainable educational change that leads to increased student achievement. It has been argued that preparing teacher leaders requires transforming leadership from a solitary to a collaborative, socially mediated enterprise, and is best accomplished within a distributed leadership context. The cognitive and socially mediated nature of teacher leadership may, in part, be explained through Vygotsky's theory of the social origins of thinking (1978) with individual developmental change rooted in society and culture. In this article, a Vygotskian lens is employed to analyze doctoral students' understandings of teacher leadership within their schools. The findings suggest that doctoral students' working knowledge of teacher leadership is socially mediated by conversations, readings, reflections, and exchange of ideas with colleagues and professors. Implications for critical issues in education, including leadership capacity, teacher leader curriculum development, and increased responsibility for the professorate are discussed.*

Teacher leadership has become recognized as one of the most viable and vigorous forces influencing school leadership today (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). It has increasingly been linked to distributed leadership, as one of several desirable outcomes of school contexts that foster teacher growth, development of expertise, and leadership capability. It was the teacher's ability to eventually recognize his or her capacity to lead that prompted Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) to compare such a teacher to a "sleeping giant;" suggesting that once awakened, little would be left unchanged.

The field of education is currently experiencing a "re-awakening" of its own – a reexamination of the purpose of learning, those who facilitate learning in P-12 schools, and those who prepare professional educators to facilitate learning in P-12 classrooms. Much published work on leadership and teaching attempts to address the social nature of teachers and their culture (Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves, 2003; Zeichner, 2006), who learn from one another (Friend, 2006) when they move beyond the four walls of their own classrooms, and become engaged - and *engage others* - in collaborative problem-solving within their schools. Teacher leaders embody such engagement. They strive to develop strong commitments to their students through their life experiences and their own teaching. They become inquirers into their own practice (Cochran Smith & Lytle, 2003) and cultivate professional learning communities where in addition to organizing, supporting, and sustaining novice and veteran teachers, they become increasingly more articulate about their own teaching and learning. Because they are committed to learning across the lifespan, they take risks within and without their circle of peers, comfort zones, and knowledge zones. Teacher leaders model *macro*-leadership for their peers, which is all-encompassing and reaches far beyond that of the *microcosm* of the classroom.

## Framing the Study

This investigation is framed around three of Vygotsky's (1978) major cognitive and socio-cultural constructs: the zone of proximal development (ZPD), socially mediated learning, and intersubjectivity. These theories provide the lens and perspective through which the study was conceived and the data were interpreted and analyzed. Vygotsky (1978) theorized that intellectual growth and knowledge reconstruction takes place when individuals reach their intellectual capacity within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This has become known as the gap between what a learner has already – or is capable to have - mastered (the actual level of development) and what he or she can achieve when provided with educational support from a "knowledgeable or more knowledgeable other" (potential development). Within any classroom the knowledgeable or more knowledgeable other may not necessarily be the instructor; rather, a mentor, colleague or other student(s) can often serve in this role. Although this theory may have originated with P-12 students in mind, its precepts have been extended to, and expanded by, adult learning theory (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

The second theoretical perspective to frame this study involves socially mediated learning. Vygotsky posited that knowledge reconstruction takes place on two planes - the social, or "interpsychological" plane, during which individuals socialize and mediate understanding with their peers and interact; and the individual, or "intrapsychological" plane, within which the individual processes and mediates information as a result of social interaction. These two planes are relevant to teacher leadership as they provide a conceptual frame for understanding that school (administrative) and teacher leaders make meaning as a social group. During those times when they work in a collaborative mode they are socialized; this is where the interpersonal relationship emerges and can be further developed at an *intrapersonal* level as learners work apart from other groups (Albert, 2000). At the intrapersonal level, the learner's mind is mediating new information, sorting and sifting through this information in an attempt to compare and contrast it to previous understanding and see how it "squares" with what is already known. Regardless of the result, that individual has become intellectually altered; has - in some sense - intellectually grown; and has reconstructed new knowledge as a consequence of his/her social interaction.

## Intersubjectivity and Teacher Leadership

The third theory that is applicable to this discussion is that of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity, or intersubjective functioning, a condition for authentic communication, which implies *shared* power and authority (Driscoll, 1994; Rogoff, 1990; Rommetviet, 1979; Tudge, 1992), evolves and is central to teacher leaders' work. In this study, leadership practice is conceptualized as collaboration on many levels – among higher education faculty, doctoral candidates, and practicing and aspiring teacher leaders within P-12 environments. Although the level of intersubjectivity between and among teacher leaders may fluctuate, new intellectual and social understandings, perspectives, and learning are happening.

Previous research indicates that as educators develop collaborative relationships, they move through stages that are facilitated by interpersonal communication skills (Fish Baugh, 1997). In the early stages, communication may be formal and even stifled; in subsequent stages, as individuals become more comfortable with one another, their interactions become more open and spontaneous, while the shared nature of their work becomes more apparent. In the final stages, the practitioner forms authentic collaborative relationships with others, the nature of which can be described as a “state of intersubjectivity” (Rommetveit, 1979) where a “reciprocal faith in a shared experiential world” is implied (1985, p. 189).

Wertsch (1985), a neo-Vygotskian theorist, extended Vygotsky’s ideas around the concepts of intersubjectivity and situation definition. According to Wertsch, intersubjectivity refers to the degree that two or more collaborators share the same definition of the task and its setting. He posited that as participants jointly carry out their work, they necessarily have different definitions of a given situation, explaining that the way events are defined, delineate and characterize the state and levels of intersubjectivity present between the collaborators. The notion of intersubjectivity, therefore, provides a broad canopy under which teacher leadership roles within a school context can be perceived, conceptualized, and defined.

### **Conceptualizing Teacher Leadership**

Built upon the belief that leadership for learning is a socially mediated process (Adams & Copland, 2005), teacher leadership essentially holds that teachers can and do assume a wide range of roles to support P-12 school and student success. This means that learning is equally “top-down” and “bottom-up” and is ideally spread across all contexts and constituents within the district as well as the school. As Fullan (1991) argued, the winning combo for change is top-down (school board, superintendents) and bottom-up (teacher-grass roots) approaches to school change (p. 15).

Formal and informal leaders at all levels who tend to have an impact on P-12 schools in profound ways are inevitably called upon to act - and at times, even invigorate - change. This requires more than possessing the appropriate knowledge, skills, dispositions and opportunities for empowerment. It demands a mechanism within which leadership can be “stretched” among all constituents within a P-12 school and those teachers who may never have entertained the idea of becoming leaders are invited and encouraged to assume leadership roles within their school. This suggests not just equity of opportunity for teachers, but also for leaders. Educators are recognizing that the task of transforming schools is too complex to expect one school leader to accomplish it alone. As Spillane (2006) points out, “Expecting one person to single-handedly lead efforts to improve instruction in a complex organization such as a school is impractical” (p. 26).

Lieberman and Miller (2004) examined teacher leadership from a visionary perspective, asserting that all teachers are leaders within their respective classrooms and schools. In *Teacher Leadership*, the authors discuss how the teacher’s role has evolved, offering examples of individual teachers who lead in a variety of contexts. They argue that all teachers should be invited

to the leadership table and given opportunities to not merely apply knowledge, but create knowledge. This ideology supports the notion that teachers are generators of knowledge and are uniquely qualified to lead from both within and without the classroom.

In *Awakening the Sleeping Giant*, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) launched a call for teachers to think of themselves and view themselves as leaders. They aver that teachers who are leaders “lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others toward improved educational practice” (p.5). The authors look at the reasons why teachers hesitate to take on leadership roles, citing unfamiliarity, lack of confidence, the fear of being asked to leave teaching behind, and the fear of being asked to assume a leadership position as just a few. Additionally, they explore ways in which support for teacher leadership can be garnered, pointing to a three-pronged model consisting of (a) professional development; (b) teacher empowerment; and (c) democratic communities. They maintain that teacher leader development requires school improvement that is inextricably linked to professional development and unconventional approaches to professional development that are continual, meaningful, and ongoing (p. 43). In addition to providing recommendations on building a culture that supports teacher leadership and teacher leaders who are preparing to lead, the authors delineate their view of the future of teacher leadership which includes encouraging teachers to (1) build self-confidence, (2) speak up in meetings, (3) take the initiative to approach the school principal with a plan, (4) take risks, (5) challenge isolation, and (6) insist on developing, implementing, and leading instructional coaching, study groups, and networking initiatives.

Harrison and Killian (2007) point out that teachers who are continual learners model ongoing improvement of one’s craft, demonstrate learning across the lifespan, and utilize new knowledge, skills, and understandings in ways that increase P-12 student achievement. Among the most common roles for teachers who want to serve as leaders within their school are resource provider, instructional specialist, curricular specialist, and learning facilitator. They stress the most critical role for teachers, however, is that of teacher-learner, an extension of the teacher leader role.

In *Teacher Leadership: A Review of Research*, Harris and Muijs (2003) draw on the work of noted scholars in the field to delineate various dimensions of teacher leadership. They blur the boundaries of “distributed” and teacher leadership, asserting that they singularly or in combination imply a “redistribution of power and a re-alignment of authority within an organization” where the conditions for collaboration are created and professional educators “construct and refine meaning leading to a shared purpose or set of goals” (p. 2). As they point out, leadership is viewed as “fluid and emergent,” opening the possibility “for all teachers to become leaders at various times” and suggesting that leadership is a “shared and collective endeavor that can engage the many rather than the few” (p. 2).

Harris (2002) suggests that four discrete aspects of the teacher leadership role exist: brokering, participating, mediating, and relationship forging. The first dimension is central to the role of the teacher leader and demands the ability for the teacher leader to translate the principles of school

improvement into classroom praxis. A second dimension involves a participative aspect, in which the teacher leader has a sense of ownership in change. The third dimension refers to the teacher leader as a source of expertise and information. Finally, the fourth dimension involves the teacher leader's ability to forge "close relationships with individual teachers through which mutual learning takes place" (p. 5).

Despite the growing discourse about the purpose and significance of teacher leadership, however, there remains a dearth of empirical research to help educators get a sense of teacher leadership's impact on P-12 student achievement. Many authors advocate that leaders need to maintain an unrelenting focus on student learning. For example, Leithwood and Duke (1998) espouse that student learning undergirds a vision for effective schooling. Similarly, Mulford and Silins (2004) posit that distributed leadership contributes, albeit indirectly, to organizational learning, which, in turn, influences the teaching and learning that happens in the classroom. Distributed leadership, they maintain, influences the way teachers organize and conduct their instruction, their educational interactions with students, and the challenges and expectations teachers place on their pupils (p. 7). What is important, they argue, is that the professionalism with which administrators regard teachers impacts how they treat teachers, which then impinges on how students perceive their teachers' work, which, in turn, affects students' learning outcomes. Although a principal may possess a deep understanding of instruction, only classroom teachers have the day-to-day knowledge of specific students in specific classroom settings. When we look at successful educational settings in which many individuals promulgate essential knowledge, a system of teacher leadership makes sense.

Consonant with these claims, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) contend that (1) leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning; (2) formal leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on teacher motivation, commitment, and working conditions; and, (3) school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.

### Method

The purpose of the current study was to learn how doctoral students in one teacher leadership preparation program perceive their preparation program in teacher leadership, conceptualize their developing roles as teacher leaders; and internalize understandings of current doctoral course work. In the tradition of scholarship of teaching and learning, the researcher engaged in the systematic investigation and evaluation of the impact of the preparation program on doctoral students' learning.

#### Context and Participants

The current study was conducted at a large public university in the southeastern region of the U.S. The participants were 27 doctoral students, all of whom were academically engaged in the same learning cohort, but professionally connected to various workplaces outside the university. Among the 27 participants, 21 were female and 6 were male. All 6 males were White; of the 21 females, 2 were Asian and 1 was Black. The remaining 18 females

were White. All participants were professional practicing Pre-K – college educators serving as content-specific or special education teachers, school principals, curriculum directors, cluster supervisors, directors from collaborative agencies, assistant principals, or other mid-level administrators. Their school contexts did not range greatly. Most worked in low-to-middle Middle Class communities within a radius of approximately 80 miles from the university. All but three students successfully completed three years of the doctoral program (approximately 60 hours) at the time of the last data collection. Beginning in 2007, this longitudinal case study is now in its fourth year.

All 27 participants were students enrolled in the Teacher Leadership for learning program and were members of the inaugural cohort for this new program. It was developed as an innovative, practice-based, and comprised of core and concentration (subject area/content) courses designed to help candidates develop knowledge, skills and dispositions as teacher leaders within distributed contexts to collaboratively address ambiguous, complex problems in P-12 schools. With an eye towards empowering leaders at every level, the program engages candidates in collaborative problem solving across content concentrations, such as mathematics education or instructional technology. Its mission is to prepare *teacher leaders* who can and do positively impact P-12 student learning.

The doctorate in Teacher Leadership for learning is grounded on four major precepts. First, this program holds that both formal (administrative) and informal (classroom teacher) leaders must work together to solve complex issues in teaching and learning. Without this type of collaboration, little can or would get resolved at either the school or district levels. Copland and Knapp (2006) wax eloquently on the primacy of learning alignment among and between various levels of leadership, from teacher (practitioner) leaders all the way through district leaders (superintendent) and every level in-between (e.g., school (principal) leaders, curriculum leaders, department chairs, etc.).

Second, teacher leaders must deepen and broaden expertise in their subject or content areas and be able to model what it means to be a facilitator of learning. Utilizing an applied research emphasis within core and concentration courses, students have an opportunity to explore real life problems that often plague P-12 schools. Third, collaboratively developed & delivered courses are the hallmark of the doctorate in teacher leadership for learning, including courses and processes at major transition points in the program, including Doctoral Seminar, comprehensive exams, and dissertation work. Collaboration exists not only across content area lines, but also across faculty and students engaged in research and the scholarship of teaching. Finally, faculty who teach in the doctoral program and model leadership effectiveness in higher education help prepare candidates for roles as teacher leaders in their own schools. The program provides fertile ground for allowing candidates to explore the types of leadership roles they may either pursue within, or *create for*, their own workplace.

#### Data sources and methods of analysis

Qualitative methods were used to gain insight into the varied ways in which students perceived their preparation program in teacher leadership, conceptualized their developing roles as teacher leaders; and internalized

understandings of current doctoral course work. Their academic program required that they provide evidence of recognizing, identifying, and to some degree, engaging in effective teacher leadership practice in their local contexts. While this article relies heavily on videotaped interviews that were conducted in year 1 and year 3 of the participants' doctoral program, other data sources, including interview transcripts, self-report inventories, memos, written correspondence, personal reflections, emails, exam responses, field notes from class observations, and formal and informal conversations between and among doctoral candidates and faculty, assisting the triangulation process. Candidates were asked to address the following questions during videotaped interviews:

1. *Describe your activity/experience within the Teacher Leadership for learning program this semester.*
2. *What have you learned about yourself?*
3. *What particularly surprised you this semester and why?*
4. *Looking back at your first videotaped session in 2007, describe the changes you have undergone since then (personal and professional).*
5. *Describe the impact you have had on your students at your school as a result of the Teacher Leadership for learning program.*
6. *Has your doctoral coursework contributed to your understanding of distributed leadership and/or the study of leadership, and if so, how?*
7. *In terms of building collaborative relationships, teams, and community partnerships that communicate and reflect teacher leadership, what has been your role in your school?*

Videotapes were transcribed and stored electronically. Data were analyzed using inductive coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), consistent with the constant comparative method. The goal was to provide as broad a spectrum of participants' perspectives and perceptions as possible. Large patterns began to emerge related to the different ways in which candidates internalized and acted upon their emerging roles as teacher leaders. Students reflected on the culture of their school workplaces, examined how well their school's vision and mission statements were reflected in classroom practice, and the ways in which teacher leadership had an impact on P-12 student learning. In some instances, students described the actions of their principal, or formal, leader; these were designated as *instructional leadership* activities. Actions perpetuated by the candidates themselves, their peers, or colleagues working in an informal leadership capacity were designated as *teacher leadership* activities.

Using pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), analyses continued as a cognitive map, or schema, based on "repeatable regularities" (Kaplan, 1964) emerged. Consistently, the data sources that produced the most animated and visceral responses from this cohort of 27 participants (in Year 1; 24 participants by Year 3) were the videotaped stories that students offered in response to structured interview questions (see above). The research findings are based primarily on data obtained from these interviews. Where personal names are ascribed to individual statements, pseudonyms have been used.

## Results

The research findings are delineated according to doctoral students' perceptions of their preparation program experience, as well as perceptions of

their personal and professional growth in relation to, and as a result of, their work as developing teacher leaders. Five broad categories emerged describing participants' perspectives: teacher leadership learning and understanding, acknowledging challenges, perceived abilities/professional growth as result of the program, influence on other teachers, and impact on own practice. Overall, doctoral students' stories suggest a trend towards more pronounced levels of awareness, understanding, and involvement in teacher leadership activities, as well as a shift towards increased collaboration and dialogue as they moved through the program. While this trend may have resulted from factors outside of the university (e.g., conditions within the school, school culture, changes in leadership, personal attributes, etc.), it seems reasonable to infer from the data that increased social interaction between and among doctoral students and their mentors contributed to these results.

### Teacher Leadership Learning and Understanding

Among the 24 participants, all but 1 in year 3 reported an appreciation for teacher leadership and its potential benefits to P-12 schools and learners. Comments such as, "My leadership conscience has broadened..." and, "I am connecting more with other professionals at different levels," suggest that students were developing a basic understanding of what it means to be a teacher leader. Respondents cited teacher leadership understanding and learning as critical to the development of their craft: "Watching [distributed leadership] leaders has helped me become a better teacher," as well as a way to gauge other's expertise: "My former principal is better with [distributed leadership] than my current principal; my superintendent is a great [distributed] leader." Students demonstrated their understanding of the impact of teacher leadership in relation to school improvement with comments such as: "The leadership perspective is clear; we want to be good leaders for our students and in our schools," and, "To be a truly effective leader, you need to keep the realities present in your mind." These comments suggest that doctoral students were moving towards increasingly inferential understandings of teacher leadership and its impact on P-12 education.

Students experienced many of the same challenges as their colleagues at various stages within the doctoral program. For example, they often spoke of being overwhelmed by the rigor of the program in light of the many responsibilities awaiting them at their regular jobs at school and those at home. Stated one student, "I'm in survival mode at work," and, "my family and friends have been neglected." Students frequently referred to feelings of loneliness, particularly following comprehensive exams and upon entering the dissertation phase. Statements such as "I miss working in groups," and "being alone is a real challenge," were quite common among the respondents. Lack of time was another challenge that students cited in videotaped interviews. Comments such as "the amount of time I consume is extraordinary," were common. Several spoke of their fears in completing their degree: "I'm nervous about finishing my dissertation," citing time constraints as their biggest obstacle.

Students spoke passionately about the personal and professional growth they noted in the time they were enrolled in the doctoral program. Comments such as, "I am now a risk taker and my confidence level has increased," "I've learned to be more open in expressing my fear," and, "I want

to step out more and put it forward,” indicate the self-confidence that students perceived. Students perceived themselves as more skilled: “Now I know what to do with all of this knowledge whereas at the beginning I didn’t,” more deliberative: “I’ve become more reflective of my practice,” and more knowledgeable: “I understand, resonate, and can articulate theories of major scholars,” as a result of their scholarship. Participants deliberated on their own learning with such statements as, “The more I know, the more I realize I don’t know,” “I didn’t know what I didn’t know,” and, “I’m surprised at the level of saturation and immersion it takes to be this expert.”

The following excerpt is an example of one participant’s perspective within this area:

I have grown personally and professionally, but most importantly, am able to do what I couldn’t do before. I used to read research simply for information and now I now read research critically. This has helped my leadership conscience broaden. (Veronica)

Another participant explained her professional learning this way:

At one time, I would never have imagined that I could see things so differently in my job. As teachers, we do not take well to change. I’ve learned to embrace change. I’ve learned to let go of my old beliefs and step out of my comfort zone at work. (Natalie)

### **Influence on other Teachers**

Respondents indicated how they had initiated or instigated colleagues at work toward teacher leader roles as a result of sharing leadership expertise and building networks of influence as collaborators. This was perhaps the highest level of evolved learning. Noted one participant:

I have become a leader in my school. I am a department chair and instructional lead teacher—that’s unusual for someone who teaches in a self-contained classroom. I have been a positive influence on other practitioners. (Julie)

Another participant, who is a director of a local educational collaborative, stated:

I empower teachers to work together, encourage them to work in groups, and to use data to drive their instruction. I have encouraged my teachers to choose for themselves what practices will have the greatest impact on their students. I can emphatically say that I indirectly influence students through the teachers I supervise and that feels good. (Marie)

It was further noted that some students went beyond inviting and encouraging others in their school to participate in teacher leadership activities. These respondents worked to consciously leverage others to pursue active teacher leader roles. As one student explained,

I am working with teacher leaders in schools for the whole year and I’m becoming part of their trusted outside capital.

Inviting them to lead a discussion group is only a small piece of the puzzle. (Lucia)

### **Impact on One’s Own Practice**

Participants were particularly attuned to teacher leadership’s impact on their role as teachers. Statements such as, “I am a better teacher because of this program,” and, “I am a model for my students,” were commonly given. Further, students specifically linked their perceived increase in effectiveness in the classroom to their leadership knowledge and skills. As one student indicated,

My perspective has broadened. I’m more aware of the impact I have on my students. I am able to stand back and appreciate multiple leadership perspectives. My leadership ability has improved and students have benefitted. They now recognize me as a lifelong learner. (Jeni)

One participant projected her students’ impact on the future: “My students are changing the climate of the school and are now advocating for themselves,” while another rethought her own future: “I’m leaving administration to stay in the classroom; It reminds me of why I got into teaching in the first place.”

As these data suggest, the majority of the students from the inaugural cohort in teacher leadership for learning moved in the direction of developing deeper and broader understandings of teacher leadership practice and its impact on their work and academic lives through collaboration and targeted social and verbal interaction with colleagues and mentors at the university and P-12 levels.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The zone of proximal development’s application in the classroom has been well documented (Chaiklin, 2003; Lebak & Tinsley, 2010; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). Few theoretical models place more emphasis on student learning through reciprocal dialogue and social verbal interaction than those espoused by Vygotsky (1978) and neo-Vygotskian scholars. Recalling local situations and class discussions, our participants revealed the extent to which they perceived they were honing their understanding of teacher leadership practice. With each re-reading of the data, it became obvious that the majority of the candidates were successfully integrating new understandings in the workplace and becoming increasingly more involved in the development of their teacher leadership roles. Students who once held a passive role in their schools became active in their local contexts, volunteering to lead book studies or form a committee of colleagues interested in developing closer ties to formal leadership.

Additionally, students gained confidence in their abilities to act as teacher leaders in their schools. Clearly, their gains in confidence and efficacy, along with new understandings of the kind of work that needed to be done in their schools signaled a shift in how they were conceptualizing their professional teaching and leadership roles. Gradually throughout the program, students began to integrate specific content matter in their workplaces and became involved in teacher leadership activities. Collaboration that was, and

still is, endemic to this program, has assisted their progress as adult learners. As one doctoral student stated near the end of her second year in the program, "The particular strengths of the program may lie in the cohort model itself...we thrive on connections with each other to discover greater potential within the [teacher] leadership model."

Research into the social nature of learning offers a window into the ways learning unfolds as a social act in the classroom and how educator/students or student/educators negotiate shared understandings, and the individual and social processes of interpretation that frame their conceptualizations (Vygotsky, 1986; Chang-Wells & Wells, 1993; Wertsch, 1991). In classes, students were observed socially mediating new understandings through lively give-and-take, debates, and peer evaluation. Subtle nuances were noted in the ways students approached discussions related to teacher leadership with their colleagues and faculty. Their insights and understandings morphed with each class as they engaged in critical dialogue where disagreement was not just allowed, but welcomed. Further, participants found themselves in collaborative relationships where they jointly carried out shared goals and worked in appreciation of others' differences and/or definition of a given situation. Doctoral students modeled what it means to work and learn within varying levels of shared experiences, affirming intersubjectivity as another lens through which teacher leadership roles can be perceived, conceptualized, and defined.

Findings suggest that positive attitudinal and dispositional changes towards teacher leadership practice, gradual expansion of teacher leadership knowledge and functionality by doctoral students to other settings, and understanding of the impact their actions and others' have had on student and teacher learning, contribute to "knowing" by a wider audience. Doctoral students' reflections and stories illuminate how Vygotsky's theoretical models (1978) provide a window into doctoral students' understandings of teacher leadership, their teacher leadership roles, and their perceptions of the impact they have on P-12 schools as well as the impact their program of study and their schools have had on them. Evidence has been presented which points to the participants' ability to critically collaborate to solve problems, promote teacher leadership development for themselves and others, and negotiate and mediate their own learning through the telling of their stories and pedagogical discourse.

The findings from this study hold implications for leadership preparation in higher education, leadership capacity in P-12 schools, and increased responsibility for the professorate. First, leadership preparation in higher education has faced much debate in recent years, charged with being irrelevant to the current context of schools (Murphy, 2005). Relevancy is among the most critical prerequisites for professional education preparation programs. Curricular retooling needs to take place in many of our existing programs. As the findings suggest, preparation programs should consider exploring the social contexts of adult learning as they work to increase their viability and marketability.

Second, today's P-12 schools must generate leadership capacity in order to stay ahead of factors such as competing in a global market and high

stakes testing, which keep education in the United States at the forefront of both policy and politics. Schools continue to face immense pressure to perform from a variety of stakeholders including parents, local and national leaders, and the media. Laws such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) bring added elements of accountability to increase performance and achievement to local schools. Leadership is critical to their success and therefore attention to what makes good leadership practice has and is a popular topic for both debate and research. Schools need to engage in leadership succession, not entirely from an administrative perspective, but from a teacher leadership perspective as well. Building capacity for change involves leveraging teachers' and teacher leaders' abilities, actions, and intentions (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), a policy initiative few schools can ignore.

Finally, it is up to institutions of higher education to provide quality preparation programs that will prepare all leaders within the school – teachers, principals, and administrators – to bring every student to higher levels of learning. With the national trend for professional education preparation programs to analyze their program's - indeed, their candidates' - impact on P-12 student learning, it is an opportune time for teacher leader preparation programs to conduct such self-study. Programs in higher education that prepare teachers to assume roles as leaders in P-12 schools must engage in a continual process of self-examination and program evaluation. Although the impact that such programs will have on aspiring teacher leaders and their pupils cannot be immediately known, demonstrating the will to study these programs from within is a step in the right direction.

## References

- Adams, J., & Copland, M. (2005). *When learning counts: Rethinking Licenses for School Leaders*. Center on Reinventing Public Education. University of Washington, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs.
- Albert, L. R. (2000). Outside-In – Inside-Out: Seventh-Grade Students' Mathematical Thought Processes, *Educational Studies in Mathematics* 41: 109-14.
- Chang-Wells, L. M., & Wells, G. (1993). Dynamics of discourse: Literacy and the construction of knowledge. In E. A. Forman, N. Minick, & C. A. Stone (Eds.), *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development* (58-90). New York, NY: Oxford.
- Chaiklin, S. (2003). "The Zone of Proximal Development in Vygotsky's analysis of learning and instruction." in Kozulin, A., Gindis, B., Ageyev, V. & Miller, S. (Eds.) (2003). *Vygotsky's educational theory and practice in cultural context*. 39-64. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside/outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Copland, M. A., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Connecting Leadership with Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Driscoll, M. P. (1994). *Psychology of learning for instruction*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Fishbaugh, M. S. (1997). *Models of Collaboration*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.



- Friend, M. (2006). *Special education: Contemporary perspectives for school professionals*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Fullan, M.G. (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Cassell Educational Limited.
- Hargreaves, A. (2003). *Teaching in the Knowledge Society*. Philadelphia, PA: McGraw-Hill.
- Harris, A. (2002). Effective Leadership in schools facing challenging circumstances. *School Leadership and Management*, 22(1), 15-27.
- Harris, A. (2006). Distributed leadership in schools: Developing future leaders. Presented at Leadership for Sustainable Innovation: The 3rd International Summit and iNet Conference for Leadership in Education, Boston, MA., Nov. 2-3.
- Harris, A., & Muijs, D. (2003). *Teacher Leadership: Improvement Through Empowerment: A Review of the Literature* (Nottingham, UK: National College for School Leadership). Retrieved April 23, 2011, from [http://www.gtce.org.uk/pdfs/research/Teacher\\_Leadership\\_litreview.pdf](http://www.gtce.org.uk/pdfs/research/Teacher_Leadership_litreview.pdf).
- Harrison, C., & Killian, J. (2007). Ten roles for teacher leaders. *Educational Leadership*, 65(1), 74-77.
- Kaplan, A. (1964). *The conduct of inquiry*. Scranton, PA: Chandler.
- Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller, G. (2001). *Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop as Leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Lebak, K., & Tinsley, R. (2010). Can inquiry and reflection be contagious? Science teachers, students, and action research. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 21, 953-970.
- Leithwood, K., & Duke, D. (1998). Mapping the conceptual terrain of leadership: A critical point of departure for cross-cultural studies. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 73(2), 31-50.
- Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership (Nottingham, NCSL).
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K., Anderson, S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York: Wallace Foundation.
- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2004). *Teacher Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mulford, B., & Silins, H. (2004). Leadership for Organisational Learning and Improved Student Outcomes. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(2): 175-195.
- Murphy, J. (2005). *Connecting teacher leadership and school improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Public Law 107-110. January 8, 2002. Section 1111, 2 (F). In Hodge, A. (May 29, 2008). Principal power put to the test. Retrieved February 27, 2009, from [http://charlotte.rhinotimes.com/Articles-i-2008-05-29\\_179826.112113\\_Principal\\_Power\\_Put\\_To\\_The\\_Test.html](http://charlotte.rhinotimes.com/Articles-i-2008-05-29_179826.112113_Principal_Power_Put_To_The_Test.html).
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York, NY: Oxford.
- Rommetviet, R. (1979). On the architecture of intersubjectivity. In R. Rommetviet & R. M. Blakar (Eds.), *Studies of language, thought, and verbal communication* (93-108). London: Academic.
- Spillane, J. (2006). *Distributed Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Spillane, J. P., & Diamond, J. B. (Eds.) (2007). *Distributed Leadership in Practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Tharp, R.G., & Gallimore, R. (1988). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning, and schooling in social context*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Tudge, J. (1992). Processes and consequences of peer collaboration: a Vygotskian analysis. *Child Development*, 63, 1364-1379.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1991). *Voices of the mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society*. (Trans. M. Cole). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Kozulin, A. (1986). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Zeichner, K. (2006). Reflections of a university-based teacher educator on the future of college and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 57(3), 326-340.

**RETHINKING FEDERAL AND STATE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES  
ASSOCIATED WITH THE CURRENT STANDARDS MOVEMENT: A  
COLLECTION OF SELECTED REFERENCES TO STIMULATE  
REFLECTIONS AND DIALOGUES**

by  
**Walter S. Polka**

WALTER S. POLKA is on faculty at Niagara University, Lewiston, NY.

**Abstract**

*All educators, especially teacher educators who are preparing future teachers, need to continuously and adamantly advocate for educational policies and practices that promulgate the primacy of the individual in the teaching-learning process. Historically, educators recognize that students are physically, socially, and intelligently different. Teachers, at all levels of the instructional spectrum, generally agree that students learn in different ways and have different motivations, however, schools continue to foster a convergence orientation in curriculum programs and instructional expectations. The contemporary standards movement, with high stakes testing accountability, has been promulgated by such national legislation as the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and 2009 The Race To The Top Act (RTTT). Even with the recent changes of September 23, 2011 in the NCLB legislation (McNeil & Klein, 2011, p.1) allowing states more flexibility in addressing the achievement expectations, the basic trend toward greater convergence in schools and classrooms throughout the country is continuing. This convergence movement with its associated standardizations and quantitative assessments continues to dominate the philosophical landscape of contemporary American educational thought.*

*However, the issue of “over-emphasis” of convergence as reflected in those NCLB rigid national and state assessment standards was recently highlighted by a once stalwart proponent of standards who reviewed the impact of standardization, reflected about her own previous policy actions and recognized that, “The most toxic flaw in NCLB was its legislative command that all students in every school must be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014...such a goal has never been reached by any state or nation” (Ravitch, 2010, p.102). Although that educator, who once figuratively “caste the die” for standardization in previous Presidential Administrations, has reflected and re-thought her previous position on the movement; her diligence for convergence as epitomized by NCLB has had a powerful impact on forcing most educators into convergence for compliance sake in their curriculum programs and instructional approaches. Thus, it is imperative for all educators to stimulate and dialogue with various key policy-makers and stakeholders about the authentic and culturally appropriate re-focusing in education on key concepts of constructivism as a philosophy with differentiation of instruction as a primary approach to teaching and learning so that the primacy of individual learning may be enhanced.*

*This article is designed to facilitate debate about the conflicting values associated with divergence and convergence in education. It contains various cogent original poems by the author as well as historical references used by him during the past five decades as he interacted with colleagues, students, parents and community members about the significance of divergence in education. The poems and readings have been effectively used and may continue to be used with various constituencies to stimulate reflections and dialogues about rethinking of federal and state educational policies and practices associated with the current standards movement in education and to illustrate the incongruities of that movement with our America cultural ethos.*

**Constructivist Philosophy**

Constructivist educational philosophy advocates that learners use their respective experiences to actively construct understanding that makes sense to them rather than have that understanding delivered to them in already organized forms (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001). This philosophical perspective emphasizes active learners who link their new knowledge with prior knowledge and apply their expanded understandings to authentic situations (Foote, Vermette & Battaglia, 2001). The constructivist instructional orientation contends that learner understanding of any concept depends entirely on the individual's mental construction of that concept for themselves based on their experiences (Danielson, 1996, p.23).

The basic tenets of the constructivist approach may be traced to such pioneers as: Quintilian, who recognized the significance of differentiation instruction in the 1<sup>st</sup> century; Comenius, who advocated relating instruction to individual growth and development in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; Rousseau, who promoted using student experiences as learning motivations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; Pestalozzi, who promulgated teachers as facilitators of learning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Dewey, who advanced a progressive student focus in teaching and learning in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ornstein & Levine, 2008).

Differentiated instruction is a teaching approach predicated on an increased awareness of the role of individual variances in learning and includes recognizing the multiplicity of differences that impact student achievement such as: "...ability level, learning style, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and so on" (Sternberg & Williams, 2002, p. 444). Such a learner-centered orientation requires that teachers create expectations as well as environments that are rich in instructional diversity and also encourage learner interactions on a regular basis to help each other reconstruct information for their own authentic understandings.

Hence, the following are key constructivist learning principles: a) construct comprehensive learning environments that include real-world problems; b) incorporate social interactions, reciprocal teaching, and multiple grouping patterns; c) provide multiple representations of content to promote learning transfer; and d) use the principles of cognitive and educational psychology (Sternberg & Williams, 2002, pp.444-445).

**Divergence v. Convergence in Learning**

Constructivist teaching and learning are intricately tied to promoting a more individualized or divergent approach to education. This concept is fundamental to the American educational experience and is consistent with our democratic cultural ethos. This significance has been documented in the educational literature and research of the Twentieth-Century (Polka, 1977). Accordingly, a cooperative project of the National Education Association, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the American Association of School Administrators titled, *A Climate for Individuality*, articulated the following key philosophical principles associated with both our cultural and educational heritage including:

- The rationalism of the enlightenment which affirms the inherent dignity of the individual as a principle in the constitution of the universe by which men are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,” among them, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”
- Scientific findings, especially from the behavior sciences, supporting the belief that human nature develops its potentials most fully when individuality is respected.
- Pragmatic confidence -- derived from experience in giving free play to intelligence, sensitivity, and creativity in problematical situations -- that respect for the individual is the ultimate key to progress (Joint Project on the Individual and the School, 1965, p.15).

Thus, the respect and regard for the individual is firmly rooted in the heritage of American philosophical thought. This heritage has promoted a positive intellectual climate for constructivism in American schools throughout our history. But, typically schools and instructors do not focus on divergent approaches to teaching and learning because it is more convenient to prepare students for the standardized high-stakes accountability tests using traditional teacher-centered whole class and/ or direct instruction. So, most educators abandon constructivist principles, especially given today’s high stakes accountability tests, to comply with school, district, and state learning expectations. Unfortunately, the resulting school curriculum and instructional approaches are very similar to the classic animal school metaphor developed by Reavis (1937) seventy-five years ago:

Once upon a time, the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of a “new world”.

So they organized a school. They adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming~ and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming, in fact better than his instructor, but he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school, so nobody worried about that except the duck. The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He also developed “Charlie horses” from over-exertion and then got a “C” in climbing and a “D” in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class he beat all the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own way of getting there.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceedingly well, and also run, climb, and fly a little had the highest average and was valedictorian.

The prairie dogs stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their child to a badger and later joined the ground hogs and gophers to start a successful private school (Reavis, 1937).

It obviously appears as if our current education has devolved back to an “animal school” model similar to the above. Yet, given the nature of human beings as thinking, reflective, valuing individuals, with as many different physical, intellectual and social attributes as the animals in the above scenario it is disheartening that so many educators fall into the convergence trap without much protest. Perhaps, the best summation to the animal school metaphor and its contemporary relevance was recently provided by a former proponent of standardization when she reflected about the collateral dangers of such a system and proclaimed that such, “...a simpleminded and singular focus on test scores distorts and degrades the meaning and practice of education” (Ravitch, 2010, p.109).

Also, it is important to reflect that individual learners do not progress at the same rate and/or mature in their educational development at the same rate. All students can learn, however, not in the same way nor on the same day (Spady, 2001) is a key concept to reflect upon as the following learning experiences of well-known historical figures illustrate:

- Louisa May Alcott... Editor’s message was: “Tell Louisa to stick to her teaching. She can never write” (Roche & Roche, 1998, p. 92)
- Beethoven... “Music teacher said, ‘Beethoven has learned nothing, he will never learn anything’ ” (Fischer, 2008, p. 28).
- Caruso...“Singing teacher doubted his singing ability.” (Graybill, 2008, p.163).
- Winston Churchill... “Twice failed the entrance exam to Royal Military College” (Severance, 1996, p.17).

- Walt Disney...“Submitted an application as a cartoonist to the Kansas City Star but was rejected” (Krasniewicz, 2010, p.21).
- Thomas Edison... “Fourth Grade teacher told a school inspector that Edison was stupid and it was not worthwhile to keep him in school” (Baldwin, 2001, pp.24-25).
- Albert Einstein... “He did not talk until about 4 years of age and he was not fluent in speech until the age of 10 and he had trouble reading” (Frank, 1947/2007, p. 8).
- Bill Gates... “Told a friend that he entered Harvard to find people smarter than himself and when he found none dropped out to build his own company” (Erickson, & Wallace, 1992, p.110).
- Isaac Newton... “Teachers called him ‘idle’ and ‘inattentive’ and considered him one of the worst students in school” (Hawkins, 1848/2002, p. xiii).
- Picasso... “Had difficulties with reading and writing during early school experiences” (O’Brian, 1994, p.25).

Think of what a different world it would have been had each of those above ten key contributors to their respective fields and our cultural achievements had been forced to abandon their creativity and restrict their individual motivations for the sake of convergence so that they could successfully meet predetermined standards such as those promulgated by NCLB and RTTT. Also, think about the price in terms of cultural advancements that we may be paying because of the current forced focus on educational convergence at the expense of divergence in individual interest, maturation, and motivation. Teacher educators and administrators need to constantly remind current and aspiring classroom teachers that, “...each student is gifted and talented but each also has special needs; it is our professional responsibility to identify and capitalize on those special gifts and talents and provide for each individual’s special needs” (Polka, 1990).

### Divergence v. Convergence in Teaching

The role of the teacher in constructivist teaching-learning situations is that of an authentic facilitator of learning as opposed to a primary purveyor of information (Marzano, 2000). Teachers and teacher educators need to focus on designing activities and assignments that engage students in constructing important knowledge for their own sake as well as for the sake of meeting specific course and program competencies and expectations. The results of these activities will be different for each individual, depending on their experiences, knowledge, and their cognitive structures at the time (Danielson, 1996). Accordingly, the following constructivist teacher behaviors have been enumerated in the research:

- Encourage and accept student ideas and initiatives,
- Use raw data and primary sources along with Manipulative interactive and physical materials,
- Encourage student inquiry by asking thoughtful, open-minded questions and encouraging students to ask each other questions,

- Provide time for students to construct relationships and create metaphors (Brooks & Brooks, 1993).

Subsequently, individualizing instruction and customizing teaching, with its roots in constructivism, focuses on the student and his particular interests and needs (Armstrong, Henson & Savage, 2005). It is a philosophical orientation that identifies that every student is gifted and talented and that each has special needs.

The instructional methods and learning strategies for differentiation in the constructivist learning approach are designed, implemented, and evaluated according to the talents, needs and interests of each individual (Polka, 1977). There is no one-way, prescribed, pre-packaged, and absolutely correct instructional design in the constructivist perspective. Since each individual is unique, several procedures are constantly made available to facilitate individual learning. Each student has an individualized curriculum guide that includes independent experiences, small group interactions, and large group presentations that have been cooperatively developed by teacher-student-community curriculum planning (Woolfolk, 2001).

Dewey, the quintessential American educational philosopher, promoted such a learner-centered instructional approach in 20<sup>th</sup> century schools as he provided the following conceptual premise for the role of the teacher within constructivism and re-emphasized the significance of divergence in curriculum planning in 1916:

Since learning is something that the pupil has to do himself and for himself, the initiative lies with the learner. The teacher is a guide and a director; he steers the boat, but the energy that propels it must come from those who are learning. The more a teacher is aware of the past experiences of students, their hopes, desires, chief interests, the better will he understand the forces at work that need to be directed and utilized for the formation of reflective habits. The number and quality of these factors vary from person to person. They cannot, therefore, be categorically enumerated in a book (Dewey, 1916, p. 51).

Thomas Friedman, author of the popular book: *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twentieth Century* provides a contemporary reinforcement of that Dewey perspective with an emphasis on the significance of developing each student’s sense of curiosity and passion. He concludes that for the twentieth-first century flat world, “...IQ Intelligent Quotient – still matters, but, CQ and PQ – *curiosity quotient* and *passion quotient* – matter even more...Curious passionate kids are self educators and self motivators. They will always be able to learn how to learn, especially on the flat-world platform” (Friedman, 2005, p.314). He also provides specific reflections about his personal experiences with teachers who made a difference in his life because of their focus on facilitating the process of learning not necessarily on the subject content they were learning or assessments for which they were preparing:

Because when I think back on my favorite teachers, I

don't remember the specifics of what they taught me, but I sure remember being excited about learning it. What has stayed with me are not the facts they imparted but the excitement about learning they inspired. To learn how to learn, you have to love learning – or at least enjoy it – because so much learning is about being motivated to teach yourself. And while it seems that some people are just born with that motivation, many others can develop it or have it implanted with the right teacher (or parent) (Friedman, 2005, p.310).

Therefore, several key references from different historical contexts support the cultural imperativeness of constructivism, differentiation, and divergence in democratic educational systems. Hence, in our contemporary educational milieu, there is a definite need to be vigilant about the standards movement and the various state and federal policies and practices that promulgate convergence in both teaching and learning even if there are slight modifications such as those of this past September 2011.

### **Contemporary Concerns About Divergence v. Convergence**

Some contemporary educators continue to advocate for divergence in teaching and learning during this current age of standardized accountability, Attending to learner variance and need historically has made common sense in a classroom. This approach also reflects decades of proliferating knowledge about the brain, learning styles and varieties of intelligence, the influence of gender and culture on how we learn, human motivation, and how individuals construct meaning (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000, p. 12).

However, schools and classrooms, even in the Twenty-first Century, are more typically organized for convergence in both teaching and learning. Accordingly, the standardized education paradigm of today is to provide for learner differences in one of two ways, "...either sorting and separating students in order to deal with their differences or placing them in the same classroom and ignoring differences." (Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008, pp.30-31).

Several contemporary educational leaders share trepidations about the current convergence movement and the inappropriateness of its ubiquitous applications in schools. Howard Garner, perhaps best expresses this perspective, "There is in the United States an enormous desire to make education uniform, to treat all students in the same way, and to apply the same kinds of one-dimensional metrics to all. This trend is inappropriate on scientific grounds and distasteful on ethical grounds" (Garner, 2006, p.187). And, most recently Ravitch (2010) postulated,

Not everything that matters can be quantified. What is tested may ultimately be less important than what is untested, such as the student's ability to seek alternative explanations, to raise questions, to pursue knowledge on his own, and to think differently. If we do not

treasure our individualists we will lose the spirit of innovation, inquiry, imagination, and dissent that has contributed powerfully to the success of our society in many different fields of endeavor (Ravitch, 2010, p. 226).

Subsequently, the poem titled: "US Educators Refuse Leaving Any Student Behind...But," was composed on behalf of educators, parents, and students who subscribe to the general accountability concepts associated with the current educational policies, such as the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and *Race To The Top* (RTTT) legislation, but who also have concerns about the convergence implementation approaches being required throughout the United States and in other democratic countries around the world because of the policies and practices associated with standardization.

The author of the poem has been an educator (teacher, administrator, school district superintendent, university professor and consultant) for six decades and has traveled, taught, and interacted with thousands of educators, parents, students and concerned community members who have expressed the ideas contained in the poem throughout the U.S.A. (37 states plus D.C.) and in 19 countries around the world. The poem is presented on their behalf to inform educational leaders and policy leaders at the local, state, and national levels about the inherent problems associated with standardization and convergence and to stimulate a renaissance about the significance of the individual as an integral component of our cultural ethos and educational philosophy.

The poem is intended as a clarion call to educators, parents, policy makers and legislators to seriously reconsider the current acute focus on convergence in teaching and learning as reflected in such federal education policies as NCLB, even with the new relaxing of assessment expectations and RTTT with its predetermined benchmarks. It is consistent with the admonitions of Friedman who stated, "In our justifiable desire to leave no child behind, we need to make sure that we don't leave art and music and theatre and literature classes behind as well" (Friedman, 2005, p. 318). That is what most educators desire to see...leaving no child behind but also ensuring that the interests, needs, and motivations of all children are an integral part of teaching and learning. They need to be assured that in our continued race to standardize assessments for accountability purposes, that policy makers are not subsequently fomenting convergence in curriculum and instruction that is detrimental to creativity and divergence is not irreparably stifled. The following composition cogently delivers that message on behalf of all US educators:

### **US Educators Refuse Leaving Any Student Behind... But,**

US educators refuse leaving any student behind  
vis-à-vis individual development!  
But, we will not promulgate  
standardization  
because each person is unique  
and possesses special gifts and talents.

We refuse leaving any student behind

involving intellectual development.  
But, we won't restrict  
thinking  
since each person is unique  
and some knowledge is incalculable.

We refuse leaving any student behind  
regarding artistic development.

But, we won't pre-frame  
expressions  
since each person is unique  
and beauty is in the beholder's eye.  
We refuse leaving any student behind  
relating to musical development.

But, we won't pre-set  
rhythms  
since each person is unique  
and apt music is in the listener's ear.

We refuse leaving any student behind  
concerning physical development.

But, we won't pre-judge  
athleticism  
because each person is unique  
and body prowess takes many forms.

We refuse leaving any student behind  
concerning analytical development.

But, we won't pre-figure  
problem-solving  
since each person is unique  
and divergent solutions show creativity.

We refuse leaving any student behind  
related to curiosity development.

But, we won't pre-fix  
explorations  
since each person is unique  
and our universe needs more discovery.

We refuse leaving any student behind  
regarding patriotic development.

But, we won't subvert  
dissent  
since each person is unique  
and history epitomizes our independence.

We refuse leaving any student behind

involving cultural development.  
But, we won't decree  
assimilation  
since each person is unique  
and enriched citizenship is multifaceted.

US educators, thus, refuse leaving any student behind  
vis-à-vis educational development!

Yet, we will not abdicate  
individualization  
because each person is unique  
and differences are hallmarks of our society (Polka, 2009).

### Summary

The concerns about the over-emphasis of testing in America and convergence in curriculum and instruction as reflected in the above poetic composition are congruent with those of recognized contemporary educational researchers including Howard Gardner who provided the following admonition:

The penchant for testing in America has gone too far. While some are useful for some purposes, the testing industry has taken off in a way that makes little sense from point of view of a reflective society. Many who seek to understand the underlying theoretical or conceptual basis of findings are disappointed. It seems that many tests have been designed to create, rather than to fulfill, a need. (Gardner, 2006, p.180).

Other contemporary educators express concern that the current convergence movement with its focus on standardized tests may reduce students to quantitative numbers and forsaking humanistic approaches to teaching and learning in order to be accountable because of NCLB and RTTT requirements. We may become a more literate society because of some of the standardized tests but lets not sacrifice the human focus of education as a result. That key point is amplified by the following statements from educational researchers, "...given the powerful influence of standardized assessments, federal mandates, and state-level oversight, it is easy to reduce students to input/output items rather than see them in their humanity" (Kelehear, 2008, p. 35). Gardner also posited the following perspective about the contemporary public support for convergence in education: "The current sentiment is based in part on an understandable disaffection with some of the excesses and limitations of earlier educational experiments. But, to a disturbing degree, it is also based on a general hostility to students, teachers, and the learning process. (Gardner, 2006, p. 187).

A similar sentiment was poignantly expressed by a Nazi Holocaust survivor after World War II and presented to a teacher on the first day of school. That note provides a key summary of the significance of valuing an appreciative human approach to education that all educators and policy makers need to keep in mind when discussing implementing standardized measurements in our schools.

Dear Teacher,  
 I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. . . . Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make children more humane. (Original Author Anonymous, Cited in Heaggans & Polka 2009, p.31)

It should be noted that Nazi Germany boasted of having the highest literacy rate in the world prior to World War II (Scrase & Mieder, 1996); but what about the human values associated with good educations? Friedman also provides reinforcement for the concepts included in the above note as he identifies the type of education that is essential in our contemporary flat world,

Its all about making connections among history, art, politics, and science which are the building blocks of so much knowledge. Yes, we also need to be vigilant in upholding the teaching of art and music and literature, because they to are essential for innovation (Friedman, 2005, p.316).

But, the dominant focus of schools in the United States during this first decade of the Twenty-first has been on establishing high learning targets to achieve the state and federal standards (Jacobs, 2010). However, she also observes that, "When it comes to education, the United States are not united. The state systems are in parallel universes. But, there is a larger question. It is not only the wide-ranging standards that are problematic, but also the focus on highly reductive testing in many of the states" (Jacobs, 2010, pp. 10-11). She further contends that the result of such a "standardization" reductionism or convergence orientation, even though it may be well intentioned, is that,

"...classroom experience too often locks in rigid standardization with an over emphasis on low-level testing and dated standards. The intention may be to help school reach targets, but the reality is that often educators feel that teaching to the test is what counts, and the tests are often suspect in terms of value" (Jacobs, 2010, pp.9-10).

But, Jacobs, consistent with the concepts contained in the poem *US Educators Refuse Leaving Any Student Behind...But*, (see page 13), states: "I do not support the notion of one national curriculum, but I do believe there are other possibilities, such as a national array of thoughtful, well-articulated curriculum options" (Jacobs, 2010, p.11).

Thus, there is a contemporary belief among many educators that federal legislation such as NCLB and RTTT may be well intentioned but so poorly implemented in standardized convergence modes that the result is a significant departure from the American educational ethos of enabling all students to achieve all that they are capable of achieving with a focus on individualism and creativity.

The next composition, *Our Quest for Understanding*, was originally developed during a Howard Gardner Seminar about multiple intelligences in the late 1980s (Polka, 2007). This poem serves as another cogent reminder to educators and policy makers at all levels about the significance of appreciating and promoting differences. Its message has resonated with hundreds of educators, parents, students and community members at various community and professional meetings and workshops. It has stimulated much reflection about what we are currently doing in the name of education to homogenize our society and pull us away from our historical individual orientation.

### **Our Quest for Understanding**

We have searched diligently for  
 similar  
 patterns, structures, and realities among  
 different  
 people, things, and ideas;  
 in our quest for simple understanding.  
 We have planned continuously to  
 standardize  
 experiences, options, and interactions among  
 different  
 people, things, and ideas;  
 in our quest for simple understanding.  
 We have implemented forcibly, with  
 precision  
 programs, models, and approaches among  
 different  
 people, things, and ideas;  
 in our quest for simple understanding.  
 We must commence seriously to  
 humanize  
 relations, histories, and futures among  
 different  
 people, things, and ideas;  
 in our quest for enhanced understanding.  
 And, we must realize naturally to  
 appreciate  
 uniqueness, and individuality among  
 different  
 people, things, and ideas;  
 in our quest for genuine understanding. (Polka, 2007)

The above composition, as well as the other references contained in this manuscript, facilitate the understanding and appreciation of divergence not only in our educational programs but in all we do as members of our democratic society in our quest for appreciating individual differences in to continuously advance our culture. Policy makers and educational leaders, especially those involved in teaching current and aspiring classroom teachers at all levels are encouraged to reflect about those references contained herein and begin to seriously rethink federal and state educational policies about academic standards and the knowledge convergence movement.

### References

- Armstrong, D., Henson, K. & Savage, T. (2005). *Teaching today: An introduction to education*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Publications.
- Baldwin, N. (2001). *Edison: Inventing the century*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Brooks, J. & Brooks, M. (1993). *In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Danielson, C. (1996). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: MacMillan Co.
- Eggen, P. & Kauchak, D. (2001). *Educational psychology: Windows on classrooms*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Erickson, J. & Wallace, J. (1992). *Hard drive: Bill Gates and the making of the Microsoft empire*. New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.
- Fischer, G. (2008). *Beethoven*. New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Company. (Original work published in 1905).
- Foot, C., Vermette, P. & Battaglia, C. (2001). *Constructivist strategies: Meeting standards and engaging adolescent minds*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Frank, P. (2007). *Einstein: His life and times*. Toronto, CA: Ryerson Press. (Original work published in 1947).
- Friedman, T. (2005). *The world is flat: A brief history of the Twenty-First Century*. New York, NY: Picador Publications.
- Gardner, H. (2006). *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Graybill, G. (2008). *Bravo! Greatness of Italian Music*. Wellesley, MA: Dante University Press.
- Heaggans, R. & Polka, W. (2009). The diversity merry-go-round: Planning and working in concert to establish a culture of acceptance and respect in the university. *Educational Planning*; 18(2), 22-34.
- Hawkins, S. (2002). In D. Adey, *Principia*. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press. (Original work published in 1848).
- Jacobs, H. (Ed.). (2010). *Curriculum 21: Essential education for a changing world*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Joint Project on the Individual and the School. (1965). *A climate for individuality; Statement of the joint project on the individual and the school*. Washington, DC: American Association of School Administrators.
- Kelehear, Z. (2008). *Instructional leadership as art*. Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, MD.
- Krasniewicz, L. (2010). *Walt Disney: A biography*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishers.
- Marzano, R. (2000). 20<sup>th</sup> century advances in instruction. In R. Brandt (Ed.), *Education in a new era*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- McNeil, A. & Klein, A. (2011). Obama Outlines NCLB Flexibility. *Education Week*. September 28, 2011. Bethesda, MD.
- O'Brian, P. (1994). *Pablo Ruiz Picasso*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton Co.
- Ornstein, A. & Levine, D. (2008). *Foundations of education*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Polka, W. (1977). Curriculum planning for the individualization of instruction. Ed.D. dissertation. Buffalo, NY: State University of New York at Buffalo.
- Polka, W. (1996). Our quest for understanding. *Treasured Poems of America*. Sistersville, WV: Sparrowgrass Poetry Forum.
- Polka, W. (2001). People, Like Flowers, Need Care to Bloom. *Superintendent's Perspective*. Grand Island, NY: The Sentinel Publishing Co.
- Polka, W. (2007). Our quest. *News from the NNER: A Publication of the National Network for Educational Renewal*; 4 (1), 7. <http://www.nnerpartnerships.org/>
- Polka, W. (2009). US Educators Refuse Leaving Any Student Behind...But.. Dallas, Texas: Poem originally presented at the Association of Teacher Educators Conference.
- Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the American school system: how testing and choice are undermining education*. New York: Basic Books.
- Reavis, G. (1937). Animal School. *Clearing House*. Retrieved (Oct. 6, 2009): [http://www.adrianwalsh.com.au/fable\\_of\\_the\\_animal\\_school.htm](http://www.adrianwalsh.com.au/fable_of_the_animal_school.htm)
- Roche, G. & Roche, L. (1998). *The book of heroes: Great men and women in American History*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing.
- Scrase, D. & Mieder, W. (eds). (1996). *The holocaust: Introductory essays*. Burlington, VT.: The Center for Holocaust Studies.
- Severance, J. (1996). *Winston Churchill: Soldier, statesman, artist*. New York, NY: Clarion Books.
- Spady, W. (2001). *Beyond counterfeit reforms*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Co.
- Sternberg, R. & Williams, W. (2002). *Educational psychology*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Tomlinson, C. & Allan, S. (2000). *Leadership for differentiating schools and classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Tomlinson, C., Brimijoin, K. & Narvaez, L. (2008). *The differentiated school: Making revolutionary changes in teaching and learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Woolfolk, A. (2001). *Educational psychology*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.



**Review of**  
**LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN INQUIRY-BASED SCIENCE**  
**CLASSROOMS, GRADES 3-8**  
**BY FANG, Z. (WITH LAMME, L. L., & PRINGLE, R. M.) (2010).**  
**THOUSAND OAKS, CA: CORWIN. 150 PP.**

**Reviewed by**  
**Andrea Thøermer and Chu-Chuan Chiu**

ANDREA THOERMER AND CHU-CHUAN CHIU are doctoral students in the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

As students move through grade levels, their love for science typically turns contemptuous and, as a result, standardized tests scores in science often reflect this trend. More than not, students' negative attitudes toward science can be attributed to the difficult language reflected in the vocabulary, structure and other linguistic features. Reading and writing serve as vehicles for learning language specific to science and can be supported through an inquiry-based approach, which has proven to enhance students' attitudes towards science. Therefore, attention to the connection between science education and literacy is essential to increase student motivation, engagement and, ultimately, science knowledge (Glynn & Muth, 1994; Norris & Phillips, 2003; Prain & Waldrup, 2010; Wellington & Osborne, 2001).

The book *Language and Literacy in Inquiry-Based Science Classroom, Grades 3-8* introduces valuable concepts for teachers and educators to rethink the way we teach science in school today. The authors shed light on how to infuse language and literacy instruction into the inquiry-based science learning environment. They emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for students to take on the guise of 'scientist' – questioning, predicting, evaluating, understanding, communicating and posing arguments for and against scientific issues, which cultivate conceptual understanding. To better understand the role of student and teacher, and to visualize the classroom layout, the authors provide sample inquiry lessons of a fourth and seventh grade classroom.

Reading is a complex process and requires strategic language analysis, especially when language is specialized and its structure is unfamiliar. The linguistic challenges of science texts include abstract nouns, technical vocabulary and dense information, which explains that the language demands in science texts are quite different from those involved in comprehending a narrative text. These linguistic challenges need to be taught in today's classroom. When students learn the specialized language of science, their understanding to the science content will be enhanced. To illustrate their point, the authors present a comparative analysis of two passages to demonstrate why students' comprehension may be challenged by the language demands when reading expository science passages. Then, they provide ways to assist and support students in becoming proficient readers and writers of science.

Going beyond the understanding of science language, the authors suggest the use of a variety of trade books in science curriculum will expand student's background knowledge and connect students' science learning from

the classroom to the world. Students studying science content must build their background knowledge and trade books are one way of ensuring better comprehension. Using science trade books to build background knowledge can be accomplished through read alouds, unit studies, poetry studies, and science author studies. Details about the implementation of the above science literacy practices are provided, along with websites to wonderful science trade books.

In addition to the exposure to rich text resources, students need to be explicitly taught how to handle the demands of science language and be able to learn science content through the complex language. Therefore, the authors of this book recommend equipping students with tools to better understand science language by using language-based tasks such as morphemic analysis, vocabulary think charts, concept definition word maps, vocabulary self collections, noun deconstructions, noun expansions, noun search, sentence completion, and paraphrasing. Some of the suggestions put a new twist on the teaching of science content.

Scaffolding students' interactions with reading expository texts through strategy instruction supports students' science reading. There are strategies that activate and develop prior knowledge, promote comprehension monitoring and encourage organization of text information. All strategies are thoroughly explained and visually represented for ease of use in the classroom.

Finally, the book ends with the importance of students writing to learn science and learning to write scientifically. Writing for different purposes, structures and grammatical features of school-based science genres are introduced. Thus, text samples, explanations on teaching these genres, and classroom activities that promote writing to learn science are provided. Science journals, learning logs, web logs, multimodal writing projects, and science fair projects are science literacy activities that can deepen and consolidate students' science learning through the process of writing to learn.

Written in an easy-to-read format, *Language and Literacy in Inquiry-Based Science Classroom, Grades 3-8* is a practical and research-based book that will supplement and empower science learning by incorporating the applicable literacy and language practices in any teacher or educator's science classroom. It presents user-friendly and ready-made language-based activities, lesson plans and resources that will immediately enrich any science curriculum and provide yet another avenue for teachers and educators to explore the teaching of science concepts.

### **References**

- Glynn, S.M., & Muth, K.D. (1994). Reading and writing to learn science: Achieving scientific literacy. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 31(9), 1057-1073.
- Norris, S., & Phillips, L. (2003). How literacy in its fundamental sense is central to scientific literacy. *Science Education*, 87(2), 224-240.
- Prain, V., & Waldrup, B. (2010). Representing science literacies: An introduction. *Research in Science Education*, 40(1), 1-3.
- Wellington, J., & Osborne, J. (2001). *Language and literacy in science education*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.