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INTRODUCTION

What Teachers Have to Say about Teacher Education is, we hope, an accurate reflection of the many thoughtful comments CBE received from teachers on their completed surveys. We would like to thank all the teachers for taking time to describe how they were prepared for the classroom and sharing their ideas and concerns about current teacher preparation programs. In addition to those who answered the surveys, we are grateful to the teachers and teacher educators who discussed their experiences in conversations and informal interviews.

Several CBE staff members assisted in this project, and we appreciate their support. Marissa Maurer and Sonali Arukur helped develop the survey and conducted follow-up phone interviews with a few of the teachers, and summer interns Sarah Carpenter and Valerie Hogan helped compile data and prepare mailing lists.

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What Teachers Have to Say about Teacher Education by Diana Wyllie Rigden

"What voice...do classroom teachers have in teacher education and certification? None whatever." James D. Koerner wrote those words nearly 30 years ago, and they remain, with rare exceptions, true today.¹ "Yet it must be obvious," Koerner went on to say, "that the views of able and experienced teachers on a great many aspects of the education of a teacher are at least as valuable as those of administrators or members of the education faculty who may not have taught in a school for a decade or two, if ever."

The quality of teacher education has been a favorite topic of critics of the American school system. Sometimes it is shrilly attacked as intellectually bankrupt, other times thoughtfully examined and supported with recommendations for improvement and change.² In the fall of 1995 the Council for Basic Education (CBE) established a Teacher Education Program to discover ways to encourage stronger teacher preparation programs to prepare the knowledgeable and skilled teachers contemporary schools need to ensure that all K-12 students reach state and district standards for achievement.

Faced with an array of often parallel but sometimes contradictory recommendations for change from many of the national teacher education reform projects and standards-setting organizations,³ CBE decided to go to the primary source – classroom teachers – for help in understanding the realities that underlie the reformers' hopes and visions. We wanted to hear directly from the teachers about their own preparation for the classroom and to ask them to describe, based on their experiences with student teachers and other experience with current teacher education programs, how well they think new teachers are being prepared by today's schools of education. Their responses were funny, touching, vehement, bitter, and provocative. They reinforced and humanized the research-based opinions of reformers and described in plain English the kind of preparation needed to be a good teacher. If the nation is going to move ahead with recommendations for change made in *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, the recent report by the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future it can no longer ignore the insights and visions of teachers.

The Teachers' Perspective

It's not as if teachers' opinions have not been sought on a number of education topics. In reports and surveys and on conference panels and policy-setting committees, teachers' perspectives have increasingly influenced how problems in education are defined and what solutions are proposed. Most

recently, the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education issued a set of teacher-specified recommendations for improving the quality and quantity of professional development in its report, *Teachers Take Charge of Their Learning: Transforming Professional Development for Student Success* (1996). Other reports, including the Carnegie Foundation's *Report Card on School Reform: The Teachers Speak* (1988), *Voices from the Inside: A Report of Schooling from Inside the Classroom* (Claremont Graduate School, 1992), and *Given the Circumstances: Teachers Talk about Public Education Today* (Public Agenda Foundation, 1996), present teachers' concerns about teaching and learning in the nation's classrooms, the role of standards in K-12 education, the nature of school-family relationships, the social context of schooling, and the professional development of teachers.

But on the quality of their preparation for their jobs, teachers have not often been invited to speak. One report describing what teachers have to say on issues in K-12 education includes a few brief comments about teacher preparation. IMPACT II's *The Teachers' Vision of the Future of Education: A Challenge to the Nation* (1991) proposes using professional teachers to teach education courses in the university or, at the very least, requiring professors of education to work directly with classroom teachers in the public schools.

Another exception to the general absence of the teachers' perspective on their preparation comes from the Metropolitan Life Foundation, which sponsors annual surveys of teachers (conducted by Louis Harris & Associates) on a number of education topics. In its 1990 survey, the foundation solicited first-year teachers' opinions on their training and education, publishing the results in *New Teachers: Expectations and Ideals, Part I: Entering the Classroom*. These teachers were asked to respond to three statements on the knowledge and skills they acquired in their preparation for the classroom. To the first statement, "My training has prepared me to teach students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds," 80 percent of these new teachers agreed, while 20 percent felt they were not adequately prepared for these students. In response to the statement, "All teachers should take a national, standardized test to demonstrate their qualifications," most of the new teachers (66 percent) endorsed the idea, nearly half of whom (31 percent) endorsed it strongly. When asked to respond to the statement, "I wish I had more practical training to be a teacher before I begin [sic] to have my own classroom," 58 percent of the new teachers agreed, nearly half of whom (26 percent) strongly agreed.

In addition to the Metropolitan Life Foundation's national survey, some state and local teacher associations have published recommended changes in teacher preparation. For example, in 1994 the South Carolina Teacher Forum Leadership Council released its *Recommendations for Pre-service Teacher Education Programs* and in 1991 the Rochester (NY) Teachers Association issued *Teacher Preparation: A Plan and Recommended Actions*. These two local reports proposed changes in the recruitment and

enrollment of students into teacher education, in course work and school-based experiences offered teacher candidates, and in licensure requirements. However, they seem to have had limited impact on teacher education programs in colleges and universities, and the teachers' voice on teacher education – how they were prepared, what they would change, what they think of changes occurring now – has remained muted.

The CBE Survey of Teachers

In the fall of 1995 the Council for Basic Education mailed surveys to 1,650 teachers to learn how well their education prepared them for teaching. Most of the teachers we contacted were award winners. Many had summer fellowships from CBE to conduct independent study in the arts, humanities, and sciences. Others were recent winners of state and national teacher-of-the-year awards, the Sallie Mae First Class Teacher Award, and the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Science & Mathematics Teaching. In addition, all of those teachers certified by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards were invited to respond.

In the CBE survey, we asked three questions:

- What was the strongest part of your teacher education experience, and what was the weakest part?
- If you could change any aspect of your teacher education program to ensure that future teachers are better prepared, what would you change and how?
- If you have been involved in teacher education since your own teacher preparation program, what are your impressions of current teacher education practices?

As is evident by the questions asked, we were interested in hearing from the teachers about specific proposals for improving the quality of teacher preparation programs. To answer the questions asked, the teachers emphasized those areas they believed were most in need of reform.

Who Answered the Survey

We were gratified by the thoughtful and often poignant responses we received – often several pages long – from teachers. Many described in detail their appreciation of and frustration with how they were prepared for the classroom and how new teachers are now being prepared for teaching. "I have been waiting 25 years for someone to ask these questions," wrote one of the more than 600 teachers who responded to our survey.⁴

Completed surveys came from 320 who teach in high schools, 141 middle school teachers, and 129 elementary school teachers. Twelve respondents identified themselves as

administrators, librarians, counselors, and staff. The great majority of the teachers (503) have taught for over 10 years, and, of those who indicated the type of school they teach in, 417 are in public schools and 92 in private schools. The largest number (201) described their school as “suburban,” 187 identified their school as “rural/small town,” and 146 defined their school as “urban/inner city.”

These teachers have accumulated a number of degrees. Nationally, 53 percent of teachers have advanced degrees; of those responding to the CBE survey, 462 (77 percent) have a post-baccalaureate degree, 35 have PhDs, and 14 have EdDs. Well over half (360) of survey respondents were certified to teach following their undergraduate education, and only 35 described themselves as uncertified. The remainder were certified through 5-year teacher preparation programs (57), upon receiving a graduate degree in education (61), or through an alternate certification or internship program (89).

What the Teachers Said

The CBE survey gave teachers considerable latitude in describing the strengths and weaknesses of their own teacher preparation, as well as the training they provide to teacher candidates or that they observe with student teachers they supervise. In their responses, many of the teachers commented on or made recommendations in several areas. As we began to analyze the returned surveys, we identified four major categories into which their responses fell:

- the content knowledge required of teachers,
- the pedagogical tools needed to teach content,
- the quality and amount of school-based experiences available to prospective teachers, and
- the quality of schools or colleges of education (including teacher candidates, faculty, and school of education policies).

We were expecting (and received) far more negative responses about their preparation for teaching than positive comments. Even the most devoted teacher educator admits to serious flaws in teacher education, and the teachers were eager to suggest major improvements. In *What Matters Most*, the national commission listed the major problems of teacher education as:

- inadequate time (a four-year undergraduate program is not enough),
- fragmentation (course work separated from practice, and education school and arts and sciences faculties insulated from each other),
- uninspired teaching methods,
- superficial curriculum, and
- traditional views of schooling.

To these five problems, the teachers we surveyed added:

- inadequate and unsupervised school-based experiences

- poor quality of many teacher candidates, and
- university faculty inexperienced in the schools.

After a decade of teacher education reform, a number of teacher education programs, as the commission rightly states, are beginning to address the deficiencies listed above. Because we anticipate some defensiveness and unwillingness to admit the continuing existence of many of these problems, we have noted by date those comments made by teachers who graduated from teacher preparation programs in the 1980s and 1990s. We have also featured comments focusing on recent experiences with student teachers and other teacher candidates, since they most clearly offer a window into current teacher education programs.

The Content Knowledge Required of Teachers

“What teachers know and can do makes the crucial difference in what children learn.” This dramatic but hardly surprising statement from *What Matters Most* was accompanied by evidence that too many American students have teachers unfamiliar with the content of the subjects they are teaching. The national commission reported that “nearly one-fourth (23 percent) of all secondary teachers do not have even a college minor in their main teaching field” and that among mathematics teachers more than 30 percent are teaching without content training. In the case of 56 percent of high school students taking physical science, 27 percent of those taking mathematics, and 21 percent of those taking English, their teachers are teaching “out-of-field,” in other words, they are not licensed to teach the subject. The picture is even bleaker for schools with the highest minority enrollments, where “students have less than a 50 percent chance of getting a science or mathematics teacher who holds a license and a degree in the field he or she teaches.”

“*One cannot teach what one does not know,*” said one teacher (1987) responding to the CBE survey. “*Good teaching boils down to solid, accurate information communicated in an interesting, interactive way,*” said another recent graduate (1990), “*and teacher education programs spend too little time preparing in the content area.*”

The importance of knowing subject matter, especially for elementary school teachers and especially in mathematics and science, was repeatedly emphasized in the responses. “*Make sure teachers are prepared in the content area in which they teach and don’t leave it up to chance,*” said one teacher who received a graduate degree in education in 1992. “*Our practices are now watered down in the content area so that pre-service teachers feel good.*” And two recent graduates (1990s) concurred that their own knowledge of content was poor. “*None of my undergraduate methods courses helped me know the content of my subject area,*” said one, and the other wrote: “*The weakest part was content. My classes touched very little on detailed content in the various subject areas I was certified to teach in.*” In one startling justification for not focusing on content, a teacher reported, “*The weakest part of*

my teacher education experience was being taught that since the world is changing so quickly, don't teach any content because we don't know what content students will need in the future."

The comments on how poorly prepared teachers are in subject area content reinforce the greatest fears of many critics of teacher education programs. When we consider that states and districts are establishing high academic standards for students, our concern for how well teachers know their subjects increases. Several teachers spoke directly to a lack of mathematical and scientific knowledge among their colleagues. *"It is ludicrous to expect elementary teachers to teach science or math on [the basis of] ONE course in each of these disciplines,"* said a 1990 graduate. Another teacher, agreeing with that assessment of elementary school teachers, added that secondary school teachers are deficient as well. *"Elementary teachers have a very poor preparation in science content. Even those who are planning to teach on the secondary level have much less course work in the specific disciplines they plan to teach than they should. Until a significant reform takes place in the way teachers are prepared, I see little hope for meaningful science teaching reform."* Wrote another, *"Current teacher preparation in all areas of science and mathematics, for all grade levels, is inadequate. The new National Science benchmarks will be very difficult to implement due to inadequate teacher preparation, particularly at the elementary level."*

One teacher, acknowledging that students engaged in hands-on learning are much more likely to succeed in math and science, pointed out the impossibility of such an approach for teachers with little knowledge of these subjects: *"Without a math or science text to use as a crutch, most elementary ed grads could not teach these subjects. Their curriculum is entirely dependent on a text."*

The picture of how well teachers are taught the content of subjects they are to teach becomes even bleaker when we read about teachers' experiences with student teachers – those who are currently going through teacher preparation programs. *"Most candidates knew very little about the content of their subject,"* wrote one teacher. *"Most were not academically serious. Many were actually dull."* Another wrote, *"Several [student teachers] use poor grammar, orally and written, and spell poorly. [They have a] poor college preparation – then [are] not screened to be good role models for students."*

According to another survey response, new teachers *"know all of the buzz words, go to all the conferences, are up on the latest theories – but are extremely weak in the very subject they are teaching. How can we turn out English teachers who are unfamiliar with the most well known poetry of someone like Robert Frost, can't explain how to use a semicolon, don't recognize subject – verb disagreement?"* The content preparation for English teachers was found lacking by another, who faulted college programs, saying: *"Lately, I find the student teachers [in English] come with only minimum writing/reading course work and tons of elective course work that may well have been interesting, but [is] seldom connected*

to the actual teaching needs." One elementary school teacher described a day with her student teacher as follows:

My most recent student teacher asked me what state Michigan was in. She listened to my directions about syllabication as I did a mini-lesson with kids. She offered her help and ended up telling a child that the word "dish" had four syllables. She might have been confused by the number of phonemes, but there are only three phonemes in "dish." Now, I'm pretty sure this student teacher will learn a great deal about geography, spelling, etc. when she's in charge of her own classroom. My question is, how do I know for sure?

Finally, one teacher warned, *"Teacher candidates are being taught many cutesy ways to teach. In the next ten years when the pendulum swings back to traditional teaching methods, they will discover they don't know the subject themselves."*

It's expected that critics of teacher education will complain how little content teacher candidates are taught, so perhaps we should expect to hear criticism from teachers on that topic. Indeed, schools of education usually suggest that knowledge of subject areas is not their purview at all, but that of colleges of arts and sciences. (Would medical schools offer this defense about interns who knew little biology?)

The Pedagogical Tools Needed to Teach Content

"Teach students how to teach!" was a plea made by many teachers in their responses. Schools of education do accept responsibility for ensuring that all teachers learn how to teach and how to manage a classroom. Their mission includes introducing prospective teachers to a variety of instructional strategies (including technology) and instilling in them the confidence and flexibility to use those strategies in the classroom. They are expected to make sure all education school graduates know the basic fundamentals of classroom management: how to maintain classroom discipline, set learning goals, create lesson plans directed toward meeting those goals as well as district and state standards, establish priorities, work effectively with individuals and with groups of students, create a classroom environment conducive to learning, and assess student learning. Finally, the school of education is responsible for providing teacher candidates with extensive knowledge of how students learn, how to accommodate different cultures, and how to deal with various social problems that appear in the classroom.

According to almost half of the teachers responding to the CBE survey, schools of education do not now provide prospective teachers all the pedagogical tools they need. More teachers cited these courses as the weakest part of their preparation. The national commission describes the problem

as one of fragmentation: "Most teacher education programs taught theory separately from application... Students' courses on subject matter were disconnected from their courses on teaching methods, which were in turn disconnected from their courses on learning and development."

The greatest weakness of the courses offered in teacher education programs, according to the survey responses is that they are so enamored of theory they are of no practical use. "Get rid of all those theory courses and replace them with subject-specific grade-specific strategy/methodology courses supported by the goals and objectives courses," was the comment of a 1984 graduate, one that was echoed by a large number of other teachers. In fact, descriptions of typical courses in teacher education programs include phrases such as: "the shabbiest psychobabble imaginable"; "an abject waste of time"; "watered down courses: 'Pretend you are 10 and try this activity'"; "repetitive make-work and focus on minutia"; "mind-numbing lectures on how to run a classroom given by people who had never been in a K-8 classroom"; "courses are not academically rigorous and tend to have excess busy work"; and "simplistic, make-work, seat-time methods courses." Testimony to the irrelevance of many of the courses in teacher education programs came in this comment: "I have been extensively involved in teacher preparation for the last five years. Most current practices, in my opinion, stress things that do not directly prepare teachers for life in the classroom."

In addition, many teachers said that methods courses were too often unconnected to the content one was going to be expected to teach. "Rather than taking a separate course in pedagogy," one teacher (a 1987 graduate) offered, "I would suggest that students take an academic course that incorporates a teaching component." Another teacher asked universities to do a better job ensuring that student teachers know something before they come to the school:

Annually I work with both undergraduate and graduate students in teacher preparation programs. While I have observed improvements in these programs in recent years, additional strategies could better prepare teachers for their classroom experiences. Prior to field experiences, students should be screened to ensure that they are ready to be in a classroom. For example, knowledge in their subject areas should have been clearly demonstrated. Knowledge in the manner in which children learn should be demonstrated.

Some teachers were dismayed that their content courses were unaccompanied by instruction in pedagogy: "There were so many classes that focus on the subject and none on instructional strategies in your field or for different students," wrote a 1993 graduate. A 1992 certified elementary school teacher claimed that her methods courses taught only theories

of content. "A good example is reading – never in my methods did we talk about how to teach someone how to read!" A science teacher (1995) was equally frustrated: "There should have been a lab preparation and activities course. As it was, there was no lab available for the use of the science educators even though much of their future occupation would depend on being able to prepare and carry out lab activities with their students." Another teacher (1987) suggested that "Teaching math to kids should be taken at the same time a student is working on math courses."

In addition to not learning how to teach content effectively to students themselves, many of the teachers responding to the survey were troubled by the inadequate preparation of student teachers and new teachers. "As a supervising teacher for numerous student teachers, I am alarmed by what I see as a lack of preparation for classroom experience. Most students are unable to prepare adequate lesson plans, unit plans, etc., and are weak in the areas of discipline and classroom management. Pre-service teachers are often unable to adapt lessons to developmental stages of learning styles," wrote a 1992 graduate. New teachers need help in "areas where even veteran teachers still struggle: how to grade papers, how to engage students of varying ability levels in overcrowded classrooms, how to stay focused, how to determine what is most important to teach," commented one teacher (1990), while a 1994 graduate recommended strong training in technology. "I found when I started teaching that the technology piece of my education as a teacher was missing. I had to learn it as a teacher. Learning about current technologies and how they can be used in the classroom needs to be part of teacher education."

Many teachers observed that schools of education do not adequately screen teacher candidates before placing them in schools. "Too often these student teachers are unprepared for the amount of time and effort it takes to be an effective teacher," one respondent (1989) said. "Elementary teachers need classroom management skills and secondary teachers need teaching techniques to motivate students." "I have had four student teachers," a second teacher reported. "All four had a very weak background in subject area. All four had the theories down, but lacked the practical teaching abilities. All four didn't realize teaching was a full time job." Another teacher remarked, "I had an intern teacher for the '94-'95 school year. While he was finally successful in certification, we had continual struggles with expectations (both in the classroom and in his ed classes). [He was] lazy and showed little commitment. From this experience I would suggest better up front screening and communication of expectations."

A teacher who participates in a university-based alternate certification program to bring career-changers into teaching described some of the weaknesses in that program:

When candidates are sent to the schools for their clinical experiences, they have ABSOLUTELY no idea how to write a lesson

plan, what methods of classroom management work best, how to assess students, what teaching to different learning styles really means, or what the state standardized testing program is like. Since these students are on the “fast track” to certification and since they have a bachelor’s degree and, in many cases, lots of “real world” work experiences, it is presumed that they will learn on the job. I do not feel we are going to encourage our best and brightest to remain in the classroom if we initiate via the “baptism by fire” process.

“Baptism by fire” seems to be the approach for most teacher candidates. It is perhaps telling that many recent graduates (all of the comments in this paragraph were made by teachers who graduated in the 1990s) felt that their preparation for the classroom was inadequate. One said that he had not been trained in classroom management and discipline. *“Much more time needs to be invested into helping teachers develop better discipline strategies.”* Another pleaded for teacher education programs to introduce students *“to the entire spectrum of strategies for management, planning, etc., not just what one university or professor prefers!”* Rather plaintively, a new teacher told how *“The professional courses exposed me to many philosophies, which were valuable, but I was totally unprepared for the impact of teaching itself.”* And a fourth described the need for teaching prospective teachers *“questioning, structuring a classroom activity, grading, how to set clear expectations for students, handling problem students and a variety of other concerns.”* These recommendations come out of often discouraging experiences. *“I realize that no one program or person can prepare you for teaching,”* said a 1993 graduate, *“but I didn’t have any ‘nuts and bolts’ knowledge to carry into battle.”*

The teachers were eloquent in identifying the tendency of traditional teacher preparation programs to jump on the latest reform bandwagon. *“Teacher education programs are keen to pursue the latest fad – which is often simply a repackaged bundle of previous fads,”* one teacher suggested. Another concurred, *“The system seems to be driven by a penchant for unthinking innovation with little respect for substance.”*

The Quality and Number of School-based Experiences

As the teachers have made clear in their comments stressing the need for effective training in subject areas and in pedagogy, all teachers need a solid understanding of the content they will teach as well as foundational concepts of teaching and learning. But education courses are not enough. *“Real world experiences beat any textbook explanation of the classroom,”* wrote one teacher (1992). And whether

professional educators admit it or not, teaching, like journalism, is best learned on the job. Most of what a teacher needs to know about how to engage students in learning and assess their progress can only be learned by observing classrooms and teachers, discussing strategies and styles, trying things out in a classroom, and practicing. By far the greatest number of comments we received had to do with improving the school-based experiences of prospective teachers, and 261 teachers described their student teaching experience (even when considered flawed) as the most valuable part of their teacher preparation.

While 62 percent of the teachers responding to the survey strongly advocated that teacher candidates spend more time in classrooms and schools, they had equally strong opinions of how to make those school-based experiences more productive and better opportunities for learning. It is not enough to drop prospective teachers into a school setting at several points in their training. An instructional partnership with the school must first be established.

Most of the teachers believed that assigning teacher candidates to student teaching during their senior (or fifth) year – which was their experience – is absolutely wrong headed. *“Student teaching should not be the first experience teachers have with the real world of the classroom,”* wrote one teacher (1989). *“Would-be teachers need to get into the classroom early not to observe but to assist, perhaps as instructional aides.”* *“Observations before student teaching should be mandatory,”* said a second teacher because, explained another, *“everything is theory with little practical experience. The trained teachers always express shock and amazement when they first face a class on their own.”*

Several teachers working with current teacher preparation programs were impressed by the amount of school-based activities now available to teachers in training. In the words of one:

The [local university] revamped its teacher education program about three years ago... to provide students with an internship program with the public school prior to student teaching. The program is designed to put university students into a public school classroom by gradually increasing the time spent in a school and by requiring them to participate or design educational activities while simultaneously reducing their college classroom time. The program was designed with the input of selected public school teachers called mentors, who agreed to accept the interns into their classrooms and help them prepare for student teaching. The results have been impressive. Student teachers who have participated in this internship program are much better prepared for a teaching career

and have experienced more success during their student teaching.

The commission reports that about 300 schools of education are creating such programs for their teacher candidates. What is the teacher preparation like in the other 900 teacher preparation programs? A 1994 graduate suggested that *“teachers should receive more practical experiences in real class settings with time for discussion and brainstorming with other would-be teachers and certified teachers. We can learn so much from each other but rarely have time to talk with and observe other teachers.”* And another (1994) worried that *“too many enthusiastic and idealistic new teachers are eaten alive (especially in secondary schools) during their first year. They need a year-long intern program where they could really get the feel of the day-to-day routine while at the same time building up units, discipline tricks, etc.”*

While suggesting more time for teacher candidates in the schools, the teachers also proposed structuring that time to provide candidates with a variety of experiences – working with different teachers at different grade levels, teaching children from different socio-economic backgrounds. One recent graduate (1994) said, *“I needed to teach more and have more freedom. I needed to see a wider variety of teaching styles – not just for an hour or two, but days and weeks.”* An experienced teacher concurred, *“Undergraduates should spend more time observing in classrooms as well as preparing lessons and teaching earlier and more often than their practicum or internship. They should spend classroom time in schools and with students of diverse backgrounds and skills. Additionally, they should observe teachers who use diverse methods and have different philosophies.”*

In *What Matters Most*, the national commission states that *“a coherent program of mentoring and instruction by school and university faculty is essential if teacher education is to be a powerful intervention in the experience of prospective teachers.”* The teachers answering the CBE survey were quite explicit about what that *“coherent program”* might include. First, teacher candidates must be placed with highly skilled mentor teachers who, as another teacher defined them, are *“the best, strongest, most professional teachers.”* Many teachers described their own experiences with *“poor”* and *“lousy”* cooperating teachers, and one, a 1994 graduate, pleaded eloquently, *“Select only the best teachers with whom to place a student teacher. It does only harm to place a student teacher with a poor teacher.”*

The second, equally important, part of the *“coherent program”* advocated by the national commission is the supervising faculty from the school of education. In comments quoted earlier in this paper, teachers reveal their unhappiness with the quality and commitment of university faculty who, as one teacher noted, *“are not realistic about elementary teaching and are not supportive of their student teachers.”* When a teacher described her frustration with a student teacher’s lack of professionalism, she said: *“We have students all the time in our schools who either never show up or do a*

terrible job with the activities they conduct, but they write a good report for their instructor. No one asks the teacher in the schools and the student is given A’s.” Another wondered why schools of education require minimum objectives or skills that *“a student teacher should have before her final teaching practicum.”* Clearly, supervising faculty are not providing much supervision.

A recent graduate (1994) admitted that *“my university supervisor rarely visited the school,”* a practice noticed by many other teachers. *“I have had several student teachers in my classroom and noticed a lack of college supervision and visitation by observers,”* another (1989) noted. A third teacher (1990) offered a bleak picture of the school-university relationship under which student teachers are being trained:

The college advisors are supposed to observe in the classroom every ten days. In general, they show up about once a month for an hour each visit. There is little time to talk with the advisors. They schedule their visits around their own schedules, not mine... There should be a better way to openly discuss the student teacher’s talents and areas for improvement as part of an ongoing plan for all student teachers. There should be a small committee – student teacher, advisor, and two teachers. A list of standard questions for each meeting to be held once a month could be reviewed and the results would help the student teacher and cooperating teacher make plans... to work on the areas for improvement.

Too often cooperating teachers feel that their work with teacher candidates is not valued or ignored. One teacher told how, *“a student teacher who was clearly unqualified was failed by his supervising teacher but passed by the teacher ed program. This kind of practice must be stopped!”*

If teacher education programs want to create high-quality school-based experiences for teacher candidates, they are going to have to redesign completely the relationship between university and school district. What now exists in many schools of education doesn’t work. Describing three recent student teachers, a teacher wrote: *“When the college supervisor reviewed the student teachers’ work there seemed to be pointless criticism instead of substantive comment. The student teachers had only a vague idea why they used the strategies in presentation that they chose. Their approaches were more grab bag than considered choice.”* Another teacher reported, *“In talking with student teachers today, a quarter of a century later, nothing seems to have changed. These people still feel unprepared in knowledge of subject matter, and they still have to prepare special lessons for ‘observations’ by vague individuals who wander in to ‘evaluate’ their performance on some pseudoscientific scale.”*

On the other hand, at some schools of education a new relationship is being introduced through professional development schools or professional practice schools. One teacher noted that *“there have been drastic changes since I received my first degree [in 1971]. I have experienced student teachers in my school that were receiving much more guidance and supervision on an individual level. They had a better sense of what they were committing themselves to.”* And another described her student teachers as *“nearly always well prepared, open to ideas, flexible, and ready to follow instructions.”*

The Quality of Schools and Colleges of Education

What Matters Most lists as one of the five greatest myths about teaching that “formal teacher preparation is not much use.” As is evident from comments already quoted, without question the majority of teachers responding to the CBE survey subscribe to and believe this “myth.” The national commission suggests that the “myth” is based on teacher education programs of 20 years ago and that many colleges of education have created standards-based programs that “integrate new knowledge” and provide prospective teachers with extended internships and school-site opportunities. As noted, several respondents cite increased opportunities for prospective teachers to spend time observing teachers and working with students in the schools. But most teachers do not see these changes in local schools of education, and many of the respondents express concern about other aspects of teacher preparation.

The preparation of teachers in content knowledge, pedagogy, and practice constitutes three key elements of the quality of a teacher education program. The commission recognizes that most programs spend too little time on “subject area content, child development, learning theory, and effective teaching strategies” and make little effort to relate course work with student teaching and school-based activities. These criticisms have been echoed by the teachers in the three previous sections of this paper.

Through their responses to the CBE survey, however, the teachers expanded the list of factors that reveal a program’s quality: entry and exit requirements for teacher candidates, the knowledge (about content as well as pedagogy) and experience (in the schools with today’s students) of faculty, and the strength of the school-university partnership.

Many teachers expressed dismay over the quality of teacher education candidates. A recent graduate (1995) described *“the lower division courses and caliber of my classmates”* as *“the weakest parts”* of his or her teacher education program. This teacher went on to say, *“It is too easy to become a teacher if one follows the traditional route.”* Schools of education are seen as shirking their responsibility when they admit weak students, who often, according to one teacher, *“go into teaching not because they want to teach but because they could not pass in the majors they were in.”* Nor should schools of education allow these students to continue in

the program: *“Many students should be weeded out of the program before they begin student teaching,”* a 1995 graduate declared. *“The universities need to be firmer.”* Another teacher agreed, saying, *“I strongly believe in better screening and guidance for prospective education majors. Someone needs to take responsibility to say, ‘Hey, your skills are not strong enough... You aren’t ready for teaching (and maybe never will be!)”*

The commission report expressed concern about the quality of teaching by school of education faculty, and one teacher provided an ironic example, *“I still remember this professor lecturing to a 300+ audience: ‘You must make your lessons interesting,’ he said in a monotone with no enthusiasm or examples.”* But to a much greater degree, the teachers were dismayed by the faculty’s general lack of experience or even interest in the schools. *“I am constantly amazed,”* wrote one, *“at how our profession is trained by folks who often have never been successful teachers, and if they were, it’s been so long ago the experience isn’t relevant. Graduates come into teaching without a clue of what’s involved and, subsequently, they soon leave!”* A recent graduate (1991) sounded the same refrain, saying that too often courses are taught by *“professors who haven’t taught in many years. They are out of touch with children and teachers of today.”*

Why school-based experience is important for university faculty is apparent from the comment of one teacher, *“I dealt with one group of students in the late 1960s, another type of students in the late 1970s, another type in the mid-80s, another type as the 90s began and yet another type in the last two or three years. How can a professor, having been out of the public school system for 15 or 20 or 35 years, truly understand the dynamics of the daily classroom situation?”*

The teacher education experience of some teachers was so poor that they advocated closing down all schools of education, getting rid or restricting the number of education courses offered by universities, and retiring any education school faculty unwilling to work for a significant amount of time in the schools. Most responses were not so drastic, but many teachers advocated redesigning schools of education as school-based programs, suggesting that *“teacher training should be removed from the universities and given over to the local school districts.”* Several teachers suggested basing teacher training programs on a partnership with a school district. *“Ideally,”* said another teacher (a 1980s graduate), *“I would have all secondary teachers get a BA/BS in the subject area and then take an MAT/MEd course entirely taught in the high schools.”* And a recent graduate (1990) said that it was through a district-based intern program that *“I had excellent instruction in classroom management, teaching techniques, and district and state education policies. I had good mentors and access to seminars and workshops.”* One teacher now teaching in a Master of Arts in Teaching program recommended that school-based teacher education create teacher teams of university professors and school practitioners who swap jobs periodically. *“For two years, one partner works at the university reading current research, observing a*

wide range of schools, attending conferences, and looking at the classroom as if it were a learning lab. At the end of two years, the partner goes back to the public school classroom and the other member of the team moves from the classroom to the university.”

What is clear to these teachers is that many current teacher education programs are out of touch with classroom and school realities and seem unwilling to work in tandem with school districts to create the kinds of programs that would produce the best qualified teachers for America's schools. Even so, several teachers were encouraged by changes in a few teacher preparation programs that offer teacher candidates a variety of in-school opportunities to observe teachers and work with students and allow them to practice instructional and classroom management strategies in a number of settings.⁵

Conclusions and Recommendations

When teachers talk about teacher education, their opinions are grounded in practice. They value ideas that translate directly into a better lesson for the class and reforms that, when undertaken, make it more likely for children to learn. Research-based theory, the preoccupation of many schools of education, is largely irrelevant to teachers, who must deal with 20-35 students five or six hours a day. A teacher described the tension between practice and theory from her own experience:

I think about the opinions I held when I was working [as a state policy maker], and about how detached and ungrounded they were, compared to the gritty, no nonsense opinions I clasp tight as I go into that school every morning. And I conclude that it is a fundamental dilemma that keeps us from progressing. Because the people who speak about what public education needs, or ought to do, or ought to be, cannot do that and know what they are talking about at the same time. To know, they should be here, should understand how this works. What does anyone know, who reads other people's stuff, and from that, writes their own stuff, and then they get together and talk about each other's stuff? Ask me about my social theories after two years of course work at [the university], and then ask me after three years at [the school].⁶

The survey responses, entertaining and challenging, come at a time when teacher education practices and policies are in great flux with reformers tackling different aspects of teacher education. The frustrations and irritations expressed by the teachers arise to a great degree from their belief that schools of education should be committed to preparing teacher candidates for the practice of teaching. Teacher educators, on

the other hand, see their purpose as the study of pedagogy: developing theories of teaching and learning in a rarefied world remote from the day-to-day realities of a K-12 classroom. From the teachers' perspective, this emphasis on theory over practice is not only inappropriate, it is damaging and has resulted in ineffective and weak preparation for the classroom. The teachers' comments suggest transforming schools of education by shifting the balance between these two purposes and creating school-based teacher preparation programs within the university.

In the survey responses we found three broad recommendations for changing teacher preparation programs:

1. Require all teachers to know the content of the subjects they teach.
2. Teach pedagogy in the context of academic content.
3. Offer prospective teachers many and varied school-based experiences.

Although the teachers offered their recommendations in stronger language than reform advocates generally use, the recommendations themselves are remarkably consistent with those proposed by the national commission and other teacher education reform initiatives. If these recommendations were carried out, teacher preparation programs would redefine practices and responsibilities within universities and strengthen partnerships between schools of education and local school districts. The standards for accreditation of schools of education and the standards for teacher licensure should reflect these changes.

To ensure that all teachers know the subjects they teach, schools of education are going to have to accept responsibility for their graduates' knowledge of content. Not only must every teacher candidate achieve a "B" average or higher in an academic major, but the school of education faculty must work in tandem with arts and sciences faculty to establish a rigorous course of study for teacher candidates, one that provides in-depth knowledge of an academic discipline, rather than a smattering of interesting electives. Finally, the university should require an exit exam that measures breadth and depth of subject-area knowledge (consistent with grade-level) before graduating teacher candidates. Even if the teacher education program is a fifth-year program that requires a B.A. degree for admission, the program must adopt an entrance requirement that ensures the candidate's subject-area knowledge and expertise.

It is not enough, however, for teachers to know content. They must be taught pedagogy in the context of academic content. As one teacher said in the survey, "*Universities are without a clue as to how to relate content with cognitive strategies.*" Award-winning and national board-certified teachers, however, do "have a clue" on what instructional strategies and classroom activities work for teaching different subjects and for engaging students who have different levels of ability and knowledge. Pedagogy courses offered by a

school of education should be developed by a team that includes discipline-based faculty, educators, and teachers. The courses should be taught at the same time, or following, a teacher candidate's experiences in a school so the candidate can see how the ideas presented might be applied in the classroom. The faculty team must also be careful to help teacher candidates learn to use K-12 content standards in planning lessons and assessing students. Finally, this team should assess the quality of at least two demonstrations of content-based teaching by each candidate.

To offer prospective teachers the many and varied school-based experiences advocated by the teachers in survey responses, a structured partnership needs to be created between the school of education and local school districts. Courses in learning theory and child development should be taught with school-based observations and analysis incorporated into the curriculum. Teacher candidates need to become familiar with school routines by working with students and using different instructional strategies through frequent and early in-school activities. School of education faculty must have clear-cut school-based responsibilities. (At the very least, all senior faculty should be responsible for supervising three-to-five student teachers each year.) Classroom teachers who meet high standards of excellence should serve as in-school mentors for student teachers and as members of the candidate's oversight team along with university faculty. These responsibilities, along with their help in designing university pedagogy courses, entitle cooperating teachers to become adjunct university faculty. This step would make the partnership between university faculty and cooperating teachers close to one of equals.

Changes discussed here require an explicit restructuring of responsibility for both universities and school districts. It does not make sense for any school of education to undertake reforms and changes to its teacher preparation program without the guidance and counsel of teachers from local schools and the commitment and participation of arts and sciences faculty. Classroom teachers must work as full-fledged partners with university faculty in training new teachers in instruction and assessment, classroom management strategies, and effective relationships with administrators and parents. As adjunct university faculty, in-service teachers should mentor teacher candidates, manage their internships, and advise education faculty on their progress.

Such school-university partnerships for teacher preparation are rare. The teachers' perspective is absent from discussions of teacher education and their involvement, such as it's been, has been badly mismanaged. Practicing teachers must be invited to join a newly-designed teacher preparation program that combines the strengths of the arts and sciences and education. Only then will a university teacher preparation program become an effective avenue into the classroom.

SURVEY OF TEACHERS ON THEIR IMPRESSIONS OF TEACHER PREPARTION

The Council for Basic Education is launching a new Teacher Education Program to help improve the quality of college-and university-based teacher preparation programs and to support programs to expand the knowledge of those currently teaching in the schools. At this early stage in developing the CBE Teacher Education Program, we thought it would be valuable to survey CBE's existing Network of Fellows to learn about your teacher education experiences and to hear your impressions of how well teachers are being educated for today's schools. Please respond to the following questions, and let us know of your availability to participate in follow-up discussions or interviews. Thank you for spending the time to provide us with your responses and ideas.

Diana W. Rigden
Director, Teacher Education Program

PERSONAL INFORMATION

College/Univ & year of graduation
Major

College/Univ, advanced degree, & date
Major

1. When were you certified to teach? (check one)
 - a. At the end of a 4-yr teacher preparation program.
 - b. At the end of a 5-yr teacher preparation program.
 - c. If you took an alternate route to certification, please describe:
2. Please list the subject(s) you are certified to teach:
3. What grade(s) do you teach?
4. What subject(s) do you teach?
5. How long have you been teaching?
 - a. 3-5 years
 - b. 5-7 years
 - c. 7-10 years
 - d. more than 10
6. How would you characterize the school in which you teach? (Please check one from each column.)

a. Inner city _____	a. public school _____
b. urban _____	b. public charter/magnet school _____
c. suburban _____	c. NAIS private school _____
d. rural _____	d. Religious private school _____
e. small town _____	e. Other private school _____

In studying the quality of teacher preparation, we will examine three major areas: (1) how well teachers know the content of their subjects, (2) how well teachers learn instructional strategies for teaching students from different backgrounds and with different skills, and (3) how much supervision and support pre-teachers receive during their student teaching or other field experiences.

Keeping these three areas in mind, please answer the following questions:

1. What was the strongest part of your teacher education experience? What was the weakest part?
2. If you could change any aspect of your teacher education program to ensure that future teachers are better prepared, what would you change and how?
3. If you have been involved in teacher education since your own teacher preparation program, please give us your impressions of current teacher education practices.

Endnotes

¹ James D. Koerner, *Who Controls American Education?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 181.

² For examples of the two extremes, see Reginald G. Damerell, *Education's Smoking Gun: How Teachers Colleges Have Destroyed Education in America* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1985) and John I. Goodlad, *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

³ Major national teacher education reform projects include the Center for Educational Renewal and its National Network for Educational Renewal, the Holmes Group, the Project 30 Alliance, and the Renaissance Group. Standards-setting organizations in teacher preparation include the Interstate New Teacher Assessment & Support Consortium (INTASC), setting standards for initial licensure; the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), setting standards for certification of experienced teachers; the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), setting standards for school of education accreditation; and the New Professional Teachers Project (NPT), setting standards for teacher preparation. The National Commission on Teaching & America's Future synthesized some of the goals of these efforts in its recently released report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1996) and recommended a number of bold steps to improve teacher preparation, recruitment, and professional development. The commission's recommendations are referred to frequently throughout this paper.

⁴ Surveys returned to CBE totaled 602. (A copy of the survey form is included at the conclusion of this paper.) The numbers in this paragraph do not add up to 602, because not all of the teachers answered all the Personal Information questions.

⁵ Harriet Tyson described seven innovative teacher preparation programs in her book, *Who Will Teach the Children? Progress and Resistance in Teacher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

⁶ Personal correspondence

Filename: What teachers have to say about teacher education
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