

Can Teacher Education Make a Difference?

Teacher education has a multiplier function for a nation's schools. Teacher educators educate generations of teachers, who in turn educate generations of students in primary and secondary as well as higher education. This is why the impact of teacher education has been and will probably remain such a contested issue. When something is wrong or thought to be wrong with education, the blame is quickly laid at the doors of teacher education, especially in times of teacher shortages.

The question asked in 1981 by Zeichner and Tabachnick "Are the Effects of University Teacher Education 'Washed Out' by School Experience?" (*Journal of Teacher Education* 32, 7-13) has become a classic one. 25 years later, there is little "hard" empirical evidence clarifying what impact teacher education programs actually have. Can teacher education make a difference to graduates' teaching competence and performance?

AERA Division K's *Exemplary Research Award* for 2006 goes to an article about this question by Niels Brouwer and Fred Korthagen from the Netherlands. "Can Teacher Education Make a Difference?" (in the 2005 Spring issue of the *American Educational Research Journal* 42(1), 153-224) reports about a longitudinal study showing that programs which carefully integrate practice and theory *can* have a noticeable influence on how beginning teachers do their work.

The following program features were shown to influence teacher education graduates' professional competence, notably their ability to activate students.

1. A carefully planned *alternation of student-teaching and college-based periods* during preservice programs created opportunities for prospective teachers to reflect on their student-teaching experiences and for reorganizing their teaching plans.
2. A *gradual increase in the complexity of student-teaching activities* during preservice programs enabled prospective teachers to try out theoretical ideas in realistic classroom settings.
3. *Cooperation* between student teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors *in small-group settings* created opportunities for mutual support and for paying attention to individual concerns.

The AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education notes in its final report *Studying Teacher Education* (published in 2005 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates and AERA) that impact studies of teacher education have their methodological shortcomings. In particular, they often lack a longitudinal design and do not strategically combine quantitative with qualitative methods. It is these features of the award-winning study that afforded a more positive perspective on the potential impact of teacher education programs than the teacher education community has been used to.

The Exemplary Research Award for "Can Teacher Education Make a Difference?" will be handed to Brouwer and Korthagen during Division K's Business Meeting and Reception in the Moscone Center South, Esplanade Ballroom, Section 304 on Saturday, April 8, 6.15-8.15 pm.

Can Teacher Education Make a Difference?

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Occupational socialization in schools is a known factor counteracting attempts at educating innovative teachers. In this study, findings are reported from a longitudinal study conducted among 357 students, 128 cooperating teachers, and 31 university supervisors from 24 graduate teacher education programs. Quantitative survey data as well as in-depth qualitative data were collected over a period of 4.5 years. Development of teaching competence was followed from candidates' enrollment until their third year as in-service teachers. Occupational socialization in schools was demonstrated to have a considerable influence on the development of graduates' in-service competence. However, evidence was also produced for an impact of specific characteristics of the teacher education programs studied involving the integration of practical experience and theoretical study. Implications of these findings for the design of teacher education programs and the conduct of teacher education research are discussed.

KEYWORDS: occupational socialization, program design, teacher education, theory-practice gap.

The impact of teacher education on teachers' behavior in schools has been a recurrent issue in the literature on teacher education. Several authors claim that the effects of teacher education on the actual practices of teachers are generally meager. A gap between theory and practice seems to persist

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