



*A Union of Professionals*

## **SHAPING OUR FUTURE (TEACHER PREPARATION AS SEEN BY PRACTICING TEACHERS)**

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### INTRODUCTION

- Pleasure to be here. I'm particularly glad that my first address to AACTE as president of the AFT comes at a time when "teacher quality" has become the watchword of the day, and when we have a great opportunity and challenge ahead of us as we replace 2 million teachers this next decade.
- Whether quality teaching also becomes "standard operating procedure" in the future is not entirely in your hands or mine. But whether our organizations do the right things or not IS in our hands, and I know we want to.
- The issue is so important to the future of public education, to the future of our nation, and, above all, to the future of all our children, I believe we really have no choice but to make the changes that will make the difference for teachers and for students in the more and more challenging environment they face. This moment is as ripe for doing harm as it is for doing good, and we had better do the right thing. Because, as you and I know, there are plenty of folks proposing things that push in the opposite direction.
- Let me give you just one example. It's probably familiar to you. It comes from a recent policy brief written by Dale Ballou and Stephanie Soler and published by the influential Progressive Policy Institute. I quote: "The federal government should break the education school monopoly on teacher preparation. Any federal funds set aside for training should be available to any program that trains teachers, not just schools of education. Independent, non-profit groups such as Teach for America and individual schools" (yes, you heard right, even individual schools) "should be eligible to use the funds for 'on-the-job' training, or in other ways they see fit."
- No standards. No quality control. Nothing to protect the public interest. Nothing to protect children's interests. Just: "Y'all come now and do so-called teacher training."
- I doubt that the writers of these words would propose such a system--a non-system--for training the plumbers or electricians who may work in their homes. But utter indifference to standards for the men and women who will teach our children is another matter. Sadder still, this point of view is not considered kooky; it's gaining a growing audience.
- These are challenging times--ripe both with the prospect for the professionalization of teaching and for its slipping out of reach. And I know that when our institutions are under

attack, it's tempting just to circle the wagons. That however, would be a big mistake. Yes, we need to defend ourselves vigorously against critics who are simply out to destroy us and, with that, the possibility of ensuring every child a well-prepared teacher. But we can't shut our ears to all criticism--especially not from the teachers you prepare and I represent. And when four out of five teachers--an overwhelming majority!--surveyed by the Department of Education in 1998 say they do not feel well-prepared to teach in today's classrooms, we must pay very serious and very prompt attention. This is not an attack; instead, it is, in Secretary Riley's words, "a cry for help." And if we are truly committed to the absolute necessity of a professional teacher education program--if we are really serious about making sure that teacher education is strengthened and not dismantled, then together, we must answer that cry for help. That is the spirit in which I make my remarks, including my criticisms, today.

#### DEFINITION OF A "PROFESSION" AS THE STANDARD

- Now, in order to talk about teacher quality and our role in it, we have to have a framework. After all, everybody says they're FOR qualified teachers, and that what they're promoting will produce them. But there is lots of conflict and controversy over how to do that.
- So, how do we keep this vitally important debate from being just a contest over whose motivations are purer? How do we ensure that the proposals and programs that win out take us where we want to go--to an immediate and ongoing future with teachers in every school and classroom who produce the highest levels of learning in their students?
- I think we do that by insisting that teaching be thought of as a profession--and by admitting up front that many of the classical attributes of a profession are not characteristic of the teaching profession today. And not because teacher educators or teachers or their unions want it that way.
- Having said that, let's focus on two attributes of a profession that, to my mind at least, get us a substantial distance up the road to professionalization--and that we in this room can do something about.
- The first is the issue of a shared body of knowledge. And the other is the issue of standards for entry into teaching--especially "clinical training" and induction.

#### SHARED BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

- Put simply and plainly, a profession has a shared body of knowledge that all its members must possess.
- Of course, in teaching, there's a vast amount of information that teacher educators and others--(everyone seems to have an opinion!--)feel teachers **should** possess. But there is no agreement about the knowledge and skills teachers **must** possess--and, therefore, no core program that defines and unites teacher education. This is not the case with any other **professional** preparation.
- Let me give you an example. The California State Department of Education surveyed its teacher training institutions about what was taught to teacher candidates about teaching reading. It turns out that this varied from professor to professor. Even on the **same**

campus and in courses bearing the **same** title, what teacher candidates were taught varied; it was all a matter of the discretion of the professor; no common core was discernible.

- Or take Georgia, where teacher education institutions were surveyed about how much total instructional time was devoted to preparing teachers to teach reading. The range among the institutions was from 2 percent to 30 percent of the teacher education curriculum.
- Contrast these findings about reading to what we would find about teaching anatomy to prospective physicians. No matter the medical school: number one, you'd find an anatomy course; and, number two, you'd find its content and duration pretty much the same.
- Now, I'm not focusing on teaching reading because I don't think math or science or English, etc., are important. But if this is the situation with teaching reading, which is **so very** fundamental, then we know we're unlikely to find comfort in how teachers are prepared in other subject areas and skills. And it is precisely because the teaching of reading is so fundamental that our shortcomings there command particular attention--and discomfort.
- Literacy is the foundation of all learning. Teachers **must** be prepared to teach all children to read. As the 1998 National Academy of Sciences report, "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children," told us, there is growing consensus about what knowledge and skills are necessary to be effective in teaching all children to read. We know so much more now--and the reading wars appear to be over....
- That's why it is absolutely imperative that the academy, that our nascent profession, determine a core body of knowledge and skills that prospective teachers must master and start to develop a core program based on that knowledge and skills (taking into account, of course, teachers' various specialties).
- A core program of knowledge and skills is characteristic of the education and training of every other professional, and that is where we too must go. Moreover, without that, our enemies will continue to be able to say that any institution, any group, any provider can prepare teachers--because, after all, what teachers should know and be able to do is just a matter of opinion or fashion.
- I know, of course, we can't do this overnight or force a consensus that doesn't exist about required knowledge and skills. But sometimes, you don't know there's a consensus until you go about seeing if there is one, and that means a commitment to doing so. And just like with reading, I suspect that once we make that commitment, we'll find more consensus about the necessary knowledge and skills of teachers than we now admit.
- We are in a solid position to start with the teaching of reading, and there is no more important way to start than with the subject of teaching reading. Because in truth, my friends and colleagues, we have not done this well.

#### SHARED BODY OF KNOWLEDGE: READING

- So our first challenge is to do it better. I am proud to announce that the AFT has developed a blueprint for a core curriculum in reading that is based on the consensus in

the National Academy of Sciences report. Many of you have seen the draft and have shared our excitement. We will be releasing the document soon. We urge you to support it and to help transform that blueprint into a core part of the program of your institutions. You should lead the way on this; and we will help. And **we** will try to lead the way on in-service because many practicing teachers have not had the benefit of this new knowledge about teaching reading. We would be grateful for your help, and more effective with it.

## SHARED BODY OF KNOWLEDGE: SUBJECT MATTER

- Let me now return to the issue of teacher education more broadly. We have long held the view that teachers need a solid grounding in the liberal arts because an education in the liberal arts is the mark of an educated person, which a teacher must be.
- Teachers also must have a deep education in the disciplines they will teach, as well as in the related knowledge and skills of the craft of teaching; reading is a good example of that.
- There's a reasonable argument to be made that a four-year undergraduate education provides too little time to educate prospective teachers in the liberal arts **and** in the disciplines they will teach **and** in the knowledge and skills of the teaching craft. There's also a reasonable argument to be made that, given teacher salaries, extending teacher education to the lengths some have proposed would make teacher shortages even worse than they are. That may be. But I think the extra time is needed, and if we do what is necessary--what is right--support for the other changes we need to make will follow.
- Time, for example, has an impact on ensuring that teachers acquire deep subject-matter knowledge. And I want to register my strong concern that the issue of subject-matter knowledge for teachers continues to get short shrift in teacher education, as well as in teacher licensure and professional development. This is especially true for elementary teachers, but it's also the case for secondary education teachers, despite the widespread, though by no means universal, requirement of a subject-matter major.
- This cannot be allowed to persist. You can't teach what you don't know well, and, too often, our students' results, at both the elementary and secondary level, clearly reflect that.
- I am well aware that colleges of education are not wholly or primarily responsible for this because, often, the responsibility for subject-matter knowledge lies with the college of arts and sciences. And I am aware that, often, those other divisions do not see the education of prospective teachers as a serious responsibility--forgetting, I suppose, that the quality of teachers greatly affects the college students they eventually teach.
- All I can say here, in the strongest possible terms, is, these walls must crumble--in the university and also between K-12 school districts and the institutions that prepare teachers. K-16 education **is** a seamless web, and we'll fool ourselves into extinction if we don't recognize that.

## CLINICAL TRAINING

- Let me turn now to one important aspect of that interdependence: clinical training.
- Teacher education must have a fundamental connection to students--and I'm not talking about the young adults preparing to be teachers, who are your students, but about the

youngsters your students will be teaching.

- If I've heard it once from my members, I've heard it a thousand times: in their teacher education programs, theory was unrelated to practice; content knowledge was disconnected from teaching methods; instructional practices were unrelated to learning and development; preparation for real classrooms was either non-existent or based on idealized situations; and, mostly, the instructors who professed about "best practices" in teaching children hadn't been in a school and classroom setting in years and years, if ever. And if they were, it was shamefully superficial.
- Student teaching, in contrast, always gets higher marks from teachers reflecting back on their training. But you and I know that this so-called clinical experience is also woefully inadequate: too short; too few, if any standards, for the selection of schools, classrooms, and cooperating teachers; and inadequate supervision, to name but a few problems.
- Not all of this, of course, can be laid on the shoulders of teacher education. I am keenly aware, for example, that the university reward structure does not encourage--even discourages--your working with schools and children. And I also know that clinical programs in teacher education are underfunded.
- But it is just plain wrong that academic faculty are not afforded time to spend in schools and to coordinate with clinical faculty. It is wrong that few, if any, standards exist for hiring clinical faculty and that they are unsupported in their work with student teachers. It is wrong that supervisors are often retired principals or teachers who are chosen not for their instructional excellence but for their willingness to work for little money.
- And then there's the state and school district role, their virtual indifference to who the "cooperating teacher" is: the practicing teacher in whose classroom student teachers get placed. He or she may be chosen by the principal or be self-selected; there is no regard for teacher quality criteria because there are no such criteria. (NCATE standards for student teacher placement only specify that the cooperating teacher be fully certified.) And, of course, the "cooperating teacher" is seldom trained and paid for the additional responsibility and therefore usually not involved with the student teacher deeply.
- The AFT recently conducted a survey of higher education and a review of the literature on this issue. We found that there are a few "boutique" programs funded by the National Science Foundation or Goals 2000 that are careful in their selection of cooperating teachers and train those teachers. But our main finding was that the vast majority of programs are under funded and reflect the sorry state I described just before--that is, indifference about whether or not cooperating teachers are excellent. It appears that no more than 20 percent of teacher candidates have access to those "boutique" programs or professional development schools--and even the quality of these vary.
- What we need are real teacher education/school district and school partnerships--not some slapped together programs that are just student teaching in fancy dress, but the hard work of figuring out standards and processes for clinical training and induction, including the meaningful involvement of expert, practicing teachers as mentors and the balance of responsibility between them and teacher educators on campus.
- One program that exemplifies this approach is the Cincinnati Initiative for Teacher Education and Professional Practice Schools, which is a partnership among the University

of Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Public Schools, and the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers.

- A key component of the partnership's efforts to improve pre-service teacher education has been the restructuring of the University of Cincinnati's teacher education program. The university replaced its former, more traditional teacher education program with a new design that emphasizes content area study and clinical experience. The former four-year program required students to earn a bachelor's degree in education. The new program is a five-year model that requires students to earn dual degrees in both education and arts and sciences and engage in more intensive content area study. Most students also acquire some hours toward a graduate degree. In addition to more hours of fieldwork prior to student teaching, the students in the restructured program must successfully complete a yearlong clinical internship in a Professional Practice School (PPS), rather than the 10-week student teaching experience of the original program. Now in its eighth year, the Cincinnati Initiative for Teacher Education has received widespread professional **and** public recognition.
- There are other meaningful, substantive partnerships like this--but not enough of them.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS/CONCLUSION

- So, what is to be done? I've covered a lot of territory here today that I believe lays out some key levers for professionalization in the area of teacher education and in pursuit of higher teacher quality. Now I want to summarize them in terms of what the AFT is doing and will be doing, and I hope that we can do some of these things together.
- We will work with colleges and universities to ensure that pre-service programs for teachers have high standards for entry and exit (as all college entry and exit standards should be high); that they require rigorous preparation in the academic disciplines and in pedagogy; have strong clinical components that involve exemplary teachers both at the field sites and on the clinical faculty of education departments.
- We will vigorously pursue adoption of the standards we have developed for getting to a core curriculum in teaching reading. We urge your support, not only for the standards but also for our collaborating on transforming those standards into solid coursework. And from that crucial first step, I hope we'll work together on a full core program of teacher education tied to subject-matter knowledge and the best research knowledge about effective practice.
- We will continue to pressure state licensing bodies and professional standards boards to require that entering teachers meet high standards that include knowledge of their disciplines, knowledge of how students learn, and knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences.
- And we will continue to seek out partners to develop clinical training programs, like the ones I highlighted, and ensure that beginning teachers are given a well-supervised induction period that includes the opportunity to observe and be mentored by highly accomplished teachers.
- We are deeply committed to this agenda. But obviously, we cannot, and should not, do this alone. Certainly the public schools can't. Nor can the university. If ever there were a need to link the education of a professional to practice, it is in teaching. And the time to do better at it than we ever have is right now.

## ENDING

- Let me just say one more thing. You know, it always strikes me, in talking about programs and laying out recommendations and actions, that something gets lost. And that is the **soul** of what we're doing and why. I believe in my heart and soul that the teaching of children is, or certainly ought to be, an intellectual pursuit.
- Teaching takes wide and deep knowledge of a complex field, and a commitment to lifelong learning. It requires daily analysis and attention to the challenges involved in opening young minds, in growing their capacity. It takes the development and exercise of reason, curiosity, interest in constantly knowing more, and, yes, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. If teaching is not treated as an intellectual pursuit in the university, the nominal bastion of learning and reason, how will it attract people who love learning? And if we want our kids to love learning, they must be taught by people who do....
- As teachers of teachers, you have a great responsibility in this. And as a union of teachers, including those who teach in colleges and universities, so does the AFT. Let's work together to make it happen.