

TEACHER EDUCATION AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY

A Coherent Vision

JULIA E. KOPPICH

TEACHER EDUCATION has, at best, a checkered reputation. Many graduates of teacher education programs—now successful teachers themselves—lament the failings of the programs where they received their professional training. They talk about skimpy subject matter preparation, pedagogy courses that artificially separate theory from practice, and inadequate experience in the classroom. So, it's refreshing to find a teacher education program, like the one at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, that has confronted all these criticisms and remade itself.

A decade ago, the program at Trinity would have been open to most of the common complaints. Admission standards were relatively low. A majority of the students majored in education. And their classroom experience was limited to the classic eight weeks in a traditional public school.

The current program, which its creators still consider a work in progress, was hammered out by a group that included university faculty, experienced classroom teachers, and school administrators. The result of their efforts, a five-year teacher education program culminating in a master of arts in teaching (MAT), combines three basic elements: academic coursework in a range of subjects; rigorous classes that give students the basics of teaching; and a series of internships in professional development schools that are associated with the program.

Trinity's program is based on a coherent vision of teacher education, and it is anchored by a network of K-16 partnerships. It aims at producing excellent

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teachers whose professional influence will extend beyond the walls of their classrooms.

The Birth of a Program

Trinity's new teacher education program came into being during the education reform of the early 1980s. The publication of *A Nation at Risk*, with its prediction about a "rising tide of mediocrity" that was threatening to engulf the nation's schools, gave rise to heated debate about reform. In Texas, as elsewhere, there was a mega-reform statute that returned to the state much of the power over education that had formerly been ceded to local school districts.

Two members of Trinity's Department of Education, John Moore (the now-acknowledged "father" of Trinity's new teacher education program) and Thomas Sergiovanni, a nationally known education researcher and scholar whom Moore had wooed to Trinity, were convinced that the Texas law, with its emphasis on top-down reform and minimum competencies for teachers and students, failed to capture either the subtleties or the complexities of schooling. The law treated all schools as if they were cast in the same mold, and it ignored the important role that teachers' professional knowledge and skills play in successful education.

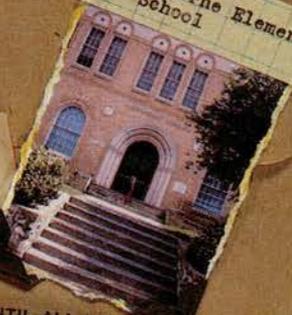
Moore and his colleagues brought together Trinity faculty and classroom teachers, along with some nationally prominent thinkers on education reform, including Ernest Boyer, Arthur Wise, and TheodoreSizer, to talk about the issues raised by the Texas reform. Their discussions resulted in *Teachers Speak: Quality Schooling for Texas Today and Tomorrow*. This report, which was written principally by the classroom teacher members of the group, expressed frustration with Texas policymakers' acceptance of the "factory model" of schooling in which state prescriptions and standardization predominated. "It is time," the report

Jackson-Keller Elementary



Partnership, n. 1. State of being a partner. 2. Joint possession or interest. 3. An alliance or association of an individual or a business on joint account. (See Fellowship, n. c.)

Hawthorne Elementary School



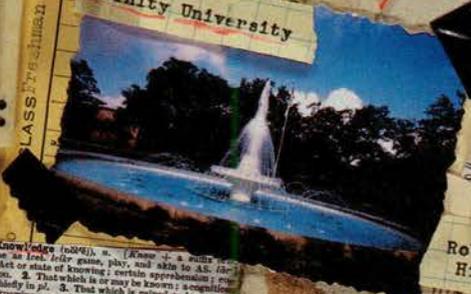
RE-USE UNTIL ALL LINES FULL.



Heater (under 16), n. (From Heater, the commander of Titian's ship.) A man commander or leader.



Trinity University



International School of the Americas



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AUTHOR
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Mark Twain Middle School



GARDNER SACHSSETT SCHOOL DEPARTMENT
REPORT OF HANOT

CLASS/TEACHER ROOM 6

Attendance

YEAR	ATTENDANCE
192	88
192	94
192	97

French

English	AA
Conduct	AA
Times Done	AA
Times Talked	AA
Days Absent	AA
Days Present	AA

Robert E. Lee High School



Vision (viz'yun), n. f. To see in a vision; to dream. Vision-ary (viz'yun-er-ee), n. Of or pertaining to a vision or visions; appropriate to, or favorable for, vision. 2. A. Imaginations; given to reverie. 3. Existing in imagination only; imaginary.

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declared, "to reshape the reform movement; to redirect it so that it reflects the understanding, the insight, and the vision of the professional classroom teacher."

Teachers Speak describes the profession as "a lifelong commitment and a lifelong learning process," and it emphasizes the importance of teachers' becoming leaders in preparing new colleagues for their careers. But it does not see the better preparation of teachers as an end in itself: The underlying premise of the report is that if teaching is transformed, student achievement can be as well.

Classroom teachers and university faculty went on to discuss what was needed to turn these principles into a program. What experiences might teachers-to-be find most beneficial and in what types of settings ought they occur? What kind of ongoing university-school relationships would be needed to create and sustain such a program? And what form should the university's own commitment to a new kind of teacher education—and, indeed, to a new vision of the teaching career—take? From these discussions, Trinity's five-year teacher education program slowly emerged.

The Schools, the Mentors, and the Clinical Faculty

Trinity has worked for a number of years with five San Antonio-area public schools to help them become professional development schools. These are the places where Trinity's teacher candidates observe and teach classes throughout their undergraduate years and where they spend their fifth year of study as interns—all under the guidance of classroom teachers who have been designated as mentors. (See *American Educator*, Winter 1996-97, for a story about Nathaniel Hawthorne School, one of the five professional development schools associated with the Trinity program.)

John Moore believes that the essence of teacher education lies in the school-university partnership. The university provides the foundation for a successful field experience; but it is the field experience that is essential in developing competent practitioners. "The university," says Moore, "is not where our education program happens. It's at the schools." As a result, there is an extremely strong—and reciprocal—relationship between Trinity University and the professional development schools.

The university pledges to provide its partner schools with teachers-in-training who are academically pre-

pared for the classroom, and to assist these schools in their education-reform efforts through staff development and university-led fundraising. Participating schools agree to assume responsibility, with the university, for the preparation and induction of new teachers. Experienced teachers in the schools become mentors, guiding undergraduate and graduate students alike through their real-world classroom experiences.

Because the schools and the university agree that teacher education is a shared responsibility to which each must contribute as an equal partner, the bond between the two is strong.

Trinity students spend their time in the field, both as undergraduates and as fifth-year interns, in the classrooms of excellent and experienced teachers. These teachers, some sixty in all, have been designated as "mentors" by the university and ap-

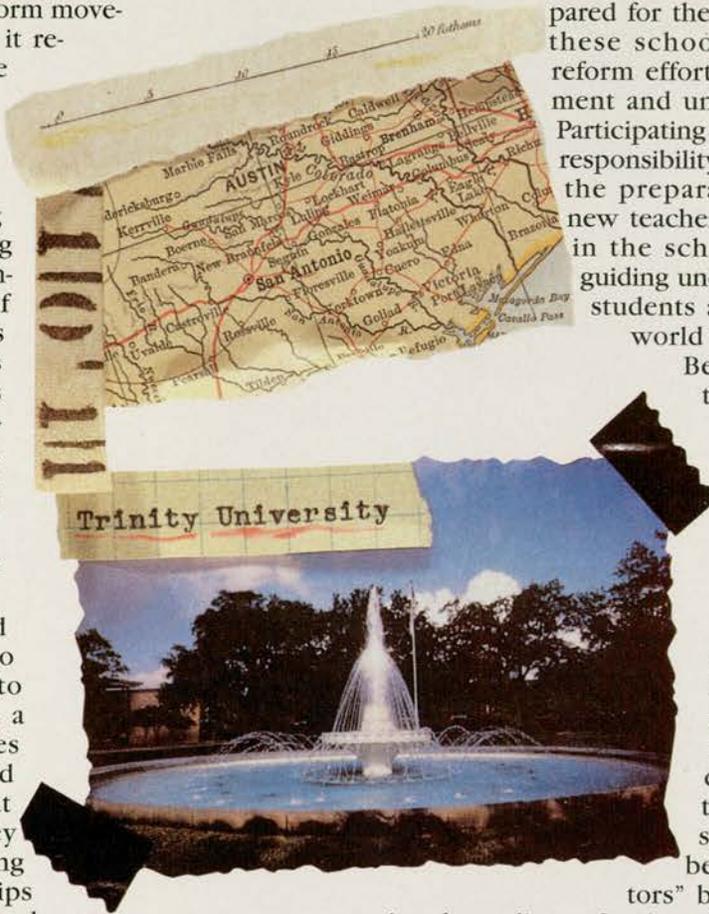
pointed as adjunct faculty in Trinity's Department of Education. Many are themselves graduates of the Trinity teacher education program. Others are nominated by their principals or request to be candidates.

The mentors' role is key. Trinity's teacher preparation curriculum includes no methods courses, per se. There is nothing in the course catalog called "Teaching Elementary Mathematics" or "Social Studies for High School Teachers." This kind of discipline-specific instruction rests solely in the hands of mentors. Trinity students learn to teach by teaching, beginning with one-on-one tutoring, working up to partial and then almost total responsibility for their classes.

Mentors are not paid (although, beginning in fall 1999, several extra paid days will be added to their contracts). They undertake this responsibility because they see it as a way to grow as teachers: This is "professionally enriching for me," says one mentor. "It's what's kept me in teaching," says another. Participation in the Trinity program "has made me feel like a valued professional," says a third. And they view the sort of apprenticeship embodied in the Trinity program as essential to developing teachers whose commitment matches their own.

In addition to providing critical support to prospective teachers, mentoring provides the expert teachers who take on this role both with ongoing opportunities to share what they have learned and to continue to learn themselves. Mentoring helps to keep excellent teachers in the classroom, John Moore explains, by helping to feed their intellectual curiosity.

In the Trinity model, clinical faculty take the place of university-based teacher education supervisors.



These professors, who occupy tenure-track positions in Trinity's Department of Education, spend half of their time (on average, one-half of the workday four days a week) in the partner schools. The other half of their time is occupied by the typical pursuits of university faculty—teaching, research, and writing. Clinical faculty take on many different responsibilities at professional development schools: They lead professional development workshops for Trinity students and experienced teachers; write grants to raise money for school-based reform efforts; substitute for absent teachers in emergencies; pick up donuts and make coffee for meetings. They become like one of the faculty.

Evaluating Trinity students is a dual responsibility. University faculty, of course, give students grades in their courses; and clinical faculty, to some extent, appraise their practicum work. But the key evaluation of students' in-classroom work comes from the mentor. If a mentor believes that a student needs additional help in a particular area, that opinion carries the day. Mentors, thus, believe they have a real stake in working with students, shaping their practice, and evaluating them rigorously but fairly.

First Experiences

The freshman year gives Trinity students who are considering teaching a chance to take beginning education courses, meet the department faculty, and get a first look at the schools in which they will begin to learn their craft—as well as to begin thinking about their academic emphasis.

Trinity offers no education major. Students who plan to teach at the secondary level must complete a major in an academic discipline. Prospective elementary school teachers enroll in a specially designed humanities program consisting of twenty-five to thirty courses, taken in academic departments. Many of these students specialize in a particular field and often complete a major or minor in one of them.

As freshmen, Trinity's teachers-to-be also take introductory education courses. One such class introduces them to contemporary education issues. Another, called "School and Community," focuses on ways in which schools become part of, or are divorced from, their communities. In these courses, students are introduced to an important component of all Trinity education coursework: the journal. In nearly every class for the next five years, students will be asked to keep a journal as a record of their ideas, reflections, and experiences. During their first year, students also participate in a series of field trips to the professional development schools where they will get their practical teaching experience.

As sophomores, Trinity students begin to understand the critical link between theory and practice as they engage simultaneously in coursework and get their first taste of teaching. In addition to classes in history, English, and other subjects, these students take one education class. "Child and Society" explores factors that shape the lives of urban children in particular, including gangs, substance abuse, and cultural diversity. Field experiences begin in the sophomore year with the first practicum. For three hours each week,

students work in a professional development school with Trinity faculty and mentor-teachers. This is the first of three such experiences; the others will occur in students' junior and senior years.

By the end of these three years, students have observed a wide variety of lessons, developed their own lesson plans, constructed student assessments, graded papers, assembled curricula, tutored individual children and small groups of students, and conducted whole-class activities. The goal is to get students to link what they are learning in their university courses with the practical realities of teaching.

Students receive direct—often daily—feedback on their teaching. Clinical faculty use university-based courses as well as their own classroom observations as opportunities to tease out problems, raise issues, and offer constructive and supportive criticism and suggestions. Mentors provide constant feedback, ideas, and critiques from their daily in-the-classroom perspective. Because students feel supported, they are willing to take suggestions and criticisms to heart. They know that to heed these comments is to become a better teacher.

The sophomore practicum invites students to focus on the school as a whole. The first two weeks revolve around the structure of the school. Students visit and observe resource rooms, the library, counselor's office, attendance office, special programs, and the like. They spend the rest of the time in the classroom of a mentor-teacher. The teachers-in-training work one-on-one with students, grade papers, administer tests, and learn how instruction is paced and planning is done. Toward the end of the semester, they must teach at least two lessons (or classes) under the watchful eye of their mentor.

Written assignments are designed to encourage students to be observant and reflective. Students prepare a written description of a lesson they have watched their mentor teach, develop their own lesson plans, and construct a paper on the culture of the school in which they are working.

Practicum students are never alone. They are assigned to professional development schools in cohorts, both in this first practicum and throughout the remainder of the program. This kind of grouping for field experiences provides students with a natural network of colleagues and offers a safe harbor in times of stress. It also means that these young teachers never learn to see teaching as a solitary enterprise; they immediately become comfortable with the demands, responsibilities—and enormous advantages—of collegiality and cooperation.

Making the Decision

Students are not formally admitted to the teacher education program until their sophomore year, after they have completed some academic and education coursework and had their first field experience. Admission is not automatic: Requirements for the MAT program include a cumulative 3.0 grade point average in the first two years of college, three letters of recommendation from individuals familiar with the student's potential teaching ability, a passing grade on or exemption from

the Texas professional skills test, and approval by the department and university faculty committees. It is not enough for students to be in good academic standing or to have taken the requisite series of courses. In order to become an official member of Trinity's teacher-to-be cadre, students must demonstrate both academic success and teaching potential.

The junior and senior years at Trinity include additional education coursework and two more stints in a professional development school. Courses focus on public education in the United States—with

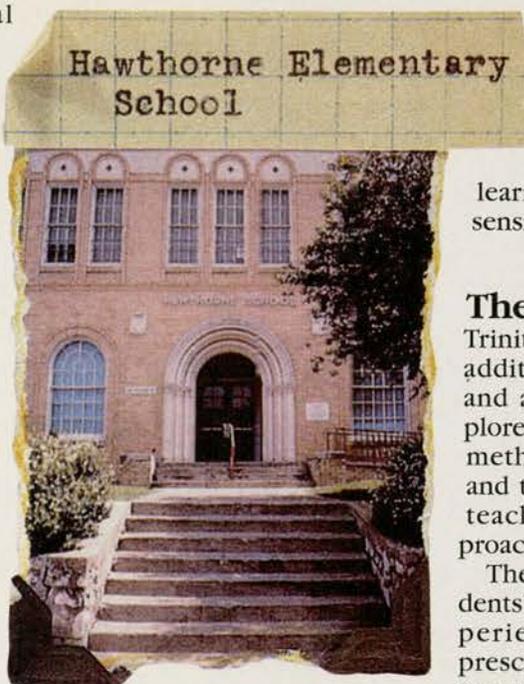
comparisons to education systems in other countries—and on Trinity-sponsored education reform efforts. Students also devote part of one semester to drafting their own agendas for school improvement.

Students in the junior practicum look particularly at what makes a master teacher. They are assigned to a different professional development school from the one they worked in as sophomores, and they are asked to concentrate on questions such as: How do veteran teachers begin a class lesson? How do they introduce new material? What kinds of management and discipline strategies do they employ? How do they move from one topic of study to another? How do they account for students' individual learning styles and needs?

Junior-year students again spend the initial part of the semester observing, and after having participated in the classroom routines, they assume some teaching responsibility, under the guidance of their mentor. They keep a journal in which they record their observations and reflections on topics such as classroom organization, teaching style, discipline and management, attention to individual students' needs, and classroom procedures.

As seniors, practicum students focus most of their attention on their students. The goal is to help these prospective teachers recognize and be sensitive to students' individual needs. Again, they spend time in the classroom of a mentor-teacher, assuming increasing levels of responsibility as the semester proceeds.

By the time Trinity students have completed four years of study, they have a broader and richer experience than their counterparts in most other teacher education programs. They have been introduced to many of the big ideas and issues in American education. They have a grounding in learning theory. They are developing professional habits of reflection and gaining an understanding of how to use research to enrich classroom practice. Final preparation for their upcoming



year of internship is a group of summer courses in which they study the history of the issues and debates about public school curriculum. The students explore contemporary learning theory and performance-based assessment, and they learn to design educational programs that are sensitive to the way particular students learn.

The Internship

Trinity students' fifth-year experiences include additional coursework, more journal writing, and a substantial research paper. Students explore the culture of teaching and schooling and methods for evaluating professional practice, and they confront their own assumptions about teaching by looking closely at how they approach their work in the classroom.

The internship, which is the heart of the students' fifth year, is an intense, in-the-schools experience that begins in August with the preschool teacher inservice. From day one, interns are expected to function as members of their school faculty, albeit supervised and supported members. In the fall, interns spend four days a week, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., in their assigned school. They also attend classes taught by the mentors an average of two evenings each week. In the spring, interns are at their assigned professional development school five days a week, and they take one evening course at Trinity. The interns in a school meet frequently to discuss the activities in their schools and classrooms and to gain support, encouragement—and ideas—from their colleagues.

The relationship between interns and mentors is also collegial. One fifth-year Trinity student puts it this way: It's "cooperative...not 'let me show you how to teach.'"

"Interns are prepared before they get here," say the mentors. "They bring fresh ideas to the school, often based on the latest research. They force us to think about change."

Interns are simultaneously protected and pushed. Given the freedom to experiment and the permission to make mistakes, they are also held accountable for their professional actions. If a lesson doesn't go well, the student and mentor discuss what happened and how such a situation might be avoided or handled differently in the future. Students are not "rescued." They return to their teaching assignment the next day (or for the remainder of that day) and carry on, just as an actual teacher would. The difference is that interns have someone to go to for help, support, and encouragement.

Students describe the internship year as a "hybrid between support group and think tank." And, of course, they keep a journal as a record of this important year. By the end of their internship, Trinity students are familiar with the standards of competent professional practice and the ethics of good teaching. They have had their share of successes and frustrations in the classroom, but none has experienced the terri-

(Continued on page 45)