

**AN EXECUTIVE REPORT OF
ALTERNATIVE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS
IN MINNESOTA WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
FUTURE PROGRAMMING**

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Kenneth R. Howey
Nancy L. Zimpher
Professional Development Partnership

Background

In the spring of 1989 The Professional Development Partnership, a private consulting firm in the state of Ohio, was awarded a contract by the Minnesota Board of Teaching (BOT) to conduct a study and provide a report describing the status of alternative teacher preparation programs in Minnesota and to make recommendations to the BOT regarding future directions in this regard. The contract also called for a report which would address conditions to facilitate entry into teaching by first year teachers and a general design for the evaluation of programs, cognizant of the program variations which exist in Minnesota.

Attached is an executive summary of the study of program alternatives and a set of recommendations relative to the future support of program options and the priorities that these should address. The specific co-investigators for the study and authors of the report are Dr. Kenneth Howey and Dr. Nancy Zimpher. A more complete report is available which expands upon this brief report prepared for the legislature.

Why Alternative Teacher Preparation or Planned Variation

We commend the BOT for its instrumental role in supporting alternative teacher preparation programming in the State of Minnesota. This support of alternatives is especially important; not to support innovation generally, but rather to promote carefully planned variations that can be studied in order to better answer a number of fundamental questions for which we do not have ample scientific evidence or clear answers at this time. The future quality of our teachers hinges on our ability to better respond to these questions. These questions include:

- * What are the most cost-effective means of preparing teachers for various roles?

- * How can a more able and diverse teaching force be attracted than that which exists at present?
- * How can teacher preparation be enabled by the contributions of those in K-12 schools and, in turn, how can those in schools, colleges, and departments of education contribute to improved school policy and practice concomitant with and as a corollary to teacher education?

There are numerous ways in which programs of teacher preparation or program components can be systematically varied and studied to address the purposes evident in the above questions. These include variations in: the length and locus of the program (baccalaureate versus post-baccalaureate is an example of the latter), programmatic linkages with general studies and the culture of an institution, piloting new teacher roles and responsibilities to accommodate the changing character of K-12 schools, conceptual frameworks which guide the nature of programs, organizational structure (i.e., the scope, sequence, and integration of coursework and related activities for learning to teach), curricular content, instructional practice, and working relationships with those in schools.

Thus, it is important to be both very clear about the purpose or goals of a planned variation and then how specific policy or practice will be varied in order to study and assess more precisely just what it is that makes a difference from one program to the next. For example, the general goal might be the improved quality of teacher education, but the specific means to achieve this can range from the development of a laboratory to practice specific pedagogical skills otherwise not easily practiced to efforts directed at fuller agreement between the college and local districts about expectations for student teaching. There has to be clarity about what it is that is

altered and why as well as what difference this is expected to make and why support is needed to test this option.

In this vein, while it is highly commendable to provide seed monies to design and implement new practices, the provision of needed resources to study the effects of the alternative, intended and otherwise, is quite another matter. A primary reason that so little is known in a scientific sense about the best means of preparing teachers is that so few resources are invested in researching and vigorously evaluating this critically important enterprise. Research undertaken by the investigators prior to this study clearly documents the labor intensive nature of teacher preparation. Teacher educators, and not only those at the smaller institutions with fewer faculty, but those in all institutional contexts, devote very considerable time and energies to teaching, advising, and field work with prospective teachers. Programmatic alterations tend to be undertaken on in addition to these on-going arduous responsibilities. Thus, not only are resources needed to support the implementation of alternatives, but also for the consuming, complex task of evaluating them in a high quality manner.

An Overview of Alternatives In Minnesota

As a result of this study, it is our view that across the institutional types preparing teachers in Minnesota there have been numerous program initiatives addressing each of the three major goals stated at the outset of this report. For example, Augsburg and St. Catherine, among other private institutions, Bemidji and Mankato State in the state university system, and all three of the U of M campuses have attempted in several instances through the design of alternative programs, to attract a more able and diverse

teaching force. The emphasis has been directed specifically towards a mature and/or career shift population of teachers.

A second emphasis to this point in time has been on enabling more effective and harmonious working relationships between those in schools, colleges and departments of education and those in K-12 schools relative to the preparation of high quality teachers. Again there is evidence of alternative programming towards this end at the three U of M campuses, and especially at St. Cloud, Southwest and Mankato in the State University System. In terms of the private sector, Moorhead-Concordia, among others has demonstrated leadership and is especially to be commended for its role in a consortium arrangement with the U of M, Morris and Moorhead State wherein preparation and support for newly prepared teachers is extended into their first year of teaching. Consortia which build upon the best of resources across campuses, irrespective of system affiliation, are to be applauded. A primary goal in this second type of alternative programming is to prepare outstanding classroom teachers to assume a more integral role in the education of preservice teachers. This is essential to the advancement of preservice teacher preparation and contributes at the same time to the retention of many excellent veteran teachers who desire to assume some leadership responsibilities but don't want to leave the classroom. This tactic also contributes centrally to the fuller professionalization of all teachers and eventually to higher quality instruction for students in K-12 schools.

Finally, there have been numerous efforts to improve the overall general quality of teacher preparation across institutions in the three systems. Typically, these have been specific program modifications and the support of the BOT has been a major catalyst in this regard. A primary example is the

focus on preparing "mentor" teachers to enhance the clinical preparation of teachers and the development of student portfolios to provide fuller documentation of teaching effectiveness undertaken at Southwest State. The College of Education at the U of M, Twin Cities Campus represents an exception in terms of more expansive program revisions across the several licensure areas with the Holmes Group serving as a catalyst and with the BOT again serving as a major source of support. A fuller accounting of these various program options is provided in the larger report.

A Need for Increased Planned Variation to Address Persistent Problems

In summary, given the relatively modest investment in the stimulus of thoughtful planned variations or alternative programs the state can be proud that multiple efforts to advance teacher preparation are underway. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. Minnesota is recognized nationally as a progressive leader in education and teacher education but other states in the midwest have recently made greater investments to promote development and research into teacher education than has Minnesota. More substantial investment in Minnesota is warranted into carefully planned variations in teacher preparation targeted at specific priorities for the state. Again, it is also essential that these planned variations be rigorously researched and evaluated in a comprehensive and valid manner so that the costs and benefits attached to these pilot efforts are understood.

We cannot underscore strongly enough that the support of alternatives in teacher preparation is not a minor matter. We simply have too much to learn to move forward without serious study. As one example, insights gained from recent research into how teachers acquire needed competence illustrate that

theoretically based and practically applied laboratory and clinical training akin to other professional training is lacking in teacher preparation. Rather preservice teachers pursue the modest ten or so weeks of "student teaching," experiences that research studies clearly demonstrate as uneven in quality. Little wonder that this is the situation, given the level of support for and degree of involvement by practicing professionals in schools. Many of those in trades, cosmetologists and bricklayers, for example -- have a considerably more protracted apprenticeship than do preservice teachers. This is but one of several problems that needs to be addressed in terms of advancing teacher preparation by enlightened leadership, policy and legislation at the state level.

There is also a growing discrepancy between the diversity of students in our schools and that of our present and future teaching force, especially those presently enrolled in programs of teacher preparation. Succinctly stated, our prospective teacher candidates are increasingly white, middle class, female, monolingual and have but limited familiarity in cultures other than that in which they grew up. Repeated surveys of these prospective teachers clearly illustrate that they have little interest in eventually teaching students who are much different than their own socio-demographic profile or of assuming a teaching position in either urban or remote rural areas. This most unfortunate circumstance needs to be redressed both in terms of programming for this present population of teachers and in terms of programs designed to attract more diversity into these prospective teacher cohorts.

Finally, K-12 schools have to change to meet the needs of a society that is changing radically; and not always for the better. The report of the Task

Force on Teacher Education for Minnesota's Future clearly identified social, economic, and political trends that will affect the structure of schools. These future schools will demand teachers who among other things can assume more specialized and expert instructional responsibilities, work more collaboratively in learning communities with not only other teachers but with professionals in related social agencies and who can more centrally and effectively employ modern communication technologies than can today's teachers. That school of tomorrow portrayed by the task force is today's school.

Recommendations

In summary then we have identified four priorities for alternative programming. We recommend that the Minnesota legislature, within the authorization given to the Board of Teaching to promote exemplary teacher preparation, appropriate funds in this regard to design and implement planned variations or alternative programs in teacher preparation which over a period of five years will:

1. Allow the further development of pedagogical laboratories and advanced clinical preparation for teachers. Just as pilots and physicians developmentally over time in their training, take on more complex analytic and diagnostic functions in laboratory facilities and clinical settings and engage in more isolated technical skills before assuming complex operations, teachers as well should not move directly from the college classroom settings to teaching in the complex culture of schools. They also need similar laboratory and clinical training. The ill-effects of compressing these needed developmental experiences into apprenticeships called student teaching, using teachers nominally prepared for this role, and minimally reimbursed for it -- cheap labor -- are well documented. One does get what one pays for;
2. Allow the fuller development of curriculum and related laboratory and clinical activities which address how to effectively and

compassionately teach youngsters living in poverty conditions, distinctive multi-cultural settings and urban and remote rural areas generally;

3. Allow the fuller development of specific programs and specific program modifications which are designed to attract and to accommodate underrepresented populations into teaching. These include attracting and accommodating not only racial and ethnic minorities but men to work with youngsters in the early, formative years of schooling and from among the growing number of senior citizens, those who might assume a number of adjunct instructional roles provided that there is focused preparation for these; and
4. Allow the fuller development of programs to prepare experienced classroom teachers to assume more of the clinical training of not only preservice but first-year teachers with provision of funds for the partial release of these experienced teachers from their classroom responsibilities.

Competition for these funds should be open to all institutions preparing teachers in the State of Minnesota. The criteria for funding should be sensitive to institutional differences in terms of size, institutional mission, and location. Priority should be given to consortia whether across institutions of higher education or, in terms of recommendations 2, 3, and 4 above, cooperation between institutions of higher education and school districts. Finally, a primary consideration should be the quality of the design for evaluating the planned variation.