

“Ah, Yes, I Remember It Well”
Reflections on Being in California Teacher Education

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H: We met at nine
M: We met at eight
H: I was on time
M: No, you were late
H: Ah, yes, I remember it well
We dined with friends
M: We dined alone
H: A tenor sang
M: A baritone
H: Ah, yes, I remember it well
That dazzling April moon!
M: There was none that night
And the month was June
H: That's right. That's right.
M: It warms my heart to know that you
remember still the way you do
H: Ah, yes, I remember it well

Honore (Maurice Chevalier); Mamita (Hermione Gingold)
(From the MGM musical, *Gigi*, 1958)

Asking the elderly to remember past events can lead to the sort of bantering dialogue between Honore and Mamita in the musical *Gigi*.

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People, events, and stories all begin to elide one into the other and one can easily re-write history to improve one's own role or denigrate one's enemies. Writing history can be an act of revenge or an act of intentional forgetfulness, and, occasionally, the truth is told. Nonetheless, I was deeply honored to be asked to write something about my time of active involvement in the world of teacher education in California. In 2002, I left the field of education for a career that pays less and has a more uncertain future than teaching. Thus, I am not current with public policy or teacher education research issues. These words will be that of one who once had a small part to play on a very large stage with people far greater than I could ever be.

For the record, my first ever California Council on the Education of Teachers (CCET) meeting was the fall gathering in 1976. I attended virtually every Cal Council meeting until the mid-1990s so my time with CCET embraces almost a quarter century. Those were interesting times, to borrow from the ancient Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times.”

Some Things “I Remember Well”

I remember standing with almost open jaw as I watched Superintendent of Public Instruction Wilson Riles singing Negro spirituals at the piano during the CCET President's reception at the Awhanee Hotel, Yosemite, California with Al Shanker (“Uncle Al the Teacher's Pal”) from the American Federation of Teachers in New York joining in on the chorus. That was my first Cal Council conference and what an introduction it was to this world of teacher education in California. So many of the post-World War II leaders in teacher education were still active. These were the people who built so many schools of education, opened so many schools, and worked collaboratively since 1945 to address the pressing needs of California's public schools.

At that same conference, I remember Gary Fenstermacher's keynote address—“The Quest for Quality in Teacher Education” based on *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Gary was then at UCLA and had been the University of California representative to the first independent teaching standards board in the U.S., the then Commission on Teacher Preparation and Licensing. I suspect that speech could still be given to this day. It rightly received a standing ovation.

I confess that I thought those halcyon days of cooperation and intellectual fervor might continue. I was to be proved wrong. Other forces were at work in California and fault lines that had been present all along were about to be split open by the press of partisan politics, the

demands for more radical reform, and the desire for power, money, and control.

And so, I remember Linda Bond—then staff to Senate Education Committee Chair Gary Hart—being a keynote speaker at the San Jose spring conference in either 1977 or 1978. Linda cheerfully and passionately told all of us teacher educators that we were dinosaurs at the water hole. It was change or die time for us all. Traditional teacher education was inadequate, expensive, and would soon be obsolete.

That salvo was followed by a slow deterioration of our relationship with the Department of Education. Somehow we managed to move from Wilson Riles coming to CCET to Bill Honig lecturing to us about our faults with great glee and great regularity to Delaine Eastin avoiding being in the same room with a teacher educator. Underneath it all, I suspect every Superintendent wanted to control teacher education, completely hated the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and also hated the independence of higher education even though most of them desired to be on the faculty of a university and often angled for such appointments.

I remember Marion Joseph and the culmination of the One Hundred Year war on reading—the phonics-forever people won in California in case you didn't notice. The Salem witch trials had nothing on the attempted purge of all whole-language people in California. Peter Lincoln Spencer, one of its founders and long-time faculty member at the Claremont Graduate School, almost got dug up and hanged all over again for his sins. Marion's single-minded pursuit of the hated heretics made Savonarola look like an altar boy and she gave new meaning to the phrase, "Jesus Marion Joseph." In keeping with the great ironies of teacher education, all that angst, all that testing, all that vituperative invective made so little difference in the public perception of schools and their impact on children that there are few traces of that war to be found.

I remember the persistent anti-credential claims and the wringing of hands over highly qualified people being denied the right to teach because they did not hold a teaching credential. Bill Walsh, then coach of the 49ers, was held up as a classic example of this stranglehold because it was claimed that he could not teach physical education in the California schools—except that Bill Walsh held a valid California teaching credential for years but somehow preferred to coach in the NFL.

When I was early in my teacher education career, I directed the program at Claremont Graduate School, which was one of the first internship programs in California. I remember a phone call I had with someone in the placement office of the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1978. He told me that LA Unified would not hire any teachers with

internship credentials because they were not fully certified teachers and LAUSD prided itself on only hiring fully credentialed teachers. Within a few years, LA Unified was requesting more emergency credentials than several states combined.

I remember the years of sudden teacher shortages as population increases and immigration shifts altered the teaching landscape profoundly. I don't remember the exact year, but there was at least one year that the entire California State University system graduated fewer than 200 mathematics majors in the same year that LA Unified alone needed over 300 mathematics teachers.

I remember the “expose” books—Gary Sykes and others who wrote, with remarkable popularity, about teacher education being higher education's “dirty little secret.” Teacher education was referred to derisively as a “cash cow” program and, across the campuses of prestigious universities and colleges, there was a slow shuffling of faculty away from their teacher education colleagues for fear those poor souls could infect others with their pariah status. I remember UC Berkeley, once a major preparer of teachers and administrators, essentially getting out of the teacher education business because the preparation of teachers was beneath the dignity of an international research university. Yet, those same faculty delighted in deploring the lack of adequate preparation of the students they admitted and never once connected the dots.

That, in turn, led to efforts to counter the claims that teacher education students were the “bottom of the barrel” among college graduates. I remember Ann Reynolds, in 1985, as Chancellor of the entire CSU, declaring that half of all the graduates of that enormous system would be ineligible to become teachers. Only those who graduated with a GPA in the top half of their academic major were eligible for entry into post-baccalaureate teacher education programs. That was 30 years ago—no one noticed then—and the drumbeat about academically unqualified teachers went on unabated, and today no one notices, and no one seems to care. It is a remarkable testimony that the real issues about teacher education and teacher quality are about something else entirely.

So, as a state and nation, we turned to teacher accountability and, in recent years, have wrung our hands over teacher tenure, the “dance of the lemons,” and other barriers to removing incompetent teachers from the workforce. During most of that debate, no one admitted that we could not hire enough qualified teachers in the first place and no one had a shred of evidence that there was a pool of more competent teachers waiting to get jobs. We also forgot the special challenges that face teachers in California public schools. I remember realizing that the children of California spoke over 140 languages, including some I only

knew from reading about them in the Bible. I further realized that some school children had been in the U.S. about a week or less when they were tested along with children who had been born here. I remember doing an accreditation visit in the 1980s to a high school that served a “port of entry” community. The ninth grade class turned over 180% during its initial year of high school as families came and went seeking jobs and security. Not one child present in September was in the same school in June. But teachers are held accountable.

At the very same time, there were persistent demands that teachers know more and more things before they entered the classroom. This “Christmas tree” approach to adding knowledge and skill requirements to teacher certification was based on the belief that every problem in California could be solved if only teachers were required to take a class or a test in “X.” At the same time, teacher education programs should not get longer.

As my career in teacher education was ending, I remember trying to explain our teacher licensing to the poor representative sent to California from Washington, D.C., to teach us backward people in California all about “No Child Left Behind.” He was unable to grasp the simple fact that California stopped awarding degrees in education at the B.A. level in the 1960s—almost 40 years earlier. He was unable to grasp the fact that, for most students in California, teacher education was a post-graduate program. He kept asking, in growing disbelief throughout his entire visit, about the “real” number of undergraduates in elementary and secondary education programs. Nothing we could say could alter his conviction that we were hiding undergraduate degree programs in education.

Personal Moments

Along with all of these political and policy battles, there are many personal moments I remember of the years I spent with my fellow teacher educators. Here is a small sample.

I remember the fall conference in Monterey, California, during a November storm that almost flooded the building. It remains a metaphor for some of the years in which many of us thought we might be swept out to sea by all the changes in our state. That night, it almost happened literally.

I remember Phil Fitch leading a group of us into Mexico to some fabulous restaurant that only Phil knew how to find and, turning off a paved road, Phil led us onto a goat path and, against all odds, we did end up at a truly great seafood restaurant. I, for one, was absolutely lost and uncertain how to get back to the USA.

I remember many years of “CrockenWamp” runs led by Dave Wampler and Vince Crockenburg. I never actually went with them on those runs but I learned about them later in the day from the physically fit attendees.

I remember learning that becoming President of CCET meant that you bought the bar supplies for the President’s reception and, therefore, drove around with a car full of booze for two years. However, as President, the good news was that you got the hotel’s presidential suite; the bad news was that the last time we went to the Ahwhanee Hotel in Yosemite was 1976. Not all presidential suites are created equal.

I remember being present at the 50th anniversary of CCET held in San Diego and all living Presidents and all living Executive Secretaries were present that night.

I remember that the first three executive secretaries of CCET were guys named Jim—Jim Stone, Jim Cusick, and Jim Hoffner until Dave Whampler and now Alan Jones.

The Real Purpose of Our Endeavors

However, we should not get overly caught up in these personal memories or matters of politics or even policy. For such concerns can, if overdone, blind us to the real purpose of our endeavors, and that real purpose is to enable every child in our state to grow and to develop to the limits of her or his potential. It is to answer the secret wish of all the children who have ever stepped into a classroom—that there would be a teacher for them, a teacher who would get to know them, encourage them, help them, believe in them. Children simply want a teacher who will teach them well, know them deeply, and love them anyway. Every child wants such a teacher and not enough children ever meet a teacher like that.

The work that we do, as teacher educators, teaching in or leading programs to draw and support highly competent people to take on the work of teaching, all comes down to that secret wish of every child. It matters little whether our programs get awards or get more funds, if that wish is denied. It matters little if we improve our resumes and enhance our chances for moving up the organizational chart, if that wish is denied. It matters little if we save a few tax dollars or make some lobbyist happy, if that wish is denied. For, you see, the very fabric of our culture, our future as a nation, a people, depends on that wish being fulfilled. Our great armies, our alabaster monuments, our prideful proclamations of greatness are empty mutterings into the winds of history if those small silent wishes go unanswered. Who among us is so cruel, so distant, so unfeeling as to tell small children that there is

no teacher for them? Who among us is so self-absorbed, so indifferent that they would tell a small child that this thirst for knowledge and for learning must go unquenched?

Our work is profoundly important and necessary for the future of our civilization. The truest of optimists are teachers. For teachers plant vines whose wine they will never drink. Teachers plant trees under whose shade they will never sit. Teachers are the truest of stewards. And teaching is, at its heart, a profoundly revolutionary act. It stands, ironically, at the opposite end of the spectrum from our capitalist, consumerist society. Teachers give away priceless knowledge every day. Teachers hand out the accumulated wisdom of the ages to all who would listen. Teachers empower other people's children and urge those children to greater lives, greater accomplishments than themselves. Teachers pay it forward so that generations yet unborn might live lives unimaginable to us. Teachers stand at the very cusp of creation every time they walk into a classroom, for out of what appears to be nothing comes the new, the unimagined, the fresh, the unique. Teachers routinely bridge time and space, knitting together yesterday and today so that tomorrow might flourish. Teachers can even cheat death, for their efforts live on in the lives of their students, echoing down through the generations for centuries to come. And teachers run to joy, for at the core of their work lies that particular human delight in learning, in knowing, in creating, in making things possible. Teachers are transformative agents in a world thirsting for change. Teachers stand at the very center point of humanness; they are the realization of what it means to be human.

The Heart of the Work We Do

I now often quote scripture and there is a portion of the Old Testament that comes to mind. It is taken from the Book of Ecclesiasticus and, I think, captures what is at the heart of the work we do.

Let us now sing the praises of famous people, our ancestors in their generations. The Lord apportioned to them great glory, God's majesty from the beginning. There were those who ruled in their kingdoms, and made a name for themselves by their valor; those who gave counsel because they were intelligent; those who spoke in prophetic oracles; those who led the people by their counsels and by their knowledge of the people's lore; they were wise in their words of instruction—all these were honored in their generations, and were the pride of their times. Some of them have left behind a name, so that others declare their praise. But of others there is no memory; they perished as though they had never existed; they have become as though they were never born, they, and their children after them. But these were godly people, whose

righteous deeds have not been forgotten; their wealth will remain with their descendants, and their inheritance with their children's children. Their offspring will continue forever, and their glory will never be blotted out. Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name lives on generation after generation. The assembly declares their wisdom, and the congregation proclaims their praise. (Ecc. 44: 1-15)

To all the members of Cal Council, past, present, and future, to all teacher educators in the world, to all those who stepped into classrooms in answer to the secret wishes of children, to all those who have labored to ensure that teachers are permitted to succeed at the work they are called to do, and for all those who have ever been lifted up by the skill, knowledge, dedication, and passion of a teacher, I now declare their wisdom and I now proclaim their praise.

If we remember nothing else of our history, we must remember this one thing well. There is no greater honor or title on earth than that of “Teacher.”