

Commentary:  
A Perspective on the Reform  
of Teacher Preparation in California

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In the last decade, the education and policy communities in California have undertaken a major effort to reform the preparation of public school teachers. At the heart of this work is quality education for all children and high-quality teacher education. With the passage of SB 2042 in 1998, the state has set in motion the building of a learning to teach system. To date, subject matter, professional teacher preparation, and induction programs are in the early stages of implementing the mandates of this reform. It is at this juncture that I reflect on the evolution and direction of the state's work. I do so as a credentialed teacher in California and as a teacher educator. And I bring to this reflection two broad questions that are raised and addressed here.

The first question has been asked by graduate students in a master's degree course I teach entitled Principles and Practices of Curriculum Development. Here we look at the kinds of curriculum changes that John McNeil (1996) suggests we often find: change as mere substitution, such as one course for another; change as modification of a program; or change as a complete restructuring of a program. We look at themes shaping the American public school curriculum in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: themes such as the notion that in any epoch there are many ideologies, but which ones stick largely depends on the prevailing social, political, and economic climate. Thinking about curriculum change and guiding themes, students, who are largely experienced classroom teachers have, for the last three years asked, *Are reforms in teacher preparation and the school curriculum just a cycle?* If you will indulge me, and travel with me a bit, here is what I know.

In 1971, I was issued a Standard Secondary Teaching Credential for the State of California. That license, signed by my former colleague, Peter L. LoPresti, who was Executive Director of what was known as the California Commission on Teacher Preparation and Licensing, entitled me to teach in K-12 schools and provided me with the authorization of Life Diploma. I think that meant that the state placed no additional requirements upon me other than to periodically renew my license — I think! I took my Life Diploma into my public school classroom, and within the first year of teaching, I quickly realized that, although I had been credentialed to teach Spanish and English for life, and well-prepared with the content and pedagogy of my subject fields, I knew very little about the kids I would have — three periods of English learners. I knew nothing about teaching English as a Second Language, and particularly reading to students whose primary language was not English. You see, our country has a long history of placing foreign language teachers in ESL classrooms, and our schools have an extended history of placing ESL classrooms at the secondary level in isolation from so-called mainstream disciplines. My experience was no exception.

My Life Diploma and I returned to the university for a master's degree in education with a specialization in a budding field, TESOL, and an emerging knowledge base in bilingualism and bilingual education. It is interesting for me to note that, as I returned to the university to learn more, the legislation that had governed my Life Diploma had been replaced by new legislation entitled the Ryan Act. This law created the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, did away with the Life Diploma, required secondary teachers to take a course in reading, ushered in the notion and requirements of the Professional Clear Credential, and created the designations Multiple Subject and Single Subject Credential. And I asked myself, what about my credential? As a young teacher, I did not realize that California, like many states, was moving to competency-based or outcomes-oriented education and teacher education. The state was streamlining the school curriculum and reducing course offerings and requirements in art, foreign language, and physical education.

By the end of the decade, California was working on the development of high school exit exams. Elementary schools moved almost exclusively to basal readers and what many educators jokingly referred to as “teacher proof” curriculums. Much of what we were doing was in response to a growing national disaffection for schools and teachers and to the demand for accountability at all levels of the educational spectrum. In teacher education, in particular, we were trying to reshape our practice by focusing on more sequential curriculums and more laboratory experiences. We were creating five- year programs and looking at teacher

education as an all-university responsibility. Finally, we were examining how to involve K-12 teachers and clinical professorships in teacher education, recommendations for the reform of teacher education made in the 1960s (Conant, 1963).

I took my Life Diploma and my knowledge in TESOL and bilingual education back to my school where I would continue to be “the” teacher who taught “those” kids at a school that failed too many students each year. But we continued our work at my school, and in the state, and in the nation. By the early 1980s, Scholastic Aptitude Scores were reportedly dismal, and the United States Office of Education pronounced us *A Nation at Risk* (1983), a publication which spawned a host of school reform movements and a thrust on standardizing the curriculum. Three years before, the department in its publication entitled *Design for a School of Pedagogy* (Smith, 1980) called for the professionalization of the teaching profession. A precursor to professional development schools, the publication recommended that universities and public schools work together in training schools and that university field or laboratory experiences increase. Similarly, the National Education Association (1982) proposed that teacher education be reformed and that it focus more on involving practitioners in teacher preparation, on building stronger relationships between theory and practice, and on providing more field experience.

With the publication of *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1986), the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy had moved the appeals for the professionalization of teaching to a call for a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and to a focus on greater diversity in the teaching workforce. The drive for professionalization was strong, and with the Holmes Group report *Tomorrow's Teachers* (1986) it was very strong. The group argued for standards for the profession and for examinations of teacher knowledge and skills. It too supported building a strong relationship between teacher education and the schools. What was emerging were parallel movements involving the standardization of the school curriculum and the professionalization of the teaching profession, with mounting research on teacher and school effectiveness.

By now I had taken my Life Diploma — which assured me that I would have no additional requirements for learning — back to the university again. This time it was for a doctorate and a deep look at the public school curriculum, the education of teachers, and the preparation of teachers to teach English learners. By the end of the 1980s, my Life Diploma had found its way out of the public school classroom and into the teacher education classroom at the university, the fate of Life Diplomas for many of my generation of teachers, I suspect.

And our work would only begin. At the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s a series of federal policies combined with curriculum and teacher preparation initiatives in California was building. America 2000 (1989) initiated a national thrust on developing national standards. With the Educate America Act (1994), our aims were clear: by the year 2000, America's students would be ready to read and first in the world in math and science. In addition, there would be improvements in teacher education. The National Commission on Educational Standards and Testing, headed by Diane Ravitch, was given congressional funding to stimulate the setting of national standards. California entered strongly with the development of the national and controversial history standards. The state was busy building academic content standards for students and the companion frameworks such as the Reading Language Arts Framework.

At the same time, the California New Teacher Project was exploring research and practice on new teacher induction. This research informed Senate Bill 1422. In 1992, this legislation established both the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program and an advisory panel to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (Olebe, 2001). The SB 1422 Advisory Panel was given the charge of undertaking a comprehensive restructuring of teacher certification, recruitment, and education (CCTC, 1997). As it pursued its work, the panel was informed by the work of the Carnegie Commission's National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF). The NCTAF study (1996), led by Linda Darling-Hammond, issued a compelling body of research on the status of teaching, learning, and teacher education. The study revealed a broken system of teacher learning and public schooling. It looked at the dismal picture of teacher qualifications, including out-of-field teaching and teachers on emergency teaching permits. It examined the broad issue of teacher recruitment with an impending teacher shortage to impact the workforce well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study countered the fabled Coleman Report of the 1960s by boldly proclaiming that what matters most to student achievement, particularly in schools with few resources, is the quality of teaching.

With the report of NCTAF and the work of the SB 1422 Advisory Panel, there was simultaneous work on standards for teaching driven by the California New Teacher Project research, the work of BTSA directors around induction issues, and research by the Far West Laboratory. The standards, a joint venture of the California Department of Education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, underwent validity studies. By 1997, there were two key publications in the state. *The California Standards for the Teaching Profession* (CDE/CCTC, 1997) represented California's response to the 1980s teacher education reforms

which appealed for standards for the profession and a common language for teaching. The second publication, *California's Future: Highly Qualified Teachers for All Students* (CCTC, 1997), outlined a fundamental overhaul of teacher certification, recruitment, and teacher education. This report is probably best known for recommending to the state legislature a system of learning to teach that links the curriculum of schooling with the curriculum of teacher education; links the pre-service education of teachers to the induction of teachers in the school and in the profession; requires that standards for teaching shape teacher learning in both pre-service and induction; creates multiple pathways to teaching; and requires that teachers be tested for pedagogical knowledge and skills before recommendation for preliminary licensure.

With the recommendations of the SB 1422 Advisory Panel, more than two decades of reform appeals, research on teaching and teacher education, and national and state policy initiatives had formed an intricate web, and later found their way into Chapter 548, better known as Senate Bill 2042. Within a context of rapid growth and great diversity in the school-age population, amid persistent patterns of low student achievement in reading and mathematics, during a period of reduction of class sizes in the early grades, with large attrition rates among beginning teachers, and when there was an estimated need for more than 200,000 teachers by the year 2008 — California had undertaken a comprehensive effort to develop the infrastructure of a learning-to-teach system.

Does SB 2042 represent a reform cycle in teacher education? I do not think so. With SB 2042, California has chosen not to engage in curriculum change through substitution or modification as it had so often with the Ryan Credential reform. California has chosen to radically restructure the preparation of the state's teachers. It is akin to the radical shift in medical education and the medical profession that took place at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the Flexner Report. Flexner championed the professionalization of the medical profession and improvements in health care by supporting the alignment of medical science with medical practice. And so I offer my second question: *Apart from being a radical shift in how we think about the preparation of teachers, what distinguishes this reform legislation?* My answer rests on the role of SB 2042 as an intended catalyst for change. We see that vividly in the overarching themes that cut across the Professional Teacher Preparation Standards, the Induction Standards, and the Subject Matter Standards for the Multiple Subject and Single Subject credentials.

Of those themes, it is the recurring theme of collaboration that I think is the most salient and most intriguing, not so much for what it says explicitly in the program standards, but for what is happening because of

the standards. I have said elsewhere that a major change I see is movement in building relationships (Maxie, 2002). These include relationships between the study and practice of teaching, between and within the cultures of schools and universities as they struggle with the developmental curriculum, and between teaching and student learning. In addition to collaboration, there is at this juncture a heightened and healthy increase in the public discourse about the work of teachers and their education. This discourse, as I have noted, is happening within and across institutions involved in teacher learning. It is a process that is engaging disparate stakeholders. I have asked elsewhere (Maxie, 2002), Is this discourse elevating the status of teacher education in universities? And I have answered, I do not know, however, there is renewed thinking about the all-university responsibility for teacher education. Is the discourse fostering public support and respect for teachers? I honestly do not know. At this time, there is a level of interest.

The discourse about both teacher and student learning is the centerpiece of relationship-building among universities, public school districts, and county offices of education. As we collaborate to build a system of learning to teach, however, we struggle with tensions. *What does it mean to be a good teacher?* While we have the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession*, we continue to ask, are we defining the work of teaching too narrowly and taking too narrow a view of student learning in the process? We wonder about teachers as critical thinkers and public intellectuals. We question whether we are preparing teachers who are educated people; who think about the discipline and beyond the boundaries of the discipline, who have tools of inquiry, who advocate for children and equitable pedagogy, and who participate fully as citizens of a global community.

In our discourse and collaboration, we ask, *Can we encourage and sustain an inclusive teacher workforce?* There is concern that the very architecture that seeks incentives and multiple paths into teaching may foster a highly exclusive workforce through testing policies which, in an era of accountability, may influence selection practices and access to teacher preparation programs.

In our discourse and collaboration, we ask, *Do we have the capacity to deliver the promise of 2042?* There is concern about adequate and sustained resources that build the capacity within and between institutions so that they can deliver high quality teacher education and that collaboration happens with integrity. In K-12, how will human resources and staff development in county offices and public school districts manage the responsibilities of licensure? Will pre-service teacher education program sponsors everywhere have the capacity to carry out perfor-

mance-based assessment that is reliable and legally defensible? Capacity refers to adequate funding, adequate training, adequate staffing, and adequate structures to monitor and ensure quality control of the assessment process.

These tensions and questions are in the discourse of our collaboration, and out of this process are stories and models of success. The Northeastern 2042 Transition Team, involving Butte Bounty BTSA, Tri-County BTSA, North State BTSA, California State University, Chico, and Simpson College is an excellent model of how sponsors of pre-service and induction programs are collaborating to ensure a high-quality developmental curriculum across the learning-to-teach continuum. This team has developed a memorandum of understanding which identifies the goals of their partnership and the roles and responsibilities of all participants. In addition, the Northeastern Team has engaged in a process of mapping standards across the continuum, examining each other's practice, and at the university, bringing BTSA directors to pre-service classes to foster continuity.

### Conclusion

So I have taken my Life Diploma, my master's degree, and my doctorate to the university teacher education classroom and I say to my curriculum students that the reform activities we have now are largely shaped by 40 years of reform in teacher education and the public school curriculum. While they appear cyclical, they seem to differ this time in that they are more deeply cemented in federal and state policies, several decades of research on schooling and teaching, and recommendations for reform in teacher education. They seek to create relationships between teacher education and schooling and among those who work in support of teacher learning in this new systemic view of learning to teach. As a teacher preparation reform policy and catalyst for change, SB 2042 poses a number of questions. It is critical that the education, research, and policy communities work together to address these questions and the tensions in the policy and in its implementation. The history of successful reform in teacher education today very much depends on the strength of our research, the strength of our advocacy, and on how we as stakeholders choose to work together in this venture.

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*Volume 12, Number 2, Fall 2003*

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