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What is the Role and Responsibility of Educator Preparation Programs to Foster and Sustain Effectiveness?

To be entirely upfront, I stole this critical question from the ASCD EDge blog that I contributed to in early February. It was just one in a string of questions about teacher effectiveness and the evaluation of such. So, I acknowledge that the issue is much greater than this one question and I hope all educators will see that preparatory programs play a substantial role in defining the reputation of the profession. This is an important question – whether you are a preservice or inservice educator. Presumably, the word “effectiveness” typically eludes to the capacity of a teacher to influence his/her students’ achievement. While there is currently no direct measure of such effectiveness, a picture can be painted from at least three types of measures: (1) classroom observations, (2) student perception surveys and (3) student achievement gains (MET study, 2012, <http://www.metproject.org/>). So how do teacher preparation programs develop candidates that can perform well across those measures?

I began by asking preservice teacher candidates the same title question. Their responses are below the dotted line. A repeated theme across their answers was, “Get us out in the field.” Teacher candidates understand that the value of what they learn in the University classroom multiplies upon application to the field classroom. It becomes real. It becomes relevant. Having a strong connection to the field cannot be underestimated in terms of its importance to teacher education programs, and should be central to their development.

I agree and want people to consider an *additional* way to connect higher education to the field that has not yet developed. Allow me to follow the thread of reasoning begun with the question regarding effectiveness. Presumably, to increase anything – it’s helpful if that thing is measurable so that we are aware of impacts. So effectiveness can be connected directly to evaluation, and it does seem that good teaching can be “measured”, according to the MET study. Those tangible measurables, the complicated pieces of a complex undertaking, get publicized in simplistic ways which are then consumed by a public that opines about the reputation of the profession. That is the thread that I want to pull, all the while acknowledging that none of this is as simple as is presented in this short piece.

Currently there is no consistent standard to become a practicing teacher. Therefore, it is difficult to see if effectiveness is fostered except for within small communities of learners – which has its own

value to be sure. However, as a *profession*, teachers have no single bar via evaluation to demonstrate effectiveness. Is it any wonder then that local opinions of the profession (“Oh, *our* teachers are great. We love them!”) vary so widely with national opinion (“Our schools are just not effective.”)? Might it be that simply *having* a consistent minimum description of a beginning-beginner teacher would impact public opinion? Not only would it give the public something to hold on to rather than a different set of measures for every community, but it would also show a consistent standard for entry into the profession, much like the bar exam for lawyers. (Shortly after I penned this, NPR aired a segment that relates to that very notion, available at <http://www.npr.org/2013/01/29/170579245/union-backs-bar-exam-for-teachers>.) However, the education profession might then have the additional opportunity to develop support for sustained growth in the profession as teachers went out into the field if this baseline informed ongoing professional development. We could use its power for good – at the same time influencing the perception of the profession, entering the public policy conversation, and reclaiming our standing as a profession built on a body of researched-based best practices, not a cookbook set of skills.

The pieces are already being built. (I thought it was interesting that the NRP piece did *not* mention that.) The Teacher Performance Assessment, known as the edTPA (<https://www.edtpa.com/>) for preservice teachers, is well into field-testing and currently used by over 20 states. Washington inservice teachers are working with the Teacher-Evaluation Pilot, or TPEP (<http://tpep-wa.org/>). There is overlap between the efforts, to be sure – but connections, ties that might strengthen the reputation of the profession as the evaluations roll out and impact public opinion, are not yet intentional, standardized, or formalized within the state.

But Washington is an “accelerated” state for these efforts, one of the first to tie such evaluations as the edTPA to consequential policy required by every teacher certification program, and the TPEP into all schools. As both systems, higher education and P-12 move forward with these efforts, what is their responsibility to each other? Acknowledging that mutuality is certainly a facet of the answer to:

**What is the role and responsibility of educator preparation programs
to foster and sustain effectiveness?**

Second and third-year undergraduate teacher candidates’ responses are found below and highlighted on an ASCD inservice blog at <http://inservice.ascd.org/announcements/be-prepared-the-ascd-forum-discusses-educator-preparation-programs/>.

Erin Loe

It is my belief that an education preparation program must expose their students to as much field experience as possible. This is vital. They must have active learning as opposed to learning from textbooks and lectures. Students in this program must also be exposed to effective teaching materials as well as resources to expand on this. In addition they must be familiar with the teaching materials and absolutely should use them before using them in their own classroom. In addition, the program should also make certain their students know teaching is an on-going learning experience which will never be perfected, but should be something to work towards.

Zach O'Neill

In order to make effective teachers an education preparation program is responsible for preparing educators in 4 different ways. First by giving the tools and practice necessary for educators to plan their classes, for instance practice creating lesson and unit plans and developing a curriculum for their respective content areas. Second, by helping the future educators to develop their assessments in a way that will benefit their students learning the most, learning to use differentiation appropriately in a classroom. Thirdly, by learning how to apply findings from the assessments in the classroom in order to make sure that the subject matter is being understood by the students. Finally, being able to use these skills in a classroom with real students and get the students engaged in the lesson being taught and making it relevant to their students' lives.

Celeste Flock

Teacher education programs must keep candidates informed on current issues in education. Since the teaching profession is constantly changing with new curriculum, technology, assessments, and legislation, candidates need to be aware of what is happening and adapt to these changes. Though it is crucial to teach candidates about these issues in class, the best way for them to learn is through experience. Candidates should have many different field experiences and service learning projects in the schools. Field experience is the best education for an aspiring teacher because it shows what lesson planning, teaching strategies, and the state standards look like in the real world. It also gives candidates the opportunity to decide if teaching is truly their calling in life.

Taylor Petersen

I believe that teacher preparation programs are responsible for providing aspiring teachers with the most advanced ways promote interest and determination in young minds. It is not just about creating that desire for learning on average, but rather that we learn how to inspire that love of education in students that are more difficult to teach. The role of the program is to give potential teachers experience working with English language learners, students with learning disabilities, and gifted students so that when they become teachers they know how to teach those learners in a way that will positively impact their lives.

Alexandra Tallas

I believe that teacher preparation programs need to inspire future teachers to acquire the tools they need in order for their students to be inspired and then be encouraged to engage in higher level thinking and inquiry. Preparation programs should instruct future teachers to focus on celebrating the students' strengths. I believe that if a student can learn to recognize and value their own strengths along with their peers strengths, they will develop a passion for learning that will be forever instilled in them. Along with the passion aspect, I also believe preparations programs need to have a focus on the ever-changing curriculum and other legislation issues. Future teachers need to learn not to take everything for face value but learn to dig deeper in all categories that are involved.

Ellen Chirhart

Part of the field experience aspect of teacher preparation must also involve reflection. Teacher candidates need to know how to reflect on their own work and methods. They must be open to

constructive criticism and able to gauge their own effectiveness. Teacher preparation must involve preparation in teacher collaboration so candidates know the importance of cooperating with colleagues and seeking support. It is inevitable that teachers will have diverse classrooms with English language learners and students at a variety of ability levels, so candidates must be prepared to teach to all students.

Sari Hertel

Another important responsibility teacher preparation programs have is to not emphasize one subject area, especially for elementary level candidates. Literacy, Math, Science, History, and the Arts are all important in their own unique ways and it does more harm than good when one is considered more important than the others.

Gene Dawydiak

The role of educator preparation programs are to help teachers better facilitate learning to students by helping teachers be better prepared through assessment of students. For example, assessing the knowledge of students in order to understand the emphasis needed on a particular lesson. This may be a test in the beginning of the semester that measures each student's knowledge a future lesson that will happen. When a majority of the class shows they understand a certain standard, less time should be spent on that standard and focus more on the standards that students are not as knowledgeable on. However, an educator must also recognize that a majority of the class is not the whole class, nor a minority of the class is the whole class. This means that even though there may be a majority or a minority of people who may understand (or not understand) a standard, there are still students who can demonstrate those standards. A class with a majority not meeting the standards through assessment may have students who do meet those standards, while there may be a majority of students who may understand a standard when a few students don't. Basically, educator preparation programs help us recognize how to meet everyone's needs, and not just the majority's needs.

Tom D'Aboy

The most important thing to me is experience. Getting out into the classroom and getting that real experience. Reflecting on those experiences is important as well, because that really makes you think about what you're doing and how to improve yourself. Reading and researching teaching strategies and methods is vital, but getting out into the field and practicing it is the most crucial.

Anna Demarinis

I agree with Tom. We can all sit in a classroom and be taught about appropriate teaching methods, assessment tools, differentiation, etc. but the real learning comes from the classroom. Working with students hands on, practicing teaching lessons, seeing first hand what works and does not work in the classroom. It allows you to see first hand what works, what doesn't work, and helps new teachers learn how to deal with those issues before they are on their own. People always say that practice makes perfect and teaching is the same way.

Jayson Orth

Researching and learning different teaching methods as well as rules and regulations is extremely important. However, I think that the most important part of the teacher education program is taking all these ideas into the classroom and seeing for oneself what works and what doesn't. Engaging in and reflecting on real life experience allows us, as future teachers, to mature, grow, and learn.

Christy Clenin

I believe that it is the program's responsibility to give its students as much experience as possible. It is easy to read from a textbook and take notes about classroom management, assessment, etc., but what is learned in class does not take importance until it is implemented. I learn from experience. When I am in the classroom setting, I learn about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. Therefore, it is the role and responsibility of the teaching program to place students in the classroom environment and reflect on their experience. Also, have an advisor oversee students in the schools in order to give constructive criticism to see what they need to improve on and what they are succeeded in. It is important for students in an education program to gain comfortableness in the school setting before they have a classroom of their own.

Clara Shands

It's nice to know strategies of teaching and classroom management so that you have some clue what to do when you actually end up in the classroom. But by far the most valuable thing is having experience with real students in a real classroom. Theories of learning are forgettable until you actually apply and experience them. The most effective way to prepare educators is to have them simultaneously work in the classroom while they learn about theories, regulations, strategies, etc. that go along with what they're doing in the classroom. This serves for a memorable cross traffic between the two environments where future educators can apply their experience to the class and apply what they learn in class to their own teaching.

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