

The Teaching Profession: Reform and Revolution

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ABSTRACT

To ensure that all students in our Nation's schools are prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment will require fundamental changes in the teaching profession. These changes include restructuring teacher training, changing the conditions under which teachers work, and providing continuous professional development throughout a teacher's career.

The ultimate goal of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 is that every school in America will ensure that all students demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography; and that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's economy. To achieve major changes in student achievement will require a revolution in the teaching profession. There are three paths toward revolutionizing the teaching profession: restructuring teacher training, changing the conditions under which teachers work, and providing continuous professional development.

Restructuring Teacher Training

All teacher candidates should have a broadly based, liberal arts undergraduate education, with at least one subject major (Ferrall, 2011; Harpham, 2011). Furthermore, all prospective teachers should have a well structured induction program that includes a one-year internship under the supervision of an experienced knowledgeable teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2010a, 2010b; Lieberman, 2011; Marzano, 2011).

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, now in its second decade of operation (Ingvarson, 2008), should continue to upgrade professional standards for teaching on the basis of the knowledge and the clinical practice base in teaching (Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, 2010; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2010e,

2010f) and continue to oversee the development of a national assessment procedure for the professional certification of prospective teachers (Hakel, 2008; Lustick, 2010).

Board certification for new teachers should be awarded only upon successful completion of a rigorous teacher education program (Darling-Hammond, 2010b; Lieberman, 2011), passage of a national teacher entrance examination developed by the profession (Hakel, 2008; Lustick, 2010; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2010e, 2010f), and demonstrated teaching competence in intern and residency programs (Darling-Hammond, 2010a; Marzano, 2011).

Changing the Conditions under Which Teachers Work

Experienced teachers should be eligible for professional career advancement through advanced certification by the national professional standards board (Hakel, 2008; Ingvarson, 2008; Lustick, 2010). Teachers should have a variety of opportunities for performing professional roles and advancing within the teaching profession, while continuing to be practicing teachers (Goldstein, 2011). Teaching must be structured as a lifetime career (Fibkins, 2011; Marzano, 2011). Furthermore, teaching and educational administration must be considered as two separate careers, and teacher salaries should not be limited to those paid to school administrators (English, 2011; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012).

All decisions regarding the establishment, maintenance, or reform of school structure and governance must be based on their effect on student learning (Blasé & Blasé, 2010; Chapman, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Reynolds, 2011). A great deal has been written and discussed concerning student learning and effective schools; such schools are learning centered (Blankstein, 2011). Descriptions of academically effective, learning-centered schools share common characteristics such as: clear goals related to academic learning, high expectations for students and faculty, strong leadership in support of the learning goals of the school, collegial relationships, collaborative planning among teachers and administrators, learning time given high priority, frequent student assessment and feedback, a safe and orderly climate with clear and fairly enforced discipline codes, and school-wide continuous professional development (Bulach, Lunenburg, & Potter, 2012; Leithwood, 2011; Lezotte, 2010).

School faculty and staff must share in the establishment and maintenance of school goals and values consistent with required local, state, and national education outcomes. School site autonomy must be increased with greater decision making power invested in classroom teachers (Bonito, 2012; Zhu, 2011). Teachers should be the instructional leaders of the schools and should be responsible for making decisions about instructional strategies, professional development, curricular materials, pupil assignments and scheduling, structure of learning time during the school day, instructional goals beyond those set by the state or local school board, school-level budgetary matters, and elements of professional evaluation (Bell, 2011; Edwards, 2010).

Providing Continuous Professional Development

Continuous professional development needs to be available to all teachers at all levels of a teacher's career. Some researchers suggest that professional development efforts should be teacher specific and focus on day-to-day activities at the classroom level (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010; Sisk-Hilton, 2011). Others indicate that an emphasis on individuals is detrimental to progress and more systemic or organizational approaches are necessary (National Staff Development Council, 2001). Some scholars stress that reforms in professional development must be initiated and carried out by individual teachers and school-based personnel (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2010). Others emphasize that the most successful programs are guided by a clear vision that transcends the walls of individual classrooms and schools, since individual teachers and school-based individuals generally lack the opportunity to conceive and implement worthwhile improvements (Childress, 2008; City, 2010). Some experts argue that the most effective professional development programs approach change in a gradual and incremental fashion, not expecting too much at one time (Cochran-Smith, 2008). Others insist that the broader the scope of a professional development program, the more effort required of teachers, and the greater the overall change in teaching style attempted, the more likely the program is to elicit the enthusiasm of teachers and to be implemented well (Elmore, 2005; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2010).

Conclusion

To ensure that all students in our Nation's schools are prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment will require fundamental changes in the teaching profession. These changes include restructuring teacher training, changing the conditions under which teachers work, and providing continuous professional development throughout a teacher's career.

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