

# The Turn Once Again Toward Practice-Based Teacher Education

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“Teaching rather than Teachers” makes an important contribution to the improvement of classroom instruction by developing a sharper focus in initial and continuing teacher education on learning to enact core instructional practices. It is part of a growing literature on making teaching practice the central element of teacher education, an approach that has been referred to as “practice-based,” “practice-focused” or “practice-centered” teacher education.”(Ball & Cohen, 1999).

While this paper and practice-based work generally make very helpful contributions by raising a compelling alternative to the currently dominant discourse that the path to improving classroom instruction lies primarily in bringing more academically talented people into teaching, even for a short time (Auguste, et.al. 2010), there is a danger that the growing movement to focus teacher education on core instructional practices (e.g., Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, 2011; Kazemi, et.al. 2009; Lampert & Graziani, 2009; Windschitl et.al. 2011) will fail to benefit from what we have learned from the difficulties experienced in past efforts to establish a practice-focused approach in teacher education. Although Hiebert and Morris add important dimensions to the growing scholarship on practice-based teacher education, they and other advocates of a practice-based approach give insufficient attention to other aspects of teaching that are fundamentally important

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to improving the quality of teaching. In the current political climate for teacher education, if these other aspects of teaching are not explicitly included within the scope of proposals for practice-based teacher education, they will be defined as not essential and will be marginalized or eliminated.

I will make a few comments related to the turn once again toward practice-based teacher education and about the arguments that are laid out in the Hiebert & Morris paper. I will also discuss some of the things that I think we should not lose sight of in this national effort to refocus teacher education and professional development on core teaching practices.

#### Practice-Based Teacher Education is Not a New Idea

My first point is that the thinking and logic involved in studying the activities and practices in which teachers engage, as the basis for teacher education curriculum is a strategy that has been used in some form for many years. One of the earliest examples of this is the “Commonwealth Teacher Training Study,” a study referred to by Saylor (1976) as an “orgy of tabulation,” carried out between 1925 and 1928. Charters and Waples (1929) and their team collected data from several thousand teachers and others and sought to increase the accuracy of the teacher education curriculum by obtaining a more exact knowledge of teachers’ activities. They assembled a comprehensive list of activities by mailing surveys to teachers in 42 states. The final list of 1,001 activities was subdivided into seven major divisions such as instruction and classroom management. Over 200,000 statements were analyzed to get to this final list.

While some of the activities were concerned with things beyond instruction (e.g., securing cordial relations with the superintendent), others focused on instruction and looked very much like the kinds of activities that have been included in various incarnations of performance-based teacher education (e.g., selects the types of instruction adapted to the needs of the class, and establishes cordial relations with pupils). The intent was to have these activities and the 83 traits identified (e.g., foresight and magnetism) form the basis of the teacher education curriculum. Kliebard's (1975) discussion of the process of "scientific curriculum making" in teacher education in this study concluded:

A blow was dealt to fuzzy thinking in teacher education and a major stride taken in the direction of a scientifically determined teacher education curriculum (p.35).

For a variety of reasons, the influence of the Commonwealth study on teacher education in the U.S was not very great. What we see in this study though is the beginning of an attempt to construct the curriculum of teacher education programs on a scientific basis related to the activities and traits of teachers.

A similar effort conducted around the same time by A.S. Barr of the University of Wisconsin sought to distinguish the activities engaged in by good social studies teachers from those of poor ones (Barr, 1929):

Barr compared forty-seven good social studies teachers with forty-seven poor ones identified by city and county superintendents in the state of Wisconsin carrying the scientific study of teaching one step further than the Commonwealth study by deriving his data from the observation of classroom

performance rather than through questionnaires or opinions of supervisors. (Kliebard, 1973, p.14).

Over the years, various forms of this same thinking have existed in American teacher education including the behaviorist oriented performance-based teacher education (PBTE) in the 1970s (Gage & Winne, 1974), and its re-emergence in a broader cognitive and behavioral form as standards-based teacher education in the 1990s (Sykes, 2004). Although there have been significant differences in the ways in which these attempts to articulate the activities of teaching and the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed by teachers to enact them have been framed and justified, the thinking in these instances has been that once the activities of teachers are identified, the curriculum of teacher education programs should focus on preparing teacher candidates to know and do these things. Teachers should be evaluated on how well they know and do them rather than on the completion of certain required courses. These various efforts to establish some form of PBTE as the norm is part of a broad “social efficiency” tradition in American education (Zeichner, 1993).

Efforts in the past to establish a national approach to teacher preparation in the U.S. focused on candidates achieving mastery of a set of core teaching practices have largely been ineffective. In addition to criticisms of the inadequacy of the research base for the competencies included in teacher education programs (Heath & Nielson, 1974), the complexity and expense of implementing PBTE programs were beyond the capacity of most teacher education institutions to handle and the result was a very low level of implementation of the idea of PBTE (Zeichner, 2005).

Sykes, Bird, & Kennedy (2010) note that the political process involved in efforts to establish teaching standards “almost always produces a set far larger and more complex than could possibly be achieved” (p.473). This problem of creating forms of PBTE that are too complex and costly to implement and sustain is one that the current incarnation of practice-based teacher education will need to address, especially given the disinvestment by states in public universities that still prepare between 70 and 80% of teachers in the nation. (National Research Council, 2010).

### Moving Teacher Education Closer to the Work of Teaching

Despite numerous efforts over the years to articulate a shared vision of the dispositions, knowledge and skills that individuals need to begin teaching, there still is a great deal of variation in what is taught to teacher candidates in teacher education programs across the nation. (Levine, 2006) Contrary to the specificity of the Commonwealth Study and the long lists of teacher competencies in many PBTE programs in the 1970s, most more recent attempts by scholars to provide frameworks for what all beginning teachers need to know, be like and be able to do (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) have involved the articulation of general standards that require readers to translate what is offered to a more specific level. Many of the existing standards for teaching that are used by state departments of education in regulating teacher education programs are stated in a very general way.

Even with the addition of “key indicators” in the most recent version of the INTASC standards<sup>2</sup> that are required in teacher education programs in many states,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wresa.org/Pbl/The%20INTASC%20Standards%20overheads.htm>

these standards are still very open to interpretation. For example, INTASC standard three, “Diverse Learners,” is defined as “The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.” A list of list of key indicators is also presented to further define the meaning of the standard. These include indicators like the following: “designs instruction appropriate to students stages of development, learning styles, strengths and needs. (3.1)”

While the inclusion of indicators like these brings the articulation of the standards closer to the work of teaching, they still need to be translated into activities and routines that teachers can learn how to enact to realize the purposes of the standards. The current wave of reform in American teacher education to focus on high leverage teaching practices and routines that are believed to support high quality student learning involves a grain size that is more useable by new teachers and their teacher educators than either the lists of hundreds of competencies or general standards. The idea of creating a common core of these teaching practices (e.g., posing problems, leading discussions) that are taught to new teachers in all teacher education programs is potentially a good development. As Ball & Forzani (2009) argue, this does not necessarily serve to de-professionalize teaching if it is done by including attention to developing teachers’ adaptive expertise (Hammerness, et.al., 2005).

#### Dimensions of the Practice-Based Teacher Education Movement

One strand of current efforts to identify core practices of good teaching that should form the basis of teacher education curriculum is embedded in the teaching

of particular school subjects like mathematics (e.g., Kazemi, Franke & Lampert, 2009), science (e.g., Windschitl, Thompson, & Braaten, 2011), and English language arts (Grossman, et. al. 2010) and draws on research that has identified certain teaching practices that are associated with enhancing student learning.

Another strand of the current focus on identifying effective teaching practices is the teaching practices or instructional and classroom management - oriented frameworks that are not tied to the teaching of particular subject matter content or grade levels. A few of the most popular of these frameworks are the “Teaching through Interactions” framework developed at the University of Virginia (Pianta, 2011), the Danielson (2007) and Marzano (2007) frameworks for effective teaching, and Lemov’s (2010) practices of “champion teachers.” These frameworks are not tied to the teaching of particular subject matter and range from those based on rigorous research demonstrating the efficacy of the teaching practices in relation to student learning (Pianta, 2011) to those like Lemov’s (2011) teaching strategies that are based on the author’s observations of teachers over the years who have allegedly produced excellent results in student learning.

Given the plethora of current models that seek to claim some portion of the truth with regard to effective teaching practices, Pianta’s (2011) call for more rigorous standards for assessing the quality of evidence supporting various models of effective teaching is extremely important. Currently all of the advocates of currently popular models claim some empirical warrant for their models, but the degree to which they make this evidence transparent and its quality varies considerably.

Another distinction that needs to be made is between merely locating a university course in a P-12 classroom and a focus on the enactment of particular teaching strategies. Although many teacher education courses have been moved to P-12 schools as a part of the increased attention to the clinical dimension of teacher education (Zeichner, 2010), it is not clear if, when, or how, some of these courses focus in a deliberate way on the enactment of particular high leverage teaching practices. Merely moving a course to a P-12 setting does not necessarily make teacher education practice-based. Some teacher education courses that are not physically situated in P-12 classroom settings are practice-based and sometimes utilize the expertise of P-12 teachers virtually in the teaching of core teaching practices (Pointer-Mace, 2009).

Furthermore, some practice-based courses involve the integration of the expertise of university and school-based teacher educators (and sometimes community educators) (Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2011). Other practice-based courses only utilize instruction by university teacher educators. Finally, in some cases of practice-based teacher education, teacher candidates or teachers have opportunities to rehearse, implement and receive focused feedback on their use of practices (Kazemi, et.al. 2010) while in other cases they do not have these opportunities (Campbell, 2008).

Thus, practice-based teacher education is situated on college and university classrooms or in P-12 classrooms (or both), and utilizes the expertise of college and university educators, practicing P-12 teachers, and community-based educators in various ways. What makes a teacher education course practice-based is its



systematic focus on developing teacher candidates' abilities to successfully enact high leverage practices.

#### The Contributions of the Hiebert & Morris Paper

Hiebert and Morris are a part of the current wave to focus programs more on teaching candidates how to enact high leverage instructional routines and practices. They offer a number of proposals for extending current work by proposing that the practices that are taught to teachers be embedded into the broader instructional context of which they are a part and preserved in the form of two products (annotated lesson plans and common assessments) that can be shared among teachers and passed along to new teachers. Furthermore, they propose that these artifacts should be viewed as continually in process as teachers and researchers work together to test, refine, and teach them through a process of classroom inquiry.

Overall, I think that what they propose makes good sense and adds important elements to the practice-based teacher education project. The idea of tying the learning of core teaching practices to the larger lessons to which they are connected and of preserving this knowledge in useable products that are continually improved over time will serve to better preserve the knowledge about good teaching practices that has largely been held by individual teachers to date. This also helps teachers develop the inquiry habits and skills that will enable them to more actively contribute over time to building and improving the knowledge base of their profession (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Although Hiebert & Morris' proposals nicely complement practice-based teacher education work to date and help create a system that would enable future generations of teachers to more easily benefit from the wisdom of other teachers, there are several issues in them that merit discussion. The first is concerned with the relationship between the model of representing, decomposing, approximating and deliberately teaching individual teaching practices (Grossman, 2011) that characterizes much of the current practice-based work in teacher education and the ideas proposed by Hiebert and Morris to embed teaching practices in the broader lessons of which they are a part and to engage in an ongoing process of testing and improving these practices.

One way to interpret these two different styles of working would be to see the two alternatives in competition with one another and a choice of one or the other having to be made. Another more useful interpretation would be to see these two strategies as complementary and as more or less appropriate at different points in a teacher's development.

Early in the process of teacher preparation, it seems to me that the approach described by Grossman (2011) should receive more emphasis as teacher candidates begin to gain classroom experience. Providing opportunities for new teachers to learn how to enact specific core practices like leading a text-based classroom discussion by seeing them modeled, and then by rehearsing them, studying them, and repeatedly practicing them is necessary along with building the capacity of teachers to learn in and from their practice as part of teacher inquiry communities. This kind of focused approach to teaching core teaching practices helps develop the

professional vision and the skills in enactment are important at this early stage of teacher development. It is also important to then scaffold the learning of new teachers toward being able to integrate these distinct practices together in the form of lessons. It seems developmentally inappropriate to me though to start by trying to have novices master everything at once before teaching the individual components of teachers' practice.

Hiebert & Morris raise concerns about the problem of transfer from the laboratory to the classroom and offer the processes of lesson study and teacher research as a way of minimizing this problem. However, while some of the work of teaching teacher candidates how to successfully enact core teaching practices takes place in virtual or live spaces outside of P-12 classrooms, more and more of this work is occurring in classrooms (Noel & Nelson, 2010). For example, at the University of Washington, Sheila Valencia and Elham Kazemi are leading efforts in the elementary teacher education program to work with experienced master teachers in teaching specific core teaching practices in literacy and mathematics. Teacher candidates have repeated opportunities in these classroom-based methods courses to see specific core teaching practices modeled, and to rehearse and practice, and received detailed feedback on their use of these practices. They are learning how to enact these practices in the complex settings in which they will later need to use them. (Zeichner, Payne, Brayko, 2011).

This focus on teaching specific core teaching practices should be complemented by participation in teacher inquiry communities as proposed by Hiebert and Morris from the very beginning of teachers' preparation programs so

that novice teachers can begin to acquire the habits and skills to learn in and from their practice in the company of colleagues. As teachers gain more experience, they can increasingly focus on putting skills together in the context of lessons and contribute to the ongoing improvement of the practice of teaching in the kind of system that is envisioned by Hiebert & Morris.

Finally, one danger we have to watch out for is the use of artifacts of teaching as scripts that undermine teachers' abilities to exercise their judgment and to adapt instruction to meet the constantly changing needs of their students and the different contexts of their work. There is growing evidence of growth in the scripting of instruction in schools serving students living in poverty (Kozol, 2005) that undermines teachers' abilities to exercise their judgment in the interests of their students. Hiebert & Morris's focus on the ever-evolving nature of effective teaching practice can potentially serve to counteract efforts to package and reify teaching products in ways that undermine the intellectual and professional aspects of teaching.

What might be left out in a Practice-Based Teacher Education System?

In this moment of intense attacks on the participation of colleges and universities in the preparation of teachers and on shifting more of initial teacher education to a point after teachers assume full responsibility for a classroom, there is a danger of narrowing the role of teachers to that of technicians who are able to implement a particular set of teaching strategies, but who do not develop the broad professional vision (deep knowledge of their students and of the cultural contexts in

which their work is situated), and the relational skills they need to be successful in the complex institutional settings in which they will work (Butin , 2005). Although Hiebert & Morris highlight the need to build a system to preserve and continually improve knowledge about teaching, there are important elements of teacher quality that have received little or no attention in their analysis and in the practice-based teacher education work as a whole.

In the current political climate for teacher education in the U.S., there is a strong press for reducing length of teacher education programs and for eliminating anything that is not seen as immediately useful to new teachers. For example, in a study of alternative certification programs in the U.S., Walsh & Jacobs (2007) criticize elements of teacher education that they do not see as immediately useful to new teachers and use foundations courses as the example of courses that are “non essential.” The National Center for Teacher Quality standards that are being used to evaluate college and university programs across the nation for the rankings to be published by *U.S. News and World Report*<sup>3</sup> do not include any attention to a social foundations element in teacher preparation.

Efforts historically to establish teacher education curriculum based on specific competencies or performances have been plagued by a narrow technical focus ignoring the need to ground teachers’ technical competence in an understanding of the historical, cultural, political, economic and social contexts in which their work is embedded (Greene, 1979). It is important for those engaged in making the teaching of core teaching practices a central focus in teacher preparation

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nctq.org/standardsDisplay.do>

programs to situate their work in relation to a vision of the teacher's role so that they do not imply that all that is necessary in teacher education is the mastery of a set of teaching practices.

Although Ball & Forzani, (2009) call for a reorientation of the foundations of education to be more compatible with a practice orientation, neither they nor others in the practice-based literature have elaborated what this means. Unless ways can be developed to reformulate the social foundations in the ways that Ball & Forzani (2009) suggest, the experience in the UK has shown that social foundations content will be severely marginalized or eliminated from the teacher education curriculum (Whitty et.al. 2009).

One example of social foundations courses in teacher education that addresses the historical, social, economic, cultural and political issues that professional teachers need to understand in relation to their practice and the practice of schooling is the "place-conscious" approach to social foundations that is being developed in the elementary and secondary teacher education programs at the University of Washington (Gottesman & Bowman, 2011). In this work teacher candidates study the larger historical and social foundations issues in relation to the particular community contexts in which their coursework and clinical work are embedded and develop the kind of situational "knowledge" with regard to social foundations that Kennedy (1999) has called for with regard to pedagogical knowledge.

Another element that is not typically included in discussions of preparing teachers to enact high leverage teaching practices is the development of teachers'

cultural competence and ability to teach in culturally responsive ways. Given the reality in U.S. public schools that many teachers are responsible for supporting the learning of students who have very different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds than their own, an extensive literature has been accumulated that provides insight about how teacher educators can develop the cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching abilities of teachers (e.g., Banks, et.al. 2005). Not discussing this aspect of teaching in culturally diverse settings implies that the successful implementation of core teaching practices alone will result in better learning outcomes for students who are now underserved by the public schools. The evidence does not support this assumption (Gay, 2011). This is why teacher education programs, school districts and states have given explicit attention to the issue of cultural competence. The ability to successfully enact high leverage teaching practices is necessary but not sufficient to improving the quality of teaching in the U.S.

### Conclusion

One of the goals of many who are engaged in developing the work of practice-based teacher education is to achieve a national consensus on which teaching practices to include in teacher education programs. As the work on the identification of core teaching practices continues, it will be very difficult to achieve such a consensus given the multiplicity of models now in use that detail the particular elements of effective teaching practices. Although these models overlap at various points, they are different from one another in important ways. Pianta's

(2011) call for the establishment of rigorous standards of evidence with regard to these different models will help, but will not solve the problem.

Individual university faculty and independent consultants earn their livelihoods and professional reputations from the support that they provide to those using their particular models of effective teaching practices and from the grants that support the continued development and study of their models. Expecting that individuals will set aside their individual interests for the common good is a naïve view of the politics involved educational reform and the entrepreneurial culture of higher education. Although the direction that the work on practice-based teacher education is pushing the field is a good one, the political process of determining which models and teaching practices become part of a more common teacher education curriculum across the nation needs to be scrutinized carefully and, as Hiebert and Morris suggest, P-12 teachers should play a central role in the process of developing and improving our common understanding of the practices associated with good teaching.

Hiebert and Morris' paper makes an important contribution to the practice-based teacher education project by emphasizing that the improvement of both teaching quality and teacher quality need to be addressed by creating a system that preserves the knowledge about good teaching practices in a way where it can be more easily accessible to current and future generations of teachers.

In our excitement over the important contribution this will make to establish a more useable form than in the past of performance-based teacher education, we should not believe that the problems of inequity and injustice in U.S. public



education can be solved by teachers or educational interventions alone. In addition to improving the working conditions for teachers and leaders within schools, there is much work that also needs to be done to address the many inequities in the broader society with regard to things like access to housing, nutritious food, healthcare, and jobs that pay a living wage (Noguera , 2011).

Practice-based teacher education and the press for a more coherent curriculum for teacher education in the U.S. are important developments that should be supported, but there is much more involved in improving educational outcomes for the many students who are now underserved by our public schools than they alone can provide.

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