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Andrew, Michael D. & Jelmberg, James R. (Eds.) (2010) *How Teachers Learn: An Educational Psychology of Teacher Preparation*. NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

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Reviewed by Catherine Scott

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Teaching expertise is something of mystery even to those who practice it, to the extent that good teaching is regarded by some as solely the product of having the personal “right stuff,” combined maybe with sound content knowledge. This view has led to the development of a variety of alternative entry programs for teaching, based on models in which aspiring teachers are chosen on the basis of possession of content knowledge and/or their personal characteristics and placed in classrooms as the teacher of record with little or no prior preparation.

Learning on the job is “justified” by the notion that teachers are born not made (Darling Hammond, 2006), a view that in its turn is reinforced by the opaque nature of

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teaching expertise. We have all, after all, witnessed teaching although few are privy to the skills, knowledge and decision-making that underlies classroom performance. For many who subscribe to this model of educators' professional expertise teacher education is largely a waste of time: practitioners should 'just teach' propelled by their own personal passion for the job and/or look to the example of other practitioners, rather than 'theory'.

At the same time that programs that feature little or no professional preparation have developed other methods of teacher education have also evolved, based in contrast on the understanding that teaching is a complex craft, dependent on careful preparation for effective practice. Among these is the Five-Year Program at the University of New Hampshire. "How teachers learn: An educational psychology of teacher preparation" is a history of the program since its inception in 1974, a report of the experience of participating in the program from the perspective a variety of stakeholders and a research-based exploration of its nature, development and success.

The book makes a powerful case for the success of the program at producing effective, committed, reflective teachers who are also in high demand among employers and who remain in teaching in greater numbers than those who enter it by alternative means or after more traditional training programs. The program is built on what Andrew calls the "ABC of better teacher education": selection of the right candidates; the development of a solid professional knowledge base; and a well-planned and well-supervised full-year internship.

Andrew and his co-writers propose that successful teaching demands the possession of the appropriate personal skills, dispositions and attitudes: not everyone can be a good or successful teacher. Experience gleaned from involvement in the UNH program and the research it has generated have demonstrated that competent and experienced classroom practitioners are the best predictors of who among aspiring teachers have the "right stuff." Consequently both the undergraduate and graduate versions of the course begin with a freshman or sophomore placement as a teaching assistant to assess candidates' suitability.

In addition to the screening process provided by the early classroom experience, other measures of attitude and motivation are employed; however the assessment of the cooperating teacher remains the only strong predictor of success. Candidates must also demonstrate academic ability and good GPA or similar is required for admission, and those who do not have a strong record of academic achievement and demonstrated aptitude for teaching are not admitted.

Andrew and his co-writers are – rightly, I would say – critical of the redundancy that afflicts the content of many programs of teacher preparation. He notes (p. 59) that “We know about half as much as we have courses for. We inflate courses to increase credit hours.” This tendency undoubtedly adds to many teaching candidates’ – and practicing teachers’ – perceptions that much education course work is “irrelevant” and a waste of time.

The professional knowledge base of the program is fashioned around “a clear concept of the nature of the teacher we hope to produce” (p. 126). There are four course areas: human development and learning; alternative teaching models; educational structure and change, and alternative perspectives on the nature of education. The importance of the first two is obvious: we need to know about kids and how to teach them. The third and fourth, however, recognize that education is not only an occupation, it is also what Sternberg calls a “field.” In order to become a very effective practitioner, one must not only know how to do the job but also understand the context in which it operates. Focusing only on what happens in the classroom makes a teacher potentially unaware of and unable to resist of the sometimes damaging political and social forces that impinge on education as an enterprise.

The lack of common agreement about what education is for, at least in Anglophone countries (Labaree, 2004), is a powerful driver of the noted tendency for educational thinking to be beset by a repetitive cycle of fads and fashions. The underlying notions of what schooling is for – educating workers, forming citizens, enabling individual development – drive thinking about how and what teachers should teach and to what purpose. Being critically aware

of the big concepts in education and how these shape the latest fads can enable teachers to be informed consumers of ideas rather than “slaves to fashion.”

A Well-planned and Supervised Full-year Internship
Having the correct personal characteristics and/or having participated in a well-planned course of professional preparation will not suffice to produce a competent teacher. Teaching is a practical craft as well as an intellectual exercise, and its development depends on the opportunity to, in a supportive atmosphere, practice the necessary skills and hone the perceptual, reasoning and decision-making skills that underlie it. Skilful support is a key part of a successful clinical experience, however, as simply practicing teaching will not necessarily produce a competent professional. Experience is after all, as someone observed, a bad teacher and may merely establish and entrench a range of survival-focused strategies that allow a practitioner to get by in the classroom but which do not result in much in the way of student learning.

Without the language to talk about the art and craft of teaching reflection and improvement are very difficult. Teaching becomes automaticised and no longer an object of contemplation and deliberate change. The UNH program recognizes the significance of quality support for developing an articulated vision of teaching by the care and attention paid to selecting, training and supporting cooperating teachers. The grouping of interns in schools, the conduct of a weekly seminar and the frequent presence of university staff in schools all contribute effective support for the development of competent, reflective teachers with a commitment to constant personal improvement and facilitating productive educational change.

The boost given to the professional development of existing school staff is a bonus of programs of this sort that depend on strong ties between schools and universities. Similar experiences here in Australia with programs with a year-long internship and strong professional collaboration between school and university educators suggest that such positive outcomes are a universal feature.

In addition to content mentioned above, the book contains a wealth of material arising from the ongoing evaluation of the program and related research into aspects of teacher learning and development. It is a very worthwhile addition to the literature on teacher preparation, learning and development and would make a valuable part of the professional library of anyone interested in recruiting, training and retaining quality teachers.

With luck, all those reading it will understand the importance of avoiding quick fixes for the problem of staffing all schools with competent and committed teachers. Those who regard good teaching as the product of either personal attributes or of simply getting through a course of teacher preparation are particularly encouraged to consult the accumulated experiences of a community of scholars and practitioners who seem to have gotten teacher ed right.

References

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About the Reviewer

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