



education review // reseñas educativas

editors: david j. blacker / gustavo e. fischman / melissa cast-brede / gene v glass

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

October 15, 2013

ISSN 1094-5296

Education Review/Reseñas Educativas is a project of the
College of Education and Human Services of the University of Delaware
the National Education Policy Center, and the
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

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Hollins, E. R. (2012) *Learning to teach in urban schools: The transition from preparation to practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Pp. 108 ISBN 978-0-415-89386-2

Reviewed by Nicholas D. Hartlep
Illinois State University

With *Learning to Teach in Urban Schools: The Transition from Preparation to Practice*, I believe that Etta Hollins has succeeded where others have fallen short in bridging theory and practice as well as preparation and practice. Reading *Learning to Teach* caused me to reflect on two of my own learning-to-teaching transitions: the transition from being a pre-service to in-service elementary school teacher, and the transition from being a doctoral student to an assistant professor. I would like to situate *Learning to Teach* within these two transitions, while capturing what I found to be the most salient aspects of Hollins' (2012) book.

Citation: Hartlep, Nicholas D. (2013 October 15) Review of *Learning to Teach in Urban Schools: The Transition from Preparation to Practice* by Etta Hollins. *Education Review*, 16. Retrieved [Date] from <http://www.edrev.info/reviews/rev1256.pdf>

As a pre-service teacher I studied to become a teacher at Winona State University (WSU), which is located in Winona, Minnesota, a small bluff city along the Mississippi River. Winona can hardly be described as an urban city. Nevertheless, it was there that my desire to teach in an urban school was developed. While completing coursework in WSU's teacher preparation program, I was exposed to enormous amounts of theory and writing about urban teaching. Reflection was highly encouraged in my coursework; however, I lacked real urban school spaces to make sense of the theoretical knowledge that I was being exposed to in the college classroom. Moreover, while I completed my student teaching requirements in Quito, South America, I felt as though I could not easily transfer my theoretical knowledge to the practical knowledge I would need while teaching. When I graduated from WSU and began searching for full-time teaching positions, I became nervous. Although I had done well in college in terms of grades, I still did not feel as though I was capable of being an effective teacher, urban or otherwise (Hartlep, 2010).

What made my transition from being a pre-service elementary teacher to an in-service teacher easier was the Graduate Induction Program (GIP). The GIP still exists; it is a mentoring and induction program that allows Rochester Public School (RPS is in Rochester, MN) teachers to become GIP Fellows while earning a master's degree from WSU. GIP Fellows receive intense clinical support and supervision during their first year of elementary or middle school teaching. In addition to the clinical supervision that I received as a Fellow, I was exposed to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in the RPS school where I taught, which allowed me to make sense of my teaching and my students' learning. From my perspective, the practice of teaching was valued by the GIP, while the theory behind it was strongly emphasized during the seminars that I attended. GIP Fellows were required to conduct action research studies for their master's theses, and this reflecting in- and on-action was extremely beneficial for me as an inexperienced teacher. I learned from both my formal and informal professional learning communities—allowing me to become a more effective elementary school teacher. Although I felt I was successful in Rochester, MN, I was

still confident that I wanted to learn and teach in an urban school environment. This caused me to leave RPS.

The second personal transition I would like to reference was my moving from being a doctoral student to being an assistant professor. Since I wished to become an urban educator, I applied and was accepted to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Urban Education Doctoral Program (UEDP), Wisconsin's only urban-focused teacher education program which was made yet more appealing by the fact that UW-M is one of thirteen universities collectively known as the "Urban 13" group. After I left RPS, I was fortunate to secure a teaching position in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), which allowed to me to apply the theory I was learning in my doctoral classes (which met at night) in my first grade classroom in Milwaukee. This was a great experience, and one I will never forget. The following year I received a generous fellowship that allowed me to devote all of my time to my research and writing. While receiving the fellowship took me out of the K-12 classroom, it placed me in the college classroom, where as an advanced doctoral student I taught social studies methods courses.

I remember being told by the department chair who hired me that I would not be penalized if I did not teach well. In fact, he told me that I should focus most of my time and expend the majority of my energy on writing and publishing peer-reviewed articles, rather than perfecting my lesson plans for the one course that I taught. His advice shocked me. My background as an elementary school teacher (urban and suburban) caused me to want always to have my teaching materials prepared so that I could teach effectively. It seemed to me that the culture of academe (in this case, the department) was elevating publishing at the expense of teaching.

All of this is to say that while I transitioned from preparing to become a professor, to actually being an assistant professor, I received little-to-no supervision or guidance from my peers and superiors. The most assistance I received was when past syllabi were Xeroxed and handed to me one month before my social studies course met for the first time. The enculturation process of higher education teaching, for me, was extremely *laissez-faire*.

I strongly believe that Hollins' *Learning to Teach* is an important book that holds implications not only for K-12 but for K-20 teaching and learning. All educators go through the transition from preparation to practice; it does not matter what level or content area they teach. Intriguingly, though, this transition—at least from my own experience—is something that receives little attention from teacher educators, especially when compared to the distinctions made between theory and practice.

One thing Hollins' book did for me was to fortify the approach I have been taking while redesigning the social foundations of education course that I teach at Illinois State University (ISU). At ISU I was selected to participate in a U.S. Department of Education grant-funded program to redesign an education course in such a way that it becomes more focused on urban K-12 teacher preparation and practice. As part of this grant, I have traveled to Chicago, IL twice, staying for extended periods of time in order to learn from CPS teachers/staff as well as from community organizers who work with CPS students and Chicago youth.

Although I have my Ph.D. in Urban Education and the Social Foundations of Education, there is so much that I can (and do) learn from my peers and even my own college students about urban education and how to best prepare future urban K-12 teachers. *Learning to Teach* encouraged me to reach out to others who know things that I don't and who may hold different perspectives than I do. The most salient idea that runs through the entire text is the importance of communicating with others and how this communication can increase teacher growth or retard it. As Hollins simply states in the book, teachers are sometimes prone to seek out support from individuals who reinforce rather than disagree with them.

On the book's last page, Hollins (2012) writes, "A major challenge for many teachers in urban schools is overcoming personal biases, deficit perspectives, and the use of personal experience from other settings as a reference for how to teach and what to expect from students" (p. 101). I think Hollins is correct in that teachers perceive what they believe to be true, and that extends to how they learn to teach in urban schools.

Learning to Teach in Urban Schools: The Transition from Preparation to Practice is a relevant read for teacher educators and individuals who mentor K-12 teachers. If nothing else, *Learning to Teach* is an honest book. And don't judge the book by its cover or length—it has 5 chapters and is only 100 pages long. The text's brevity reflects its succinctness and accessibility, and it packs a great deal of insight into those pages. Among the insights I would single out are the following:

1. Structured dialogue helps teachers develop different perspectives that are needed to teach and learn effectively in urban schools;
2. Teacher educators and K-12 teachers should learn together since pooling their experience and expertise yields powerful learning;
3. Effective urban teachers determine when their pedagogy or teaching strategies are contributing to academic disengagement and modify their teaching approach accordingly;
4. Novice teachers, unfortunately, are inducted into holding deficit ideologies of students; and
5. Collaborative reflection is equally important as individual level reflection.

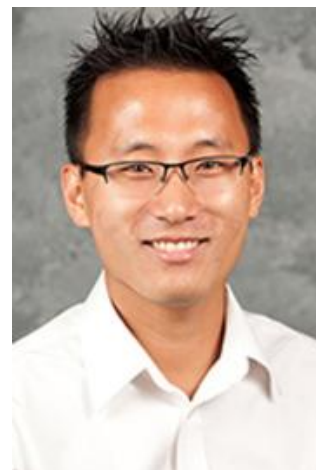
Points 1 and 2 speak to the importance of teachers communicating with others and how this communication can lead to positive growth, while points 3, 4, and 5 are interrelated. If urban teachers believe that their attitudes are justified by student behaviors, collaborative reflection may prevent the adoption of deficit ideologies, whereas reflection done at the individual level may impugn students and lead to poor teaching and student learning.

Reference

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About the Reviewer

Nicholas D. Hartlep is an Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations where he teaches courses on the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education. He is the author of *The Model Minority Stereotype: Demystifying Asian American Success* (2013) and *The Model Minority Stereotype Reader: Critical and Challenging Readings for the 21st Century* (2014). He is co-editor of the recently published *Unhooking from Whiteness: The Key to Dismantling Racism in the United States* (2013 with Cleveland Hayes). He recently launched "The Model Minority Stereotype Project" which can be accessed here: <http://my.illinoisstate.edu/blogs/ndhartl>



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Editors

David J. Blacker

blacker@edrev.info

Gustavo Fischman

fischman@edrev.info

Melissa Cast-Brede

cast-brede@edrev.info

Gene V Glass

glass@edrev.info

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