

## OVERVIEW

### Reason for Hope

Ron Brandt

In September, PBS broadcast a documentary about an unusual teacher recruitment program called Teach for America. The broadcast paid tribute to Wendy Kopp, an idealistic 22-year-old Princeton graduate who, with single-minded determination, sought out \$3.6 million in funding and convinced 2,500 graduates of top universities to compete for 500 slots teaching in inner city and rural classrooms. I was thrilled by her commitment—and by the willingness of so many bright young people, frequently typecast as selfish hedonists, to serve a worthy cause.

Still, I couldn't help but wonder why education continues to be regarded as a charitable, rather than a fully professional, activity. Maybe we should give first-aid training to recent college graduates so they can staff emergency rooms in urban hospitals. Or how about giving volunteers a short course in law and assigning them to give the free legal advice that defendants are entitled to but that attorneys are less and less willing to provide?

I am not criticizing Teach for America, or the fine young people enlisted in it. It is wholly admirable that a business or liberal arts graduate would take a few weeks of training and walk bravely into a classroom in a tough big-city school. I am concerned, though, about the first-year teacher in that same school whose commitment to teaching began at least four or five years earlier and who patiently prepared for the responsibility she now faces.

Of course, she probably didn't go to a "top" university; she probably wouldn't have been admitted had she applied. And she is probably not as well educated, either, what with all those mickey mouse courses she had to take.

That, unfortunately, is the way most people think about teacher education—and not without grounds. We all know about the SAT scores of education undergraduates. We understand the factors that influence young people's career decisions. And some of us have taken a few mickey mouse courses ourselves.

Teacher education, like elementary-secondary education, is caught in a vicious cycle: Because it lacks prestige, has many problems, and is uneven in quality, people withhold their support—which only makes matters worse. A temporary, partial answer is alternative certification, which permits able people without much professional training to enter teaching through the

back door. A more effective long-term solution is to form partnerships among all those who need to be involved and take on the long, hard work of redesigning the whole system.

That is the approach being taken by schools and colleges in numerous communities, with John Goodlad playing a key role. A year ago this month Goodlad documented the shocking state of teacher education in his book, *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools* (1990). In this issue (p. 4), he reviews highlights of what he learned in his visits to representative teacher education institutions. Equally important, he tells about some of the follow-up activities being undertaken by his Center for Educational Renewal at the University of Washington and eight pilot settings where colleges and universities have established partnerships with local school districts.

To make sound decisions, school and university partners need information about the effects of various types of preservice and inservice programs. Luckily, Mary Kennedy (p. 14) has new data from a large-scale study that followed teacher education candidates from the time they entered preparation programs into their first year of teaching. Particularly interesting is the finding that "majoring in an academic subject in college does not guarantee that teachers will have the kind of subject matter knowledge they need for teaching."

After a decade in which legislatures in several states, having given up on improving teacher education, have instead severely restricted it, Kennedy's findings provide new evidence for the role of what Lee Shulman (1990) calls "pedagogical content knowledge." That would seem a convincing argument for the principle that preparation for teaching requires the right sort of subject matter knowledge, and the corollary that future teachers should not be left on their own to acquire professional skills through trial and error.

Changing teacher education is an awesome challenge, and no one understands that better than John Goodlad. But Goodlad is convinced that all the other reforms we seek, including much higher standards of student performance, depend directly on the professional qualifications of those who teach. We've only just begun—but we have reason for hope. □

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