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Techniques of Teacher Preparation Programs and How They Fail To Meet the Needs of Teacher Candidates

by Chad Hochstatter

(Education 1100)

Abstract

This paper examines the idea of teacher preparedness and the programs that are utilized to better prepare teachers for the education field. Specifically, the downsides of these programs will be explored. The debate remains over what is the best way to approach teacher preparation. Many different types of teacher preparation techniques have been utilized in the past, and some have found that they have been unsuccessful in getting teachers ready for a true classroom experience. This paper will state some of the techniques of teacher preparation and how they fail to meet the needs of future teachers in an actual school setting. Also, within this paper there will be alternative ideas as to how to better prepare teacher candidates for a successful teaching career.

There are many different types of teacher preparation programs in practice and some work and some do not work. Those that work educate teacher candidates how to become successful teachers, and those that fail leave them stranded and “at particularly trying times it has felt like I was swaying on a tight rope while things were being thrown at me and I was juggling” (Hollander and Scharff, 1999). A student who is choosing to go in to the field of education should be required to do more observations during his or her freshman year. One preparation program that has room for improvement is the observation method. According to McKenzie, “we get twenty-four credit hours of their undergraduate years to prepare them. That’s not enough. It’s not enough if you want to have a teacher succeed in a complex environment, such as at a school that needs to be turned around. We don’t demand enough of the folks who go into education” (McKenzie, 2010). If the teacher preparation programs were allotted more time to actually teach the candidates and go into further depth of each subject, teachers would be more well-rounded in all areas of the teaching spectrum. This is especially true for those who are entering the middle school levels of teaching in which math and science are becoming more in depth subjects and students are becoming more intelligent in these subjects. If the teachers are not mentally and educationally prepared for this then the students are at a larger risk of falling behind (McKenzie, 2010).

Student teaching is another program that has shown there is a need for enhancement. Teachers are getting into classrooms thinking that their students are going to be as excited as they are about the content and that the students are going to be attentive. Then they are flabbergasted when they find they have students who do not want to be there, students they cannot seem to reach, and parents who do not value what they do (Pennington, 2001). There is a need for ongoing communication between the college that prepared the teacher and the teacher themselves to ensure that the information they were taught is useful when transitioning into the classroom setting (DesMoinesRegister.com, 2009). “New teacher candidates must be equipped with 21st-century knowledge and skills and learn how to integrate them into their classroom practice for our nation to realize its goal of successfully meeting the challenges of this century” (News, 2010). In a discussion with certified teachers, it is noted that they feel that there should be more experience at different levels of teaching. For example, a teacher going into special education should have to student teach at an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. Certified teachers feel that the student teaching programs are not diversifying teacher experiences. Teachers become certified in areas where they have not participated; a graduate might be hired in an area where they may not have had

prior knowledge.

Teacher preparation programs are not adequately preparing teachers for classroom management of today's children. "Nationwide, one-third to one-half of new teachers quit teaching before completing their fifth year" (Pennington, 2001). In a survey of graduate of education schools and colleges it was indicated that the number one concern that the teachers had was the feeling of inadequacy and managing classrooms (Kizlik, 2010). "I don't think any program is preparing teachers for the kinds of kids they are going to have when they get into the classroom. They are preparing them for the ideal student who is going to have a mom and a dad at home to help them with homework every night" (DesMoinesRegister.com, 2009). Today's youth is unlike any youth that has been through schooling before; their challenges stem back further than just academic issues. Today's youth has to deal with more economic, social, and behavioral issues than in previous years. Schools are offering preparation programs that try and prepare future teachers to manage a classroom but this is not enough. Frustrations and the hectic pace of the classroom setting can cause teachers to "slip into survival mode," where they just try to make it until Christmas or spring break (Pennington, 2001). Those teachers that do "slip into survival mode" do not have the time or space for the kinds of reflection that lead to increased knowledge and understanding (Hollander and Scharff, 1999). These programs are failing to prepare teacher candidates for the inconsiderate behaviors and external challenges of today's youth.

Teacher preparation programs need to be updated to the 21st-century. In this "their curricula need to better prepare future teachers to integrate 21st-century skills into their instruction" (eschoolnews, 2010). A recent research conducted states, "teacher preparation programs must do a better job of imparting digital-age skills and teaching strategies to future educators so they, in turn, are prepared to equip students for success in college and the workforce" which many experts agree (eschoolnews, 2010). For instance in a national survey 82% of polled teachers said that tools such as blogs and wikis are important instructional tools, only one in four are learning how to use these tools in their courses on teaching methods (eschoolnews, 2010).

Some of the alternatives to better prepare teacher candidates are that of teacher mentoring. One thing that is important in the support of new teachers is a strong mentor. This should be where the mentor (i.e. a veteran teacher) and the mentee get together to discuss the teachers concerns, collaborate on lessons, discuss issues, or just unwind. "It is often difficult for a department director to spend time with new teachers to offer them the support and encouragement that they need. A strong mentor program could effectively pair a veteran teacher who not only has the time but demonstrates valuable leadership qualities with a new teacher who could benefit from their experience, knowledge, and expertise" (Rubenstein, 2010). Allowing time for mentoring is the key to a teacher's success. Teachers must have this time during the school day to meet with their mentors in order for "collaborative problem solving" to occur (Pennington, 2010). "You can't do this on your way to the teachers' lounge, and you can't do this standing back to back on the playground while watching the kids" (Pennington, 2010). As stated by an Arkansas superintendent, "We know that if we provide focused professional development for teachers, support for teachers, and the tools they need to do the job we ask them to do, then we are going to see the results in increasing student achievement" (Pennington, 2010). By using the mentoring program we are giving new teachers a better chance at surviving in a classroom setting.

Teachers need to learn not only how to teach, but also learn how to learn (Dembo, 2001). Every student has a different method of learning preference. For example, some students are visual students where by seeing what they are learning they learn it better. Others are kinesthetic where they move around and actually do it they learn better. The other is auditory which is where the students hear the lesson and they learn this way. Therefore, teachers need to learn the different types of teaching methods so that they can adapt to each students preferred manner of learning. Student preparation programs should teach teachers how to balance instruction so that students will be taught

in the manner in which they learn best so this will increase comfort level and willingness to learn (Silverman, 1988).

The many methods of teacher preparation do have the right idea of attempting to prepare teachers for the classroom setting. However, for reasons stated here, they are continuing to fall short. Teachers constantly need to evaluate their successes in the classroom, and teacher preparation programs need to begin to do the same. It needs to be noted that many first-year teachers are feeling the strain of the lack of guidance in areas that were not covered in their preparation programs. Minimal observation hours and short in-class hours have led to these feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness. Increasing the amount of actual teaching, educating teacher candidates about the multiple intelligences, and providing credible mentors are only a few ways to alleviate the stresses that are placed on the first-year teacher. Reevaluating the teacher preparation programs would require a considerable amount of time and an even more increased amount of time to revamp the program. However, when it comes to the value of students' education, this is time well spent.

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