Teachers for the New Millennium

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INTRODUCTION

They say if you drop a live frog into a pot of boiling water, it will jump right out. But, if you place the same frog into a pot of water at room temperature and then gradually raise the flame under it, the frog will not notice the changes and remain in the pot until it is cooked.

Now, you might ask, what is the connection between a frog in a pot and what a millennium teacher should know and be able to do?

My view of the connection is that there are events and processes happening around us every day. Most of the time, we do not pay them much attention because they occur so frequently or gradually that from moment to moment they do not seem to signify very much—like the gradually rising temperature in the pot of the cooking frog. Once in a great while, a potentially transformative event occurs and it makes us jump: September 11, Columbine, sending a man to the moon, or Y2K hysteria. Usually though, we conduct our routines and make our way through the day or the semester and tend to rely on the comfort of the familiar, seemingly unchanging, landscape. Yet, were we to carefully study and reflect upon that landscape, we might discern important trends that hold meaning for how we conduct ourselves presently, and in the future.

In terms of the specific professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of new teachers, I believe there are others who have done a much more effective job at identifying and describing them than I can. This information can be located at the Web sites of organizations such as the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

In this article, I wish to briefly identify four trends that I think will affect teaching, learning, and schools in the future. I am not so sure about their impact on the entire new millennium, or even the whole new century; but I do think they will be important over at least the next generation or so. I will describe factors in the wider environment that I think have the power to affect the practice and preparation of teachers, and comment on some of the challenges these factors may present.

INCREASING DIVERSITY OF THE STUDENT POPULATION

Racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity will continue to grow in the public schools. In addition, the numbers of students in special education classifications and alternative placements will likely increase. Cries for cost containment in special programs and the squeeze for classroom space within school buildings will result in more and more "non-traditional" students being placed in "regular" classes. Teachers will confront the need to become more adept at providing differentiated educational experiences for the multiple needs of students present in their classrooms, for diagnosing those needs, and for assessing student progress in multiple ways. Technology will offer much help in this area and teachers will be increasingly pressed to be proficient in its use.

It is likely that increasing numbers of adult educators will also be present in classrooms—co-teachers, support teachers, assistant teachers, paraprofessionals, and the like. Skills in team leadership and collaboration will increase in importance for classroom lead teachers. Student diversity will increase at a more rapid rate than diversity of the teaching staff. As a result, the need will rise for the teaching force, which will remain overwhelmingly white and female, to become more and more sensitive to, and adept at, simultaneously addressing differences in race, language, culture, and (dis)ability. Teachers' repertoires of available knowledge, skills, and dispositions will be challenged to expand and become enriched. The abilities to affirm and coach one's colleagues and students, in a spirit of solidarity, will likely emerge as highly desirable. These challenges suggest that prior to enrollment in teacher

education programs, greater attention to recruitment and pre-screening of candidates already in possession of desirable levels of vision, motivation, and attitude would be wise.

ASCENDANCE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE MARKETPLACE IN SCHOOLING

"School choice" has fully penetrated the lexicon of both Republicans and Democrats. Increasingly, schools will be expected to compete for their students. Charter schools, magnet schools, theme schools, schools-within-schools, mini-schools, and academies will continue to proliferate, as efforts will persist to dismantle what some call the "public school monopoly." The better educated, more connected, and politically savvy parents will tend to take the time and make the effort to ensure that they identify the best of these schools and differentiate them from the rest. They will also likely work hard to make sure their children attend them. This will tend to further separate our public schools into two tiers, each generally characterized by a different client population, one being at greater risk than the other.

The differing client populations in the "first tier" and "second tier" schools, regardless of their location in urban or suburban settings, will generate a variety of skill sets needed by the faculty in the schools. For example, "first tier" schools will tend to have higher levels of parental involvement. "First tier" teachers will feasibly have to *manage* high levels of parent participation, while "second tier" teachers will more likely focus *on ways to increase* parent involvement. Parents in both tiers of schools will care about their children; they will just manifest it in different ways. In another example, on January 15, 2003, Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York announced there would be entirely different curricula and approaches to instruction in the city's 200 "first tier" schools and its 1,000 "second tier" schools. One-size-fits-all approaches to educating teachers will not work well in this environment. Teacher preparation programs will be challenged to become more market sensitive and provide for greater specialization.

Dual-Route Certification Policy

Since at least the 1960s, there has been both a front door and a back door into the teaching profession. The front door (traditional route) is through a teacher training institution; the back door (alternate route) is through some form of special program or provisional or emergency certification. Entrance through the front door is supposed to prepare the prospective teacher by providing a B.A. degree that includes subject expertise and the necessary skills, knowledge, and dispositions to at least begin teaching on a professional level. The most common back-door route is one in which teachers already have their B.A. in a subject field and are supposed to get a great deal of on-the-job training while acquiring their skills, knowledge, and dispositions in condensed classes held after work, on weekends, and during vacations. Colleges and universities conduct nearly all traditional training programs. Increasing numbers of alternate route programs are being run by non-profit and profit-making organizations that may or may not be university affiliated.

Based upon the continuing shortage of hundreds of thousands of teachers our nation is experiencing, particularly in mathematics, science, languages, and Special Education, neither the front door nor the back door has been very successful in producing either the quantity or quality of teachers we need. However, the apparent success of programs such as Teach for America (which in 10 years has only produced about 7,000 teachers) has caught the attention of policymakers. Back-door programs seem cheaper and faster than front-door programs, because they tend to attract more mature and more diverse candidates. Because the results in terms of teacher quality are alleged to be better (or at least, no worse) than front-door programs, they have been growing in public support.

Possible challenges raised by this dual-route certification policy may include: 1) decreased demand for traditional college-based teacher training programs; and 2) increased demand for existing, experienced teachers to serve as mentors for new, inexperienced ones—both formally and informally. Experienced teachers will need to develop a new set of mentoring skills for adults in addition to their skills in teaching children. Further, they will need to organize their time suitably to take on this new responsibility and to perform it well.

Regardless of the route taken to certification, the initial years of induction into teaching will remain critical in terms of student learning from these early career professionals and the teachers' decisions about remaining in the profession. Enhancement of the quality of induction programs will likely result in improvements

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