

# *Prologue*

## *Policy, Practice, and Politics: Taking Stock of the Field*

This is a book about policy, practice, and politics in teacher education. Its content is a collection of editorials, which were written five times a year over the six years that I served as editor of the *Journal of Teacher Education*, 2000–2006. As the alliteration of the title suggests, these editorials individually and collectively make the case that the strands of teacher education policy, practice, and politics are indelibly interrelated and braided together. The editorials reveal that practice sometimes complies with policy (or is coerced by policy to reform) and sometimes resists or co-opts policy. The editorials also reveal that policy is sometimes shaped by emerging practice, but also, and probably more often, policy trumps practice, ignoring its realities, creating contradictions, or forgetting its history. Most important, this book suggests that politics hovers over all of this, winding its way around, under, and through practice and policy—sometimes creating snarls that are nearly impossible to untangle, sometimes weaving extensions into existing discussions, and sometimes concentrating on the beads and baubles of policy debates rather than the thicker strands of substance. Although the entanglement of teacher education policy and practice with politics is inevitable—and at times blatantly obvious—it is all too seldom made explicit and visible in the discourse of the field. The impact of politics is often subtle—disguised as “just good policy,” masquerading as “what the research shows,” or stitched so seamlessly into the logic of the discourse about practice that it is nearly imperceptible. Often, given the amnesia of our field, the much longer political history that

is the context for new developments in teacher education policy and practice is either forgotten or ignored. Just as often, given the myopia of our field, the much broader political agendas that are the context for new developments are purported simply to be “common sense.”

That teacher education policy and practice are completely intertwined with politics is neither surprising nor revelatory. Teaching is, after all, a public profession with which nearly everybody has extensive experience and about which many people have strong opinions. If teaching—as part of the larger educational system that sponsors it—is understood to be the major shared activity through which our society socializes and inculcates its children, then it stands to reason that it is a high-stakes enterprise. What is taught, how it is taught, who teaches it, who assesses it, how it is paid for, and who decides all of these things are contested areas, reflecting the inevitable disagreements about values, ideals, and purposes that are inherent in all social institutions. In this sense, politics is an inherent and valuable part of human societies and the social institutions they construct. Far from being simply what partisan policymakers engage in, politics represents the tensions and disagreements that inevitably arise when human beings live together and when they create social institutions to organize their lives.

Teaching is not only a high-stakes profession; it is also a huge profession. As sociologist Richard Ingersoll (2004) points out, teachers comprise 4% of the entire civilian workforce, with two times as many teachers as nurses, and five times as many teachers as either lawyers or professors. In addition, teachers’ salaries make up the biggest chunk of the overall cost of education (Rice, 2003), and everybody these days seems to agree that providing “well-qualified teachers” (which, although its importance seems unanimous, means a number of quite different things to different individuals and groups) for the nation’s children should be a priority. In light of all this, it may well be that the only remarkable thing is that teacher education practice and policy are not debated and critiqued by politicians, policymakers, and the public even more often and more heatedly than they already are.

This prologue has three purposes. First, it provides the background for the editorials included in this book by describing the larger historical, social, and political contexts within which they were written. Along these lines, I suggest that during this period a “new teacher education” was emerging, which, although it had deeper roots, represented a significant departure from the past. In this section, I also discuss the role of editorials as written discourse that “takes stock” of events and issues

at particular moments in time, attempting to connect these events to others as well as to the larger issues and perennial questions that define a field. In this sense the prologue is intended to help readers understand the larger contemporary context within which each editorial represents a moment in time. Second, this prologue shows how the editorials transcend particular moments in time by making an argument about the role of politics in policy and practice in a more general sense. The argument here is that in a certain way, policy *is* politics, and that, given the increasingly politicized society in which we live, there is very little policy, and perhaps to a lesser extent but still the case, there is very little practice that is *not* shaped by larger political issues related to ideas, values, morals, and priorities as well as power, influence, and alliances. Finally, the prologue discusses the major recurring themes in the politics of teacher education practice and policy over the last six years: the role of research and science in improving teacher preparation, competing agendas for reform, the impact of the accountability and testing movements on teacher education, defining teacher quality and its connections to desired outcomes, and teacher education for social justice and equity.

## TAKING STOCK OF TEACHER EDUCATION

As noted, all of the editorials in this book were written between 1999 and 2006. During this time, as I have argued in detail elsewhere (Cochran-Smith, 2005), a “new teacher education” has emerged out of a convergence of social, economic, professional, and political trends. These were influenced by the changing notions of accountability that emerged in the mid 1960s and, more specifically, the educational reform movements that began in the 1980s. In addition, the new teacher education is influenced by the continuing educational achievement gap, the enlarged role of the federal government in education, the elevation of the science of education, the embrace of a market approach to education policy, and the history and status of the teaching profession and the teacher education field.

### The New Teacher Education

Despite the fact that calls for something new and improved are the rule rather than the exception in teacher education, it is clear that

what has been called for recently (and what actually appears to have emerged) is qualitatively different from what was demanded in previous cycles of reform and critique. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, teacher education was urged to reform by addressing its perceived imbalance between liberal arts and humanities, on one hand, and pedagogy and methods, on the other. In the 1970s, teacher education was caught up in the competency movement, pressed to improve by assessing the progress of teacher candidates as they were trained to display explicit teaching behaviors in classrooms. During the 1980s, teacher education was pushed to be more coherent and internally cohesive by focusing on the emerging knowledge base, especially with regard to knowledge about the marriage of content and pedagogy, and the conceptual frameworks that steered the curriculum. In the 1990s, teacher education was propelled by the professionalization agenda, urged to reform itself as a standards-based profession, consistent across accreditation, certification, and licensure and in keeping with professional consensus. Although reminiscent of the 1970s in some ways, the emerging new teacher education of the 2000s is more evidence- and outcomes-oriented than previously. More important, the new teacher education is increasingly driven by a market approach to reform where educational improvement is assessed in terms of cost-benefit analyses and where there is enormous faith in the power of competition and the invisible hand of the market to regulate the economy and our social institutions. These shifts in the practice and policy of the new teacher education are reflected in the many reform documents, position papers, research syntheses, and calls for action that were widely disseminated during the period from just before and after the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 1998 and continuing until the present.

Of course, teacher education is neither monolithic nor unitary, and there are many variations among programs, pathways, and related projects. When I speak of a new teacher education, then, I am referring to emerging trends, patterns, and directions in the field rather than particular programs or routes. And, of course, it is important to note that the emergence of this new teacher education has been gradual rather than abrupt and that some of the seeds of change have deep historical and epistemological roots. However, the HEA reauthorization in 1998 with its Title II provisions stipulating numerous mandatory reporting and accountability requirements for teacher

education, linking state grants to the revision of certification, and providing funding for alternate routes (Earley, 2004), works well as a rough marker for “the new teacher education.” As Penelope Earley (2000) pointed out shortly after its reauthorization, the HEA debates, which had accountability as their mantra, “fingered teacher education as the culprit” (p. 37) in the perceived failure of the schools and the impending teacher shortage and thus charted the course for tighter regulation and other interventions. This does not mean, however, that the 1998 HEA requirements brought about the new teacher education. They did not. Rather “the new teacher education” was influenced by the same social forces that influenced HEA. It is also important to note that the new teacher education was not something “done to” the profession by outside forces. Rather, those involved in the profession of teacher education at universities, professional organizations, foundations, and think tanks were shaped by but also helped to shape the directions of the field.

The new teacher education, which is the context for the editorials collected in this book, has three closely coupled pieces: it is constructed as a public policy problem, based on research and evidence, and driven by outcomes. These pieces of the new teacher education are elaborated in many of the editorials collected in this book. As these pieces are put together in the context of additional—sometimes conflicting—regulations and in light of the commitments that have historically animated teacher education, a number of tensions have surfaced: the trade-off between selectivity and diversification, the balance between subject matter and pedagogy, the competition between university and multiple other locations as the site for teacher preparation, and the contradictions of tightly regulated deregulation. Each of these issues is also considered in the editorials that follow.

### **Editorializing the Field**

If it is true that teacher education, like all social institutions, is always in part an ideological practice, then it also true that the time period during which the editorials in this book were written has been a particularly ideologically driven time. In his book on ideology and discourse, James Gee (1996) wryly states, “To many people, ideology is what other people have when they perversely insist on taking the ‘wrong’ viewpoint on an issue. Our own viewpoint, on the other

hand, always seems to us simply to be ‘right’” (p. 1). Gee points out that in contemporary discourse, the word “ideological” is frequently used to cast aspersions on the viewpoints of one’s opponent, implying that he or she is an ideologue who operates within a closed system of ideas and values and is completely unwilling to entertain opposing points of view. In reality, however, the term, “ideological” may be used simply to refer to the fact that any given position or stance about a social practice, such as teacher education, is based on some set of cultural ideas, beliefs, principles, and values, rather than to make an evaluative comment about a particular set of ideas and values. Similarly Timar and Tyack (1997) suggest that ideology—or shared belief systems—has enormous power in shaping social institutions by building common cultural meanings and thus influencing public expectations as well as policy and practice. Throughout their analysis of the shift in school governance from the common school emphasis on training moral citizens to the current view of education as a consumer good, Timar and Tyack focus on the influence of what they term, “the invisible hand of ideology” (p. 1).

Conceptualizing teacher education as ideological practice means assuming that it is neither ideologically neutral nor value free, but is instead rooted in the cultural ideas, ideals, and beliefs about teachers, learners, schooling, society, and progress shared by particular groups. It follows from this that an integral part of analyzing the events and issues of teacher education is uncovering the value systems and cultural ideals behind them as well as identifying the groups and alliances that share those values and ideals.

As noted in the Preface to this book, my intention in editorializing teacher education was to be both scholarly and opinionated, in the sense of the long tradition of academic editorials. The contradiction in those twin goals notwithstanding, it was my hope both to draw on and create scholarly analyses of current issues and events in teacher education while at the same time taking a position on some of the most important issues and, on some occasions, even sounding a call to action about the directions of the field that I saw as seriously flawed or wrong-headed. In doing so, I work in the tradition of educational historian and policy analyst Larry Cuban, who in 1992 asked what the responsibility of scholars was to speak out against policies they believed to be seriously “flawed in both logic and evidence, and ultimately, hostile to [their] vision for students” (p. 6). Cuban characterized the momentum building in the late 1980s for

national tests and curriculum as a train rushing down a track. He asked whether scholars should accommodate what appeared by then almost to be political reality—by helping to build better track for the train in the form of, say, better tests—or, whether they should use their “expertise, evidence, and freedom” (p. 6) to try publicly to slow down the train by speaking out to lay and professional audiences in order to influence the policy debate. Cuban suggested that either choice (building better track or slowing down the train) was reasonable for a scholar, although he himself preferred slowing the train.

Following Cuban and others, then, one of my intentions in editorializing teacher education has been to suggest that in our roles as teacher education scholars and practitioners, we must also be public intellectuals, using our expertise, our evidence, and our freedom to challenge policies and practices that do not serve the interests of school students and try to lead the way in other directions that are more productive and more democratic. The strategy of simultaneously working against and within the system is paramount here. That is, it is essential both that teacher education scholars and practitioners offer critique in whatever public realms they have influence and access at the same time that they continue to do the work of teacher education within the boundaries of current policy and practice.

## **TEACHER EDUCATION AND POLITICS: TWO ANALYTIC FRAMEWORKS**

As noted above, one of the major aspects of the “new teacher education” is that it is constructed as a public policy problem. Defining teacher education as a matter of public policy means focusing on the parameters of teacher education (e.g., teacher testing requirements, rules about 4- or 5-year programs, subject matter regulations, alternate route options) that institutional, state, or federal policymakers can control with the assumption that if and when the “right” policies are in place, they will solve simultaneously the problems of teacher quality and teacher supply. Increasingly, as part of the new teacher education, scientific research has been deemed the appropriate and desirable basis for identifying the right policies and practices, although as several of the editorials in this book suggest, this litmus test for policy is selective and may be more rhetorical than real. Nonetheless,

the idea that solid evidence should drive policy and practice is in keeping with the larger evidence-based practice movement in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. Although this has been challenged (e.g. Erickson, 2005; Lather, 2004; Trinder & Reynolds, 2000), it remains the prevailing view.

This section provides two analytic frameworks for understanding the politics of teacher education, one for understanding the politics of teacher education policy and the other for understanding the politics of teacher education practice. While closely related and thoroughly consistent, these two frameworks are also somewhat different from one another, the first taking a more macro view of public policy making and the other offering a more micro view of the politics of teacher education practice.

### **The Politics of Policy**

With the passing of the No Child Left Behind legislation (P.L. 107–110, 2002), the federal government took an unprecedented stride into educational matters previously left to the states and/or to higher education and professional organizations. In addition, competing agendas for educational reform, including the reform of teacher education, have grown increasingly publicized and politicized over the last several years. Arguably, there have never before been such blistering media commentaries and such highly politicized battles about teacher preparation policy as those that have dominated the public discourse and fueled legislative reforms at the state and federal levels during the last five to seven years—precisely the same time as the period during which all of the editorials in this book were written. During this time, the accountability movement—and with it a proliferation of high-stakes tests of students as well as their teachers—has come to dominate the educational agenda. At the same time, there has been considerable growth of private schools, charter schools, and for-profit school corporations, and in teacher education there has been growth of alternate routes, community college programs, on-line certification and degree opportunities, and for-profit teacher preparation centers. These have raised new questions about what it means to educate all learners for “the public good.”

Some of the current debates about teacher education policy may be explained as turf battles, some as rhetorical maneuvering or



political symbolism, and some even as ongoing challenges to an unjust system. Taken together, however, these debates point to the fact that policy making regarding teacher preparation is fundamentally a political enterprise, which must be analyzed and understood as such and that social institutions within a democracy are necessarily the sites of political disagreement. This book is based on the premise that education and, as part of that larger enterprise, teaching and teacher education are fundamentally and inevitably political. One goal of this collection of editorials, then, is not to politicize teaching and teacher education but to acknowledge, as fully and completely as possible, that they are already politicized (Bruner, 1996) and that analyses that leave out the political origins and implications of teacher education policy and practice are, at best, incomplete, and at worst, naïve and misleading.

In several of the editorials in this book, I draw on Deborah Stone's theory of public policy, elaborated in *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (1997), to characterize developments and trends in teacher education policy. Stone suggests that, in the main, contemporary public policy analysis rejects politics, claiming instead to be about "rational analysis" and "disparag[ing] politics as an unfortunate obstacle to good policy" (p. x). In contrast Stone offers a model of policy analysis that accepts politics as not only an inevitable part of policy making but also a "creative and valued feature of social existence" (p. x). The crux of Stone's theory is the contrast she draws between a market model of society and with it a "rational" view of public policy making, on one hand, and a "polis" or political community model of society and also a "political" view of public policy making, on the other.

Stone's market model of society posits a collection of individuals with relatively stable individual preferences who weigh alternatives on the basis of deliberate and rational calculation. With a market model, policy making is part of what Stone calls the "rationality project," which is intended to take the politics out of policy. From this perspective, rational public policy making is based on a process wherein objectives are identified, a range of alternative actions to meet those objectives is identified, choices are evaluated on the basis of predictions (usually econometric) about their impact, and then the "right" choice is selected. From this perspective, individual people have individual interests, and they trade or exchange things with others in order to maximize their own well-being, which prompts

resourcefulness and creativity. On the other hand, from the perspective of what Stone characterizes as the political community model of society, people live in a “web of dependencies, loyalties, and associations where they envision and fight for a public interest as well as their individual interests” (p. x). With a political community model, policy making is understood to depend on the ways in which people are psychologically and materially connected to and dependent upon each other. From this perspective, public policy making is understood to be influenced not so much by strictly rational choices but also by people’s emotional bonds, their affiliations with social groups, and the shared meanings that connect them to others. From this perspective, policy making is seen as a struggle over ideas and over how the terms of policy debates are established. From this perspective, the focus is not simply on individuals, but on communities—both political communities (groups who live under the same structures and rules) and cultural communities (groups who share culture); here it is assumed that part of what motivates people is collective will and effort.

Stone (1997) suggests that the chief conflict in society is how to reconcile individual interests with public interests since there is never complete agreement about what the public interest is. With a market model, it is assumed that the market decides—that is, it is assumed that given a fair initial distribution of resources, the public interest is—by definition—the natural side effect of the accumulation of individuals pursuing their self interests. Competition is the key: what is best for a collection of individuals is by definition what is best for society, and choices are made on the basis of complete and accurate information. With a political model, however, it is assumed that cooperation and alliance building are as important as competition and that providing for the public good—not just private goods—is part of what motivates groups of individuals. Policy making is understood as problem solving, and groups are the key, including how groups are formed, split, and re-formed to get at public purposes. Far different from the assumptions underlying the purely rational view of policy making implicit in the market model, the political community model assumes that policy making is in part a function of interpretation, values, and passion—how people interpret information (which is always incomplete), who provides the information in the first place and what loyalties and affiliations are attached to that information, and which information is distributed and/or withheld

(strategically or otherwise). Stone suggests that in the market model, change is assumed to come about as a function of exchange. In the political model, however, change is assumed to occur through the “interaction of mutually defining ideas and alliances.” From Stone’s perspective, then, policy making is not so much about how people use power to influence policy decisions, but how they use ideas to garner political support for their own views and their own ways of defining the questions that count at the same time that they work to challenge the viewpoints and defining questions and thus decrease the political influence of their opponents.

In many of the editorials in this book, where policy matters are described, I have worked from a perspective that is akin to Stone’s. Using Stone’s and other related ideas, I have analyzed how various groups with competing ideas about how to reform teacher preparation have struggled to control the enterprise by controlling the ideas and frameworks used to debate teacher education and to make policy about it. As a number of the editorials in this book suggest, it is often the case that although the values and priorities underlying policy debates are paramount, these are not explicitly debated. This means that an important goal of the critical discourse—in various forms, including editorials—is to uncover and unpack the politics of policy, or the ways that individuals and groups with differing policy positions forward and bolster their own views at the same time that they position and undermine opposing views.

### **The Politics of Practice**

In discussions about the curriculum of teacher education and the nature of teacher education pedagogy, a distinction is sometimes made between a “political” kind of teacher education practice and some other kind of teacher education practice that is not political. For example, some teacher education scholars and practitioners suggest that focusing on social justice or equity in teacher education is “too political,” while, in contrast, focusing on content and pedagogical knowledge is both more important and also more “neutral” when it comes to politics. Let us put aside for the moment the false dichotomy between social justice and equity, on one hand, and subject matter and pedagogy, on the other, since the former takes as a starting point the idea that all teachers must be well prepared in subject matter and pedagogy in order to teach all children to high

standards. Disagreements about this dichotomy notwithstanding, the very existence of discussions about whether one kind of teacher education practice is “too political” in comparison with some other “nonpolitical” kind presumes that there is a choice in teacher education practice between politics and no politics, and that it is possible to engage in the practice of teacher education without being political (or, to concede a point at the outset, at least without being very political).

The premise of this book is quite the opposite. The premise here is that all teacher education practice (and by “practice,” I mean a whole range of program and program-like matters, including decisions about the content and focus of the curriculum, the pedagogy developed, the assessment strategies employed, the arrangements regarding program structures and fieldwork experiences, and the ways candidates are selected and recruited into the field) is political in that it involves choices about what is included and what is left out, whose viewpoints and interests are served and whose may not be, which aspects of teaching and schooling are made problematic and which are taken for granted, and what assumptions are made—whether spoken or unspoken—about the purposes of teaching and schooling in a democratic society.

The editorials in this book are grounded in a conceptual framework for understanding the politics of teacher education practice based on critical questions (Cochran-Smith, 1998, 2003). The premise of the framework is that any particular teacher preparation program or practice (whether collegiate or otherwise) takes a stance on key issues or questions, which are then mediated by institutional, community and regulatory policies that are somewhat more external to practice. The key issues of practice can be framed in terms of eight critical questions: the diversity question; the ideology or social justice question; the knowledge question; the teacher learning question; the practice question; the outcomes question; the recruitment/selection question; and the coherence question. There are “answers” to these eight questions—either explicit or implicit—in any and all teacher education practice. How these questions are answered is, essentially, the politics of practice in that these answers involve choices and decisions based on values, priorities, ethics, beliefs, and ideals and in that these choices either help to maintain or challenge the status quo.

The “diversity question” has to do with how the increasingly diverse student population in American schools is constructed as a

“problem” for teaching and teacher education and what are understood to be desirable “solutions” to this problem. Many critics of teacher education claim that historically, diversity has been constructed from a deficit perspective about the education of minority students, rather than regarded as a valuable resource to be extended and preserved. With the problem of diversity regarded as a deficit, it has also been historically assumed that the “inevitable” solution to the problem is assimilation, wherein differences are expected largely to disappear, and a “one size fits all” approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment is assumed to equate with equity for all. The “ideology or social justice question,” is closely related to the diversity question. It has to do with ideas, ideals, values, and assumptions about the purposes of schooling, the social and economic history of the nation, and the role of public education in a democratic society. In particular, this has to do with what images of American society (from meritocratic to hegemonic) as well as what notions of social justice (from everybody achieving to higher standards to redistributing society’s resources) are assumed in teacher education courses, fieldwork arrangements, and other aspects of practice. Theorists and researchers who are critical of traditional teacher education practice have argued that implicit within it is a meritocratic view of American schooling and assessment and an assimilationist view of the purposes of education. Often, of course, the ideological stance underlying teacher education practice is unstated, with continuation of the status quo more or less presumed either by design or by default.

The “knowledge question” has to do with the knowledge, interpretive frameworks, beliefs, and attitudes that are considered necessary to teach, particularly knowledge about subject matter, pedagogy, and culture. Many critics of traditional undergraduate teacher education programs have suggested that there is not enough focus on deep knowledge of subject matter and too much focus on pedagogy and education foundations. Meanwhile critics of alternate forms of practice suggest that subject matter knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for teaching and that there is too little focus on pedagogy, how people learn, and how schools work. Along other lines, those who emphasize multicultural teacher education and issues of educational equity suggest that teachers need to know not only about “the knowledge base” of teaching but also how to critique the knowledge base as well as have knowledge of culture and the role of culture in learning and also need to develop the beliefs and skills to teach

diverse groups successfully and to join with others in larger social movements.

The “teacher learning question,” which has to do with how, when, and where adults learn to teach, is closely related to the knowledge question, with the former focusing on what teachers need to know and the latter on how they come to know it. The teacher learning question has to do with how learning to teach is regarded in teacher education practice—for example, as a matter of being trained to exhibit particular classroom behaviors, or a matter of developing interpretive frameworks for practice through participation in inquiry communities, or a matter of learning on the job through trial-and-error experience. The “practice question” involves the competencies and pedagogical skills teachers are assumed to need to teach effectively and how these are accounted for in teacher education practice. Closely related to (and in a certain sense, a subset of) the teacher learning question, practice includes not only how teachers learn to perform in classrooms but also how teachers’ roles as members of school communities, as school leaders, and as theorizers of practice are conceptualized and instantiated in practice. It also includes how teachers’ responsibilities to families and students and to communities are understood.

The “outcomes question,” which has emerged as central in the last decade, has to do with the expected consequences of teacher preparation as well as how, by whom, and for what purposes these outcomes are assessed. This is in keeping with the general shift in the field away from focusing primarily on curriculum- or program-oriented standards and toward emphasizing instead performance-based standards and the long-term impacts of teacher preparation on K-12 students’ learning. At the same time there has been a general shift to an outcomes- rather than an input-based approach to teacher education, however, there has also been a strong theme of resistance to narrow conceptions of outcomes in some examples of practice and in much of the theoretical literature. Along these lines, some teacher education practice is explicitly designed to be “against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 1990) of common practice by questioning the ways schooling has systematically failed to serve many students from diverse backgrounds.

The “recruitment/selection question” has to do with which candidates should be recruited and selected for America’s teaching force. The answers to this question implicit in various teacher education

programs and practices have to do with the value of diversifying the teaching force, the importance of recruiting teachers with outstanding academic backgrounds, and/or the importance of seeking teachers who are likely to remain in teaching over the long haul. Different answers to the recruitment/selection question depend on different assumptions about the role of experience in teaching quality and whether subject-matter knowledge trumps life experiences and commitments. Finally the “coherence question,” which encompasses the other seven questions discussed so far, has to do with the degree to which the stances taken on the first seven issues are connected to and coherent with one another and with how particular issues, such as issues related to diversity and equity, are positioned within a program—centrally or marginally.

Taken together, the key questions described above constitute a framework for understanding the politics of teacher education practice. In many of the editorials in this book, I have focused on one or more of the key questions of teacher education practice—knowledge, learning, outcomes, and so on—to get at the very different values, ethics, and priorities that underlie differing teacher education practices and the larger political and professional agendas to which these views are attached. As a number of the editorials in this book suggest, there are deep complexities and multiple meanings involved in understanding teacher education practice as well as deep complexities in the politics of practice.

## **THE ISSUES THAT DEFINE, THE ISSUES THAT DIVIDE**

During the period from 1999 to 2006 when the editorials in this book were written, many new policies, commission reports, empirical studies, research reviews, report cards, reform proposals, foundation initiatives, and position statements related to teacher quality and teacher preparation were produced and disseminated. A search of *Education Week's* archives for this period, for example, yields more than 4,000 entries related to teacher education. More than a dozen new reviews and syntheses of the research on teacher preparation (along with rejoinders and responses to these) were published since 2001. In addition, major statements—even “manifestos”—about teacher preparation and quality were produced by professional organizations, blue-ribbon commissions, think tanks, and major foundations



with various political and professional agendas. Also during this time period, new teacher education accreditation standards were announced from the major national accrediting body (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education), and the authorization of a new accrediting agency (Teacher Education Accreditation Council) with its own standards was announced. There were new state-level certification and licensure regulations put into place in nearly every one of the 50 states. During this same time period, the landmark No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (P.L. 107–110, 2002) greatly expanded the role of the federal government in education and legislated controversial definitions of both “highly qualified teachers” and “scientifically based research” in education. These were buttressed by subsequent policy reports such as the Secretary of Education’s (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005) annual reports to Congress on teacher quality, the first of which appeared just a few months after NCLB, to reinforce its definition of highly qualified teachers and assert that current approaches to teacher preparation were failing to produce the teachers the nation needed.

To say that there was a steady stream of documents and materials related to teacher education during this time period would be an understatement—there was a deluge. The deluge of materials, documents, and policies coupled with new regional and state reform initiatives, research collaborations, and assessment systems as well as commentary and debate about all of these served as the grist for the editorials in this volume. Five broad topics recur across the editorials, while, at the same time, five major analytic threads or themes run through them. The major topics include : (1) the role of research, particularly scientific research and evidence, in the improvement of teacher preparation; (2) competing agendas for the reform of teacher education, particularly competition between the professionalization agenda and the deregulation agenda, with its roots in a market-based model of society; (3) teacher education accountability strategies and systems, both external and internal, especially with regard to the outcomes of teacher education and to teacher/pupil testing; (4) teacher quality, including how teacher quality is (or ought to be) defined, what characteristics of teachers are associated with desired educational outcomes, and how quality indicators are related to the selection and retention of teachers; and, (5) issues related to teaching and teacher education for social justice and social change, especially the attention (or lack thereof) to issues of multiculturalism and equity in



standards and regulations regarding the preparation, certification, and licensure of teachers. Each of these topics is elaborated below.

### **The Role of Research and Scientific Evidence in Teacher Education**

In a growing number of arenas, the “science of education” has been greatly elevated (National Research Council, 2005). Today’s rich data sources, powerful analytical techniques, and increasingly sophisticated researchers are presumed to permit the verification of scientifically based practices and policies that will increase students’ achievement, improve teaching and schools, and solve the problems involved in providing universal education to a large and diverse population. The elevation of science is reflected in the formation of the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences and the What Works Clearinghouse, which was created to provide a central reliable source of scientific evidence in education for use by policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. Emphasis on greater scientific rigor is intended to respond to the widespread perception that educational research has been generally low in quality with constantly contested results and little capacity to improve educational policy and practice. The notion of “scientifically based research” and its complement, “evidence-based education,” along with the new agencies and partnerships created to foster them reflect renewed confidence in the power of science to solve social and educational problems.

Disagreements about what constitutes science are not new, nor is burgeoning faith in the ability of science to solve educational problems, although many critics have pointed out that science cannot resolve issues about the purposes of schools or the students they should serve. As Lagemann (2000) noted, educational research has always been “an elusive science,” with debates as early as the 1890s about whether there could truly be a science of education. Like the period Lagemann described at the beginning of the 20th century, the beginning of the 21st is also a time in which “science is remaking conceptions of truth and knowledge” (p. 19) in education generally and in teacher education particularly. Several of the editorials in this book directly take up questions related to the role and function of research in teacher education, including how research is defined, how it is (or can be) related to policy and practice, and how it ought

to be evaluated. In addition, the editorials identify new research initiatives in teacher education—several with innovative research collaborations and mixed methods research designs—that are intended to examine scientifically the impact of teacher preparation on pupil, teacher, and school outcomes. Several of the editorials also scrutinize the “the research base” for teacher education, dissecting debates about what the research shows, sorting out the differing uses of the term “research” in the discourse of the field, and comparing the state of research in teacher education to that of other professions.

### **Competing Agendas for Reform**

Competing agendas for the reform of teacher education are quite different from one another in history and tradition, with some strategies to control teaching politically and others reflective of long-term struggles for professional autonomy and equity. The two major contemporary reform agendas in teacher education are generally referred to as the professionalization agenda and the deregulation agenda (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, 2005; Zeichner, 2003). The former aims to make teaching and teacher education a profession with a research-based and formal body of knowledge that distinguishes professional educators from lay persons, has jurisdictional responsibility, and works from consistent standards for professional practice. The major goal is to ensure that all teachers are fully prepared and certified. The deregulation agenda, on the other hand, aims to eliminate most requirements for entry into the profession based on the assumption that these simply keep bright young people out of teaching and focus on social goals rather than pupils’ achievement. Deregulation is consistent with other market-based approaches to reform and with the larger movement to privatize health, education, and other services.

Unpacking and critiquing these two agendas is a recurring topic in the editorials in this book. A number of the editorials are critical of the market-based approach to teaching and schooling, which is dependent upon a strong competitive environment. The assumption underlying this approach is that to improve teaching and quality of life for the public writ large, what schools need most is the freedom to recruit, hire, and keep all teachers who can raise pupils’ test scores regardless of their credentials. The editorials argue instead that this approach fails to understand the nature of teaching and learning and the motivations of those who enter the field (and stay). Several of the editorials

also try to sort out the contradictory conclusions about the research base for teacher education reached by advocates of these agendas. In addition, some of the editorials deal with the fact that there are other agendas for reform besides these two, including efforts to regulate teacher education by increasing federal and state control of teacher education's inputs and outcomes, on one hand, and to construct teacher education as a social justice project, on the other, which is considered as a separate topic below. Although these multiple agendas are contradictory in some ways, they are not mutually exclusive. The editorials in this book consider how the various reform agendas overlap and collide with one another, depending on state regulations and on how the agendas are positioned by opponents and proponents.

### **Accountability and Outcomes**

It is crystal clear that the accountability movement now dominates the discourse about reforming education and improving the schools in the United States. The annual testing requirements put into place by NCLB along with its annual requirements concerning pupils' and schools' progress now drive many state- and school-level initiatives regarding curriculum scope and sequence, graduation and promotion policies, and practices related to test preparation. As part of this larger accountability movement, there is now a major focus on accountability strategies and systems in teacher education. Some of the press for accountability is from sources external to teacher education at the institutional or program level—state-level certification regulations, licensure requirements, accreditation criteria, professional standards, and national reform initiatives. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the press for accountability is not just outside-in. It is also inside-in, that is, internal to institutions and programs, with many teacher education practitioners themselves concerned about whether they are meeting their own objectives and commitments related to the preparation of teachers. That the press for accountability comes from sources both external and internal to teacher education is not surprising. Teacher educators are influenced by the same social forces as policymakers and accreditors, and the press for accountability is part of a larger clamor in American society for all of the professions—including higher education—to respond to the forces of the market and prove their worth to consumers.

A number of the editorials in this book focus on accountability in teacher education, particularly on emerging assessment systems and the ways practitioners and policymakers are defining and measuring the outcomes of teacher education. A recurring theme is that the outcomes of teacher education are being constructed too narrowly, with accountability defined as test scores alone. The editorials raise questions about the feasibility of accountability systems intended to trace the test scores of pupils back to the specific teacher preparation program or institution, given the many intervening variables, the critical influence of school culture and climate (not to mention resources), and the multiple goals and purposes of teacher education. Several editorials focus specifically on the question of evidence in teacher education, challenging the application to teacher education of the underlying theory of “evidence-based education” as a reform strategy and raising fundamental questions such as “evidence of what?” and “evidence for whose purposes?” that expose the politics of evidence.

### **Teacher Quality and Its Indicators**

Nationwide there is an emerging consensus that teacher quality makes a significant difference in schoolchildren’s learning and in overall school effectiveness. Politicians, policymakers, and researchers of all stripes increasingly use this term to emphasize that teachers are a critical influence (if not the single most important influence) on how, what, and how much students learn. NCLB cemented into law the assumption that teacher quality matters by guaranteeing that all schoolchildren have “highly qualified teachers” who receive “high-quality” professional development. However, education researchers, practitioners, and policymakers do not agree upon a single definition of “teacher quality.”

Within the general guidelines mandated by NCLB, the states are defining teacher quality differently from one another and putting different policies into place. Some researchers define teacher quality as student achievement, while others define it as teacher qualifications. While these are not necessarily mutually exclusive from one another, they represent different relative emphases and they have quite different—and extremely important—implications for teacher education policy and practice.

A number of the editorials in this book focus directly on the question of teacher quality, sorting out differing definitions and the

various groups—parents and the general public, politicians of varying stripes, researchers from different paradigmatic and methodological backgrounds, teacher education practitioners, and school-based educators—who work from those definitions. When teacher quality is defined as student achievement, the premise is that although there is measurable variation in effectiveness across teachers, this variation is not captured by the common indicators of quality, such as teachers' preparation, experience, and test scores, but is captured in pupils' performance. With this approach, the point is to identify major differences in student achievement gains that are linked to teachers and then suggest implications regarding incentives, school accountability systems, and policies regarding the placement of teachers and students. The second approach defines teacher quality in terms of teacher qualifications. The point is to determine which (if any) of the characteristics, attributes, and qualifications generally considered indicators of teacher quality are actually linked to student achievement or other outcomes, such as principal evaluations of teachers or teachers' sense of efficacy.

As the editorials in this book indicate, these issues of teacher quality are closely tied to the accountability and testing movements, discussed above, and to the increasing focus on pupils' achievement as the appropriate outcome of teaching and teacher education. They also have to do with how we conceptualize and establish teacher education policies and practices related to teacher recruitment, selection, and retention.

### **Teacher Education for Social Justice**

Over the last two decades, conceptualizing teaching and teacher education in terms of social justice has been the central animating idea for some educational scholars and practitioners who connect their work to larger critical movements. Advocates of a social justice agenda want teachers to be professional educators as well as advocates for students and activists committed to diminishing the inequities of American society. They also seek teachers more likely to stay in hard-to-staff schools with large numbers of minority and poor students. The social justice agenda overlaps with but also bumps up against the other agendas for teacher education reform noted above.

In the spirit of editorials as both "opinionated and scholarly," as I noted above, there is no question that this collection of editorials

takes a social justice perspective on teacher education. Many of my editorials explicitly raise questions about teacher education for equity, social change, and social justice, particularly with regard to what is being left out of the discourse of reform and what is silenced in discussions about teacher education at the highest levels of power and influence. As the editorials indicate, advocates of a social justice agenda worry that concerns about the achievement gap and concerns about preparing qualified teachers have been melded together and converged with policymakers' obsession with testing and accountability. The result is that educational equity is increasingly being conceptualized as opportunities for all students to be held equally accountable to the same high-stakes tests, despite unequal resources and opportunities to learn. Teacher preparation is increasingly being conceptualized as a way to ensure that all teachers have the subject-matter knowledge and the technical skills to bring pupils' test scores to certain minimum thresholds. And preparing young people to live in a democratic society is increasingly being conceptualized as efficiently assimilating all school children into mainstream values, language, and knowledge perspectives so they can enter the nation's workforce, contribute to the economy, and preserve the place of the United States as the dominant power in a global society.

This collection takes quite a different tack about the purpose of teaching, schools, and teacher education. Of particular concern is the increasingly narrow focus of the new teacher education on producing the nation's workforce coupled with excessive attention to the tests used to compare it to other countries. The editorials raise questions about the role of teacher education in preparing teachers who know how to prepare future citizens to participate in a democratic society. The argument here is that there is very little discussion in the teacher education discourse about the need for all teachers to have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach toward the democratic ideal and even less discussion about the need to evaluate teacher education—at least in part—by their success at producing teachers who teach for democracy. These goals are being silenced or squeezed out of the discourse.

### **Common Analytic Threads**

In addition to the five major topics just described, there are also a number of analytic threads that run across and through these topics and

thus stitch this anthology of editorials together. These threads are stated below in the form of five tenets for understanding teacher education research, policy, and practice—tenets that both guide the analyses offered in the editorials and also serve as a potential guide for understanding teacher education policy and practice in a more general sense.

(1) There is danger—even grave danger—inherent in dichotomy, simplicity, and reductionism. Concomitantly, there is necessity—even pressing necessity—for complexity in how we understand teaching, learning, and schooling, how we construct teacher education policies and practices related to these, and how we study all of this. (2) Many contemporary issues in teacher education have deep historical roots. It is important to learn from and connect to the past by locating contemporary issues in the context of the perennial issues that have animated teacher education development, critique, and reform for more than a century. On the other hand, it is also important to understand that each time perennial issues reemerge, they are somewhat different and are threaded into the tapestry of changed and changing political, social, and economic times and thus have a different set of meanings and implications. (3) In teacher education, as in other arenas, how the questions of the field are framed and how its problems are posed define and limit the range and variation of possible answers and thus prefigure what is emphasized, included in, and omitted from the discussion. This means that to a great extent, whoever has control of the questions in teacher education also has control of the answers, or the operating agendas and issues that drive changes and developments in teacher education research, policy, and practice. Identifying the key questions and how they are being constructed is essential to understanding the field. (4) Beneath the surface of every aspect of teacher preparation policy and practice and every debate about reform and renewal are particular configurations of values, ideals, beliefs, and priorities as well as particular constellations of actors who do and do not share those values and who do and do not have power and influence over various groups of others. In short, beneath the surface of every aspect of teacher education policy and practice is politics. It is impossible to avoid politics, and thus it is impossible to understand policy and practice fully or to clarify the issues thoroughly without also uncovering and understanding the underlying values and politics. (5) What happens at the margins of teacher education helps to define the center and to delineate the boundaries of the field. This

means that in order to get a handle on teacher education policy, research, and practice, it is necessary but not sufficient to analyze and critique what topics, themes, and issues are emphasized in the discourse. It is also necessary to determine and critically analyze what is marginalized, left out, or silenced in the discourse.

The editorials in this book explore the five topics listed above and the many complex issues that accompany them—research, competing agendas, accountability, teacher quality, and social justice. This topical discussion is understitched by the analytic threads that run throughout the editorials—complexity, historicity, questions, values, and omissions. Taken together as a body of work over time, the editorials collected in this book suggest that in a very real sense these major topics and the threads with which they are stitched to one another are both defining and dividing the contemporary field of teacher education. In other words, how these five topics are conceptualized, played out, and described locally, regionally, and nationally are defining the contours of contemporary practice and policy in teacher education and, at the same time, sometimes dividing the field by separating those with contrasting or conflicting views.

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