Teacher Education Policy in the United States: Perspectives and Controversy
Edited by Penelope Earley, David G. Imig, and Nicholas M. Michelli

As indicated by its title, this book is written to share perspectives and controversy regarding teacher education policy in the United States. The essays cover, either explicitly or implicitly, a variety of critical issues dealing with teacher education policy: for example, the characteristics of quality teacher education and how it is assessed, the appropriate standards for granting a teaching credential, the changing nature of education policy and its sources, the lack of connection between education policy and research, and the relationship between teacher education and social justice.

I have chosen to review this book in three parts. First, I will provide a brief overview of each chapter in an effort to get at the scope, substance, and focus of the book. Next I will summarize the main conclusions derived from the book, with comments regarding their importance. Finally, I will comment on how the book informs the Agenda for Education in a Democracy (Goodlad et al., 2004; Goodlad, 1994).
An Overview—Scope, Substance, and Focus

In Chapter One, “Teacher Education Policy Context,” Michelli and Earley delineate the “tension” between political decision makers and educators regarding what constitutes a well prepared teacher and how to best prepare teacher candidates to meet the standard. They note the controversy over what is meant by teacher quality and how it is to be measured. The authors write about the discrepancy in expectations which occurs between the decision makers and educators regarding the timing of education changes necessitated by policy changes: Policymakers expect educators to make changes immediately when policy is enacted. The authors describe why this is always difficult.

Two essays, one by Frederick Hess and the other by Neal McCluskey, comprise Chapter Two. Both discuss the expanding federal role in education and thus in teacher education. Hess provides examples to illustrate his concern over resistance to change coming from the education community. He pleads with educators and other school officials to open a dialogue with advocates of change and look for workable solutions in the middle. McCluskey writes critically of what he believes is the self-interest demonstrated by both federal and state politicians.

Case studies offered in Chapters Three and Four provide useful illustrations of the challenges identified in this book. The themes that emerge in the Louisiana case study (Chapter 3) show the difficulty teacher educators experience in their efforts to balance their support of K-12 schools with university responsibilities. The Florida case study (Chapter 4) demonstrates an increasing gulf between state officials and university teacher educators. One example noted is politicians placing blame for low student performance primarily on teacher educators.

Chapter Five, “Assessing State and Federal Policies to Evaluate the Quality of Teacher Preparation Programs,” is illuminating. The question of what constitutes a quality teacher and how this is measured is at least partially answered by Zeichner, who contrasts the preparation and evaluation of candidates in other professions with the assessment of teacher candidates. He concludes that no other profession judges its candidates with so little evidence. He also discusses costs versus benefits of various accountability systems and “reasonable” ways to get at accountability. He gives attention to two practices: (1) teacher performance accountability and (2) preparation institution accountability, which links the program with K-12 test scores. He tackles the value-added controversy and concludes that these measures still lack reliability.
Weisenbach, in Chapter Six, describes the creation and implementation of a state professional standards board in Indiana, established to improve teacher quality and pave the way for teaching to be regarded as a profession. Progress was made, but it was short lived as charismatic leaders changed in the governor’s and superintendent’s offices.

Chapter Seven, written by Ada Beth Cutler, Frank Alvarez, and Susan Taylor, describes the university-school partnership established at Montclair State. The authors describe some of its history, foundational philosophy, strengths, and weaknesses, and they share some important lessons they have learned.

Van Dempsey and Deborah Shanley (Chapter Eight) relate their work to improve teacher education and schooling in rural and urban settings. Their story is critical in showing how their efforts seemed to be continually blocked by federal education policy.

In Chapter Nine, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Kim Fries describe the meaning of social justice and discuss its importance for teachers and teacher educators.

The three editors provide in the concluding chapter their reflections on the overall purposes of the book. Michelli writes about issues of research, social justice, and concern for the health and well-being of all children and youth. To Imig, eight factors prominent in today’s culture provide significant challenges for teacher educators. Earley provides a parable to portray several important needs for teacher education.

**Main Conclusions of the Book**

The conclusions one comes to from reading the book are important and should have deep meaning for teacher educators. In the following I summarize what I consider to be the most prominent of these conclusions.

*There is a disconnect between the views of educators and policymakers as to how quality teaching and quality teacher preparation are best measured.*

Michelli, Earley, and Zeichner are among the authors who treat this issue. Although they do not indicate specific characteristics they feel necessary for a well prepared teacher or best methods for preparing them, they do argue for the need to find appropriate ways to measure these. To Michelli and Early the controversy over reform initiatives is over what is meant by teacher quality and how it is measured.
Hess proposes measuring teacher performance by linking it to student performance, but Zeichner, as described in Chapter Five, believes this is problematic, particularly if the measure of student performance is norm-referenced tests.

Value-added measures lack empirical verification, argues Zeichner. He writes that the time required to produce useful results is prohibitive, and that cost versus benefit factors do not support its use. After describing the results of his comparative study showing the inferiority of teacher candidate assessment, he reviews the federal movement of accountability from input measures to outcome measures. While he agrees that accountability assessed by outcome measures is best practice, he acknowledges that appropriate measurements have not been found. But these measurements can be found if policymakers and educators are willing to come together to find meaningful solutions. His conclusion is that the most effective method of determining teacher candidate effectiveness seems to be more frequent and more focused observation of teacher candidates by teacher educators.

Michelli makes a strong statement that quality teacher education institutions do not argue for less accountability. They do, however, argue for accountability around a different set of questions: for example, “Are more students graduating and is the graduation rate about equal when sorted by diversity factors?” “Are we succeeding in diversifying the teaching force?” “Are the achievement gaps narrowing?” (211)

In summary, a disconnect is apparent between policymakers and educators on how the quality of teachers and of teacher preparation institutions should be measured. Some argue for value-added measures of accountability; others argue that these measures fall short. Some want to link teacher quality to student performance; others see this as laden with problems. The most promising measure of teacher quality may be greater quantity and quality of observation of teacher candidates in their clinical settings.

Some policies are useful, but when taken to extremes their impact is “neutralized” as they build defensiveness among those expected to implement them.

Hess believes the education community too often resists change. He gives two examples that occurred in 2010 (Florida’s Senate Bill 6 and a decision of the Los Angeles Times) to make the point that some attempts to improve teacher
performance are not necessarily poor policy, but when taken too far are rejected by educators and thus provide no improvement. He proposes that such policies as linking teacher performance to student performance, ending tenure, making student data transparent to the public, and calculating value-added measures can yield positive changes. But if they are taken too far, the adverse reaction by the education community “nullifies” their potential to improve teaching.

For example, under NCLB the practice of disaggregating scores to highlight the need for additional help to underserved populations has been a positive outcome of the policy. However, expecting all students to be highly performing by 2014 is ludicrous—a clear negative. The “overengineered” NCLB, which when pushed to illogical ends has led to resistance from the education community and negated some of its more helpful provisions.

In advising school officials to dialogue with change advocates to find acceptable middle-ground solutions, Hess concludes,

> The larger point is that the vitriol tends to both stifle problem-solving and to be self-perpetuating. It shuts the door on fruitful debate and influences [negatively] the rising generation of advocates, thinkers, and practitioners. We create guarded camps that jeer at one another across the divide. In the end, this is neither democratic policy discourse nor even a think community; it is tribal politics. And it’s not good for any of us. (19)

*Policymakers too often create barriers to appropriate change.*

McCluskey argues that the federal government should stay out of education because it is too far removed from the people and because politicians act only in their own self-interests. Though such a statement might imply that he favors involvement of state government, he further comments that politicians at the state level will also act in their own self-interests. His essay is useful in reviewing the increasing federal involvement in education. But it is short on possible alternatives and long on controversy.

Case studies in Chapters Three and Four provide powerful illustrations of numerous challenges identified in this work, made more difficult by the actions of policymakers. As the editors point out in their commentary, two themes emerge in the Louisiana case study (Chapter Three): (1) the responsibility of teacher educators
to the state’s K-12 schools and (2) the uncertainty of “the role that teacher education should play between the university and the school” (44). Often deans are caught in the middle, not only between the schools and the university, but between state policy and university teacher educators.

Teacher educators will relate positively to the authors’ conclusions in Chapter Four regarding the Florida case. The expanding divide between state officials and university teacher educators might be bridged through a series of conversations among politicians, educators, and constituents. Teacher educators resent being considered solely responsible for the lack of student performance. They plead for a process based on fair evidence. Teacher educators are willing to use value-added and performance-based assessment measures, but they need for policymakers to understand the difficulty in making such changes quickly. Teacher educators need the understanding and support of policymakers in a series of conversations about how to improve both schooling and educator preparation.

The professionalization of teaching continues to be an important and controversial issue. The creation of state professional teacher standards boards to provide for teacher quality is open to further study.

As described by Weisenbach in Chapter Six, an Indiana state professional standards board, which seemed to have the potential for improving teacher quality and promoting teaching as a profession, was discontinued due to changes in leadership. Whether such a board could achieve this potential is not known. However, such boards might make a significant difference in identifying the characteristics of quality teachers and quality teacher preparation and in finding the most effective ways for measuring this quality.

Immediate implementation of the policies is expected by policymakers who do not understand the difficulty of making rapid changes in a complex system.

Michelli and Earley (Chapter One) remind us of the national goals adopted by the nation’s governors and the nation’s president, stating that “with few exceptions, these policies assumed that the teacher preparation system would automatically and quickly change programs so all teachers would be able to respond immediately to each new federal mandate” (5), something very difficult to do. NCLB and Race to the Top are examples of this problem. Policymakers have failed to understand the
difficulties of rapid change for improving teacher quality and teacher preparation. Or they simply don’t care.

*Teacher education policies from federal and state levels have been shown to negatively impact both urban and rural settings, curtailing their renewal efforts.*

Van Dempsey and Deborah Shanley, experienced deans of education in a rural setting and a large urban setting respectively, share significant and often poignant accounts of their efforts to improve teacher education and schooling, explaining roadblocks created by federal policy. Shanley relates her efforts to improve teacher education quality in New York through Race to the Top funds and her discovery that the funds were given to not-for-profit agencies that used them in programs that circumvented the higher teacher standards Shanley had established earlier. Dempsey experienced similar frustration with federal policy as he fought an uphill battle regarding federal definitions of poverty that were working against the eligibility of impoverished schools in his state. These are stories that need to be read.

*A quality university-school partnership is critical in improving teacher education and schooling.*

“The Case of Montclair State University and its School-University Partnership,” described in Chapter Seven, is of particular importance in examining teacher and teacher education quality. Can a well-functioning university-school partnership make a difference? Ada Beth Cutler, Frank Alvarez, and Susan Taylor (a dean, a suburban superintendent, and a retired urban educator) make a strong case that it can and does.

The Montclair State University Public School Partnership is one of the oldest and strongest university-school partnerships in the nation, and much can be learned from its story. The authors take the reader through the Partnership’s beginnings, its affiliation with the National Network for Educational Renewal, and its undergirding philosophical foundations. The conclusion from the three authors is instructive. While noting that the partnership is viewed by visitors with awe due to its complexity, strength of human and financial resources, purpose, and outcomes, they discuss five lessons they have learned: (1) the value of “shared commitments,” (2) the importance of key leaders’ longevity, (3) the need for wise use of public policy and public and private funding, (4) ways for balancing common good with
self-interest of the partners, and (5) the critical nature of “dedication to high quality
teaching and learning” and such intangibles as trust. (149-151)

The case of Montclair State is critical to the discussion of improving teacher
education and teaching, both at the pre-service level and the in-service level. Of all
the discussions of improving teaching and teacher education, a quality university-
school partnership should be at the forefront. Montclair State is a shining example.

*Teaching for social justice is a moral imperative for schools and teacher education institutions.*

One of the primary purposes of this book is to help readers understand the
importance of social justice and the connection it has to quality teaching and
teacher education. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Kim Fries argue effectively for this
position in Chapter Nine, “Teacher Education Policy and Social Justice.” Consider
their questions (182):

What do we mean by justice? How do we think about teaching and
learning in a way that enhances justice? How do we conceptualize
and assess teacher education that prepares teachers to foster justice
and support them as they try to live out this commitment in school
settings?

The authors skillfully guide the reader to understand “a theory of justice,”
put that theory into practice, and develop “a theory of teacher education.” They
give three highly instructive contemporary examples of teacher education policy
and social justice. Of particular value is the illustration of the aspirations and
implementation involved in establishing social justice as a teacher education
outcome at Boston College—an example which is critical to understanding the
relationship between social justice and teacher education. The authors conclude,
Learning to teach for social justice is integral to the very idea of learning to teach,
and this teaching for social justice is not an outcome only for those prepared at
private universities, but a fundamental outcome of teacher preparation in general.
(200)

In Chapter Ten Michelli writes passionately of the need for teaching for social
justice. Long an advocate for this practice, he asks seven questions, not arguing for
less accountability, but for accountability for important ends that are not addressed
in the current climate. He argues for children to have full access to the knowledge they need to be healthy in the broadest sense of the word. Social justice must be a prominent goal for teaching and teacher education. Further, he maintains that a focus on “imagination,” “democratic behaviors,” and other elements of an “expanded view” of education in a democracy is desperately needed. (213)

The array of policies used to prompt changes in teacher education must be recognized and understood by teacher educators and policymakers.

David Imig identifies many policies that are being used to prompt changes in teacher education, policies which can “overwhelm” teacher education programs. These include: Support for multiple pathways to teaching, Commitment to evidence, Insistence on partnerships, Skepticism about teacher professionalism, Transformation of teaching (the impact of Teach for America), Engagement in the arts and sciences, Changes in professional development for teachers, and A focus on children. (216-218) Imig concludes,

The reality is that there will be more demands on the scarce resources available for teacher education and faculties, and deans will have to make even more strategic choices. Doing so in a time of intense competition and increased accountability makes the future most uncertain. (218)

His conclusions are primarily bleak but with a ray of hope, stating that there are many studies delineating the problems, but few with solutions; however the only ones that count are those “that [lead] to learning for all students.” (219)

Policymakers are unwilling to make decisions based on sound research.

Michelli makes a strong statement about this; Imig and Earley do as well. Policymakers think it takes too much time to do the research. They believe results can come quickly and doing the research first gets in the way. In addition, the evidence gained may not support the direction the policymakers are determined to take. Policymakers are too often interested in what they want or what a particular constituency wants rather than facts established by quality research.
The Agenda for Education in a Democracy

I conclude with a brief discussion of the relationship between the content of this book and the Agenda for Education in a Democracy (AED or Agenda). As developed by Dr. John Goodlad and his associates, the Agenda sets forth a primary strategy, a set of moral underpinnings most often labeled as its mission, along with 20 conditions or “postulates” (Goodlad et al., 2004; Goodlad, 1994). The strategy is the “simultaneous renewal of teacher education and schooling.” Both entities must renew together. Goodlad (1994, 1) has written that you can’t have good schools without good teachers. And you can’t have good teachers without good schools where teacher candidates have their clinical experience. The mission has four parts: enculturating the young in a social and political democracy (teaching the young how to make a living but also how to live with one another in our American form of democracy), providing access to knowledge for all children and youths, practicing pedagogical nurturing, and ensuring responsible stewardship of schools. (see Goodlad, 1994, 5)

The book clearly and strongly informs the Agenda. How does it do this? Consider Chapter Seven, the case of Montclair State. This is probably the best example of simultaneous renewal of both schools and teacher education, but this concept is a strand woven through most of the book. Concern for how teacher quality and teacher education quality are measured, one of the primary foci of the book, illustrates the concept of simultaneous renewal. It is not just about measuring the quality of teachers. It is not just about measuring the quality of teacher education programs. It is concern for both—simultaneous renewal.

Considering the four-part mission of the Agenda, Michelli, Cutler et al, and Cochran-Smith write persuasively about the need to promote democratic ideals, values, and actions in teachers and students. Zeichner does as well, saying that we need to continue to discuss and debate the need for a strong education system for the good of our democracy. Demsey and Shanley’s desire for even-handedness from policymakers has as its primary goal nurturing students and providing access to knowledge for all students. Access and nurture are threads woven consistently throughout the book. Stewardship is based on the notion that a teacher should be concerned not only with the students in her classroom, but with all the students in the grade level or department, in the school, and in the community in general. A quality teacher education program, appropriate standards to ensure quality
teaching, and fair and consistent education policy, are the kinds of things a steward of public education should be concerned with. The book has everything to do with ensuring responsible stewardship.

Even without a detailed examination of the postulates, it is easy to conclude that fair and consistent education policy is necessary for the health and vitality of good schools and teacher education institutions, and the essays contained in this book strongly support this notion.

This book significantly supports the Agenda for Education in a Democracy.

Final Comments

The commentary provided by the editors at the end of chapters two through nine is particularly helpful. In addition, the discussion questions at the end of each of these chapters have significant value to help with a reader’s reflection on the chapter. The commentary and discussion questions not only inform the learning of teacher educators, but can be used by teacher educators to assist their students in better understanding the importance of the issues. No doubt interesting and challenging discussions about the perspectives and controversies will ensue in the teacher education classrooms. Reading the chapters and reflecting on the commentary and discussion questions will strengthen the education of educators, both current teacher educators and their teacher candidates.

The strength of this book is its clear delineation of the problems with teacher education policy in the United States. Readers will also look for proposed solutions. That these are more difficult to come by may be seen as the book’s weakness. It is not. The barriers to improving teacher education are considerable but not insurmountable. This book will help teacher educators better understand and articulate the barriers, thus gaining the capacity to more effectively meet the challenge of improvement. It should be read by every teacher educator and policymaker.
References
