

20 December 2009

To: The Honorable Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education, Washington, DC

From: Frank B. Murray, President, The Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), Washington, DC

Topic: Some Additional Evidence about the State of US Teacher Education

You have recently brought welcome and timely attention to the role that teacher preparation programs play in supporting success for students in the nation's schools. And as you have pointed out, the accreditors of teacher preparation programs are laying the groundwork for better policies by ensuring that standards and reforms are based on solid empirical footings. What you may not have noticed is that this empirical turn in accreditation is beginning to yield some unexpected answers – including some happy ones – and I thought you would like to know what some of these answers are.

In 1997 the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), one of the two national accreditors in teacher education, designed a system of accreditation that requires faculty members to investigate and document what their graduates know and can do and then use that evidence to continuously improve and transform their programs. TEAC's pioneering system was recognized by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation in 2001 and subsequently by your predecessors in 2003 and 2005. Today TEAC has approximately 200 institutional members and to date has accredited over 100 teacher education programs across the country.

Our approach to accreditation recognizes that none of the currently available assessments in higher education is up to the task of assuring the graduates' competence. Thus, TEAC programs are free to use the measures upon which they truly rely, but because no single measure is adequate, programs must employ multiple measures, and because the validity of all measures is suspect, programs must also provide local evidence of the reliability and validity of the measures they employ. Within these constraints, programs accredited by TEAC are free to use any assessment that meets a scholarly standard for evidence and to present their case for accreditation in a research monograph of publishable quality.

Like you, TEAC expected initially to find evidence for the widely-held belief that teacher education programs are *cash cows* – high volume programs run on the cheap whose considerable profits are used to run the more costly programs that the institution really values. TEAC has found just the opposite so far in its sample of national programs – teacher education programs are more costly than

the norm owing to costs associated with the required clinical experiences throughout the programs.

The 100-plus programs TEAC has audited and accredited are a reasonable cross-section of the nation's programs, and in contrast to many critiques of teacher education, all had convincing evidence from multiple sources for their claims that their graduates were competent beginning teachers. The sources were typically limited to grades given by education and arts & sciences faculty members, state license test results, ratings of students' competence given by students themselves, alumni, cooperating teachers, employers, clinical faculty members, and faculty evaluations of portfolios and work samples (which include evidence that the pupils of student teachers learned the lesson). But, there were also many novel and tailored lines of evidence that various faculties brought forward. For example, in one case the institution's arts and sciences departments regularly used teacher education master's students as graduate teaching assistants in their A&S courses because the master's students knew their subjects well and received high course evaluations. In other cases, local superintendents were willing to hire the program's graduates sight unseen because of the program's track record of preparing excellent teachers.

TEAC's unique approach to accreditation has shed light on the quality of teacher education and some of our findings run counter to prevailing views. For example, the grades that teacher education students earn in courses in the arts and sciences disciplines are invariably equal or better than the grades the arts and sciences majors earn in the same courses. This finding holds for all kinds of institutions – flagship research universities and small liberal arts colleges.

A somewhat more troubling finding is that students' performance in the clinical portions of the program, the capstone of the program, is strikingly unrelated to the students' performance in every other part of the program. Ratings by clinical faculty, cooperating teachers, and student teachers themselves fortunately are highly correlated with each other, but oddly they are not related to license test results, grades in the teaching subject and in pedagogy (which are fortunately also highly related to each other). These findings also hold throughout the country.

The TEAC data show that the nation's prospective teachers are quite able in their teaching fields, or as able as majors in those same fields, and they show that there is another dimension to their competence, one seemingly independent of that captured by the typical academic assessments. This dimension is lawful, internally consistent, and supports the program's claims that its graduates can teach. This dimension also indicates, at least preliminarily, that schemes for recruiting new teachers solely on subject matter expertise and human decency are likely to be insufficient. These findings also show that in the typical teacher education program there is a gap between the academic and clinical components

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of the program so that apparently significant amounts of what teacher education students are required to study has little influence on their teaching.

Of course these findings require further inquiry as it may turn out that the lack of correlation is due to restricted variance, minimal overlap in clinical and academic assessments, or that academic accomplishment beyond a threshold value has diminishing influence on teaching.

TEAC independently surveys the program's students, faculty, and cooperating teachers about the adequacy of the students' own understanding of subject matter, pedagogy, teaching, and other aspects of the program. To date these survey results indicate that students, faculty, and cooperating teachers, in contrast to many current pronouncements, rate nearly all aspects of the programs in the *more than adequate to excellent* range. While the ratings are high (4.00+/5.00), there are still statistically significant differences among many survey items. Students, for example, see their own teaching skill as superior to their knowledge of their subject matters and pedagogy and relatively independent of their grades in the program and their ratings of the adequacy of the program faculty and courses. While they rate their professors and their courses highly, they seem to feel that their own expertise has much of its origins elsewhere.

Of some concern, at least at the outset of TEAC's work, was the lack of confidence many teacher education faculties had in bringing forth the evidence upon which they truly rely and in acknowledging the weaknesses that their inquiries uncovered, owing to the historical incentives in accreditation to hide weaknesses and magnify strengths. It took a while before our teacher education faculties turned the tools of their scholarship on their own programs, but the findings in their ensuing research monographs have potentially important implications for the design and rationale of teacher education programs. The point is that they provide support not only for multiple approaches to teacher education accreditation, but they indicate that most U.S. teacher education is healthier and more effective than many of its critics are currently claiming.

I would be happy to share with you the details of our work and findings and look forward to exploring how our accrediting accomplishments can assist the department in its own agenda for achieving the nation's educational goals.