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Teacher education reform as a story of possibility: lessons learned, lessons forgotten — the American Council on Education's Commission on Teacher Education (1939–1942)

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Abstract

The history of teacher education generally is reported as one of impossibility rather than possibility. This view is encouraged by lack of knowledge of past achievements. The little known but monumental project described in the eight volumes of the American Council on Education's Commission on Teacher Education (1939–1942) is reviewed in light of lessons learned about reform. Many of these lessons confirm the value of recent work in teacher education that maximizes participation, builds partnerships between schools and higher education, and forms student cohorts as a means for overcoming program fragmentation. Additional results are identified that deserve renewed consideration, results that emerged from projects that opened up possibilities for reform, including the value of child study as a form of professional development and as a means for educational renewal. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Teacher educators live in a lively present the demands of which enable gestures toward a hoped for future but generally not an embrace of the past. Politically vulnerable both inside and outside of the university, we react to our contexts even as we seek to better control them. Given the context, memory is short. Hunches, feelings, and commonsense most often seem to guide program development efforts. One result is that the story usually told of the history of teacher education reform is a sad tale of persistent themes and of little progress: status

deprivation, neurotic arts and science mimicry, and flight from the dirty work of schooling. Like teachers, teacher educators work within swirling cycles of policy maker reform talk, talk that is outside of and disconnected from practice (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Disappointment abounds; nothing ever seems to change. Yet it does.

A similar situation frequently obtains in schools. Lessons learned from improvement efforts of the past are seldom shared, especially when the effort was judged a failure, and when they are shared they often are embedded in stories of change that honor the unique features of an educational context but underplay the potential of principles and generalizations to sharpen understanding, orient action, and

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illuminate even the most diverse of educational settings. In response, a few teachers, not unlike many teacher educators, develop the kind of comfortable cynicism about reform of Horace Smith described in *Horace's Compromise* (Sizer, 1984).

A closer look at this history is required, however. What emerges is a remarkable difference between what counts as reform for policy makers and what counts as reform for practitioners, including teacher educators. The disappointment that flows from the grandiose visions of policy makers for massive, systemic, permanent and quick change blinds them (and those who write about reform from their perspective) to the modest kinds of successes that concern and please practitioners. Within the sad and so often told tale of educational reform reside other frequently overlooked stories, ones of possibility and hope rather than impossibility and despair.

It is with concern for the past and in the desire to locate stories of possibility in teacher education reform, that I turn to a discussion and analysis of one of the forgotten but extraordinarily provocative large scale reform efforts in teacher education, that sponsored by the Commission on Teacher Education of the American Council on Education (1939–1942). The eight volumes published by the Commission represent a remarkable repository of insights into educational practice and reform that lends support to much of the recent research on change, especially the growing and promising emphasis over the past decade on teacher development as the centerpiece of renewal (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Holmes Group, 1986). As Clifford and Guthrie state, “Eventually ... almost no matter how tortured the logic, one is led to the need to upgrade teachers and teaching” (1988, p. 37). In addition, the Commission reports raise oft neglected questions about the direction of reform and the means for encouraging it and grapple with issues that have long perplexed teacher educators. Remarkably, one sees in the reports the seeds of current partnership efforts that seek simultaneous renewal of the schools and of teacher education (Patterson, Michelli & Pacheco, 1999). But, more than anything, one sees examples of successful tinkering, changes that were highly valued by those who

produced them (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) even if they did not institutionally long endure. Indeed, endurance may not be the sine qua non of reform.

1. Background of the study

1.1. *Commission's point of view*

Recognizing the economic and educational crisis of the time, the Committee on Problems and Plans of the American Council on Education turned its attention to the education of teachers and in January, 1936, began an inquiry to determine whether or not to launch a national study of teacher education. In February, 1938 a report was issued entitled *Major Issues in Teacher Education* (American Council on Education, 1938). The report called for “more experimentation, demonstration, and evaluation, on the basis of hypotheses in which there is reason to have confidence because of previous careful study ... The new task confronting teacher education is, in part, the breaking down of the control of tradition and outworn practices and, in part, the building up of new concepts of education and a creative approach to the problems of teaching” (quoted in Commission on Teacher Education, 1944, p. ix). With support of the General Education Board,¹ the Commission on Teacher Education was established with 16 members representing all parts of the country and diverse educational interests. The Board chose to support the American Council's proposed work in teacher education rather than that of the Progressive Education Association, which was a source of disappointment for PEA leadership (Graham, 1967, p. 92). The Commission included many of the most — or soon to be most — influential leaders in American education: Ralph Tyler, Harold Benjamin, E. S. Evenden, W. Carson Ryan and George F. Zook, among others.

¹The General Education Board was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and funded, among other projects, much of the work of the Eight-Year Study of the Progressive Education Association.

During its first year of operation the Commission created a five-year plan which was announced in February, 1939.

The program was built upon the principles laid down in *Major Issues* and reflected the growing faith, in educational circles, in the virtues of decentralized studies involving widespread participation of a cooperative nature. (Commission on Teacher Education, 1944, p. x)

The point of view of the Commission was grounded in two concerns: “(1) Ways in which higher institutions and school systems could work on their own to improve their own situations through shared planning and experimenting; and (2) how to make the results of this experimenting available to other institutions and school systems” (Ryan, 1944, p. 11). An experimental attitude and a commitment to democratic practices — “respect for personality, acceptance of social responsibility, and reliance upon reason” (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, p. 10) — underpinned all of the Commission’s work and gave it a unique flavor and direction:

[The Commission] emphasized the idea that improvement in teacher education is always possible, requiring continuous planning, continuous experimentation, and continuous evaluation. It suggested the very great importance of the processes employed in group endeavor — of sensitivity to human relations, of the selection of ways of working together that are democratic in character and effective in result.

In consequence of [the Commission’s] point of view the groups associated with [it] were encouraged to play their part in certain ways. They were asked to make participation as widespread as possible, to pay particular attention to the cooperative process, and to plan together in long-range terms. At the same time they were pressed to focus attention on problems felt to be given special importance by the situations in which they currently found themselves. (Commission on Teacher Education, 1944, pp. xii–xiii)

Underpinning the work of the Commission was a profound belief in the importance and value of teachers and the dignity of teaching:

In all civilized communities the task of teaching is chiefly entrusted to a company of experts. In the United States that company numbers approximately 1,000,000; and some 285,000 young men and women are preparing to enter the profession. It makes a difference who and what these teachers are. Social well-being and social advance depend in marked measure on their excellence. But who these teachers are, and what they are, turns directly upon the effectiveness of the arrangements that we make for their education. To improve teacher education is to improve teaching; to improve teaching is to improve the schools; to improve the schools is to strengthen the next generation; to strengthen the next generation is a social duty of the first magnitude. (Commission on Teacher Education, 1944, p. 24)

Accordingly, “Teacher education never ends” (p. 164).

1.2. *Organization of the study*

Beginning with a two-week planning conference at Bennington College attended by over one hundred future participants in the study in August of 1939, a series of conferences was organized to which representatives from teachers colleges and universities, state departments of education, and a sample of school systems were invited to discuss teacher education and its problems and to begin the hard work of improvement. The cooperative study itself lasted three years, and ultimately involved seven state teachers colleges, seven liberal arts colleges, a technical college, seven universities, two Negro colleges, three of the five largest city school systems in the United States, four systems in medium sized cities (more than 100,000 but less than 1,000,000 residents), twelve small school systems, six county or other non-urban systems, and one private school. In total 23 states were represented. Participation was voluntary, and no system or institution was accepted into the study without assurances of a serious commitment to the improvement of teacher education and full participation, which included willingness to provide an institutional coordinator for the study. On its part, the Commission “undertook to provide central and

field staff to facilitate the efforts of the local institution or school system, [and] to work as consultants with the coordinators and committees in the various cooperating units. From time to time the Commission brought the coordinators, other institutional representatives, and members of the central and field staff together in working conferences to consider the progress made and discuss further steps” (Ryan, 1944, p. 11). Working conferences were common. A clearinghouse service was created to enable the systematic exchange of information about the study and a widely circulated monthly newsletter was established to provide a means for regular communication. A diverse range of other publications was supported. A center for child study was established at the University of Chicago where institutional representatives could come and study research on child development and work for six months or a year. Some funding was made available for travel so that institutional representatives might gather or visit other institutions to share developing insights and materials. A workshop service was created and a variety of workshop activities supported, including several workshops conducted by school systems for teachers. The range of these activities was broad, and grew in part because of a transfer by the Progressive Education Association of resources and funds for the support of workshops once the Eight-year Study² was completed. Approximately 30 summer workshops lasting five or six weeks were supported, with a total attendance that ran into the thousands. Generally workshop agendas were set locally with support of the workshop service. Finally, once the cooperative

study was underway the Commission supported a series of statewide studies in Georgia, Michigan, New York, and smaller-scale activities in Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio, and West Virginia.

2. Getting started

At the Bennington Conference five sets of problems were identified that represented the central concerns of the institutional representatives in attendance. These included the still persistent problems of pre-service teacher education: How colleges and universities might develop programs that would help teachers make “subject matter functional”, have a “good attitude toward teaching”, facilitate “child guidance”, and be able to deal with the “practical problems that actual teaching brings.” Concern was expressed for the “planning and conduct of student teaching ... and the problem of improving the coordination of the activities of educationists and subject-matter professors as these related to teacher education” (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, pp. 31–32). Two problems received special attention, ones that remain perplexing today and are central to virtually all current discussions of teacher education reform: The Commission’s aim was “the development of an integrated program of school–college relationships calculated to promote mutual understanding and mutual aid, and the general improvement of methods of encouraging and facilitating the continuous growth of all educational workers in service” (p. 32). Then as now, it was widely believed that school/university relationships badly needed improvement. Arguably, it is in reference to these two issues that most progress has been made toward reform (Osguthorpe, Harris, Harris & Black, 1995).

Upon their return about a third of the institutional representatives presented the results of the Bennington Conference as a kind of blueprint for beginning reform. This was not the Commission’s intention, however: “There is a tendency in the public schools, as in other human undertakings, to have relatively too much confidence in blueprints and pronouncements rather than in widespread

² The Eight-Year Study grew out of the Progressive Education Association’s interest in extending progressive principles to secondary education. The initial concern was to overcome the problem of college entrance requirements, which were seen as a major impediment to curriculum reform. The commission on the Relation of School and College was formed under the direction of Wilford M. Aikin, then Director of the John Burroughs school and later Professor of Education at Ohio State University, to address this issue. Work quickly expanded to include a range of projects related to reform, including the study of human relations and adolescence. For background on the study see Wilford Aikin (1942). *The story of the eight-year study*. New York: Harper Brothers, Inc.

study among the people to be affected by the contemplated action” (Prall & Cushman, 1944, p. 199). What the Commission members hoped was that the wide-ranging discussion of problems at Bennington would “throw light of a general character on the tasks lying ahead both for the Commission and for the associated centers” (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, p. 33). The results for this third were disappointing: “This did not work out very successfully. The mortality rate of groups so organized was relatively high” (Prall & Cushman, 1944, p. 12). Most representatives, however, did as was hoped: “their first job upon returning home would be to engage their colleagues there in planning what should be set about locally” (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, p. 34). The expectation was that each institution would establish its own reform agenda based upon “earnest self-study” (p. 51), and that the Commission would support local efforts and seek to coordinate them and to disseminate the results widely.

The committee urged that the basic considerations in the development of each program should be the needs of the persons to be educated and those whom they were or later would be teaching, and the perpetuation of the values essential to democracy. Procedures should be such that all participants could be simultaneously teachers and learners, leaders and followers; and continuous institutional self-improvement, rather than either instant or ultimate fixed perfection, should be the goal. (p. 34)

Local responsibility, group participation, reliance on experimentation and on rational discourse, and careful attention to the life situations and concerns of those to be educated, teachers and students, were the watchwords.

3. Local problems

In this section a few of the specific projects undertaken by the participating institutions are described. In recognition that perhaps most teacher education problems are persistent and enduring, those chosen for discussion are of particular significance to our time.

3.1. Subject matter preparation

Then as now, relatively little of a pre-service student’s time was actually spent in courses taught within schools or departments of education. The relationship between schools of education and faculty within the arts and sciences was strained.

... the undergraduate and graduate faculties of arts and science, each with their own centers of attention, were, if not actually unfriendly to teacher education as they saw it, at least likely to feel little responsibility to do more than offer prospective teachers instruction that could seldom be said to have been planned with professional needs much in mind. (Commission on Teacher Education, 1944, p. 61)

Such divisiveness stood in the way of fundamental reform, which the Commission sought: “the Commission preferred to concentrate on promoting the integrated attack of whole institutions on their entire programs” (Armstrong, Hollis & Davis, 1944, p. 3).

At the University of Texas this issue burned, but was only part of a larger concern with the quality and focus of academic majors which often had little relationship to the content taught in secondary schools. Beginning teachers were ill-prepared to teach their subject areas, and graduates of other competing institutions, particularly teachers colleges, increasingly were preferred in hiring decisions by school administrators. Concern grew and the School of Education began to respond but with limited success. A solution required involvement of the School of Arts and Sciences. The cooperative study provided an opportunity to attack this problem in new ways.

The president of the university and deans of the two schools formed a planning committee for the cooperative study. After consulting with the faculty, a decision was made to organize working committees to address the subject area needs of secondary teachers in the natural and social sciences. Later English, foreign languages and mathematics committees were formed with a similar charge. The deans sat on all five committees which were composed of subject-matter specialists and included a professor of education.

The committee on natural sciences illustrates what was accomplished. The committee spent nearly a year becoming familiar with the conditions in the high schools. Enrollment trends, changes in responsibilities of schools, recent developments in instruction, and the challenge of adapting instruction to diverse student populations each demanded and received attention. The committee discovered that nearly half of all teachers taught in small high schools and were responsible for other subject areas, sometimes as many as four of them in addition to science. Courses of study in the high schools were evaluated, as were textbooks. Visits were made to school science departments to discuss the concerns of teachers. With the Commission's support, an all-day conference was organized so that the committee could interact with science teachers, supervisors and administrators. The conclusion reached was that the course work offered to prospective teachers at the University was of relatively little value to a majority of high school students and that the program of instruction within the disciplines needed overhauling.

At this point the committee turned to the Commission for assistance, and two consultants were provided to assist in program revision. A proposal for curricular revision was completed during the second year, and emphasized a "greater range and less concentration in the subject-matter requirements than was characteristic of the prevailing pattern of majors and minors" (Armstrong, et al., 1944, p. 113). Graduates would be acquainted with five sciences, fuller knowledge of two, and extensive work in one. Further plans were made for a faculty position that would include responsibility for "bringing university and high school people closer together so that they might come to agree on the essentials of a permanent program for the education of science teachers" (p. 117). Perhaps the most remarkable outcome, however, was a change in attitude toward the problems of secondary education: "for the first time in twenty-five years ... the College of Arts and Sciences," the dean reported, "has been confronted with the problems of the secondary schools" (p. 117). Moreover, the dean stated, "the two university schools that joined forces in the project ... are irretrievably bound together from now on in the professional problem

of training teachers for the public high schools" (p. 118).

The project illustrates the principles of reform embraced by the Commission: focus on local problems; maximized participation and interaction among interested parties; data gathering and self-study; Commission support for local plans; and forward-looking planning. The Commission anticipated Goodlad's advice to the profession: "In the early stages of redesigning settings or creating new ones, it is not wise to go forth seeking models elsewhere" (1994, p. 100).

This particular project was but part of a larger reform effort, consistent with the Commission's desire to attack problems broadly. The larger project included an extensive study of teacher problems and the design and controlled testing of an experimental curriculum in the school of education that included in the junior year a semester of study of the public school as a social institution followed by a second semester studying adolescence. Student teaching followed the senior year and emphasized integration of theory with practice, a theme common to many of the projects. Focusing on student concerns about beginning teaching, students helped plan the curriculum with the faculty and much of the instruction involved small committees studying, under faculty guidance, the problems identified by the students. Evaluation was continuous, and the results of a two-year trial promising. Revisions of the standard program followed, which included a focus on themes for each year as a way of strengthening program continuity, an issue that will be addressed shortly.

3.2. *General education*

Analyzing the results of the many projects carried out in the participating colleges and universities, Armstrong and his colleagues recognized failure as well as success. They expressed particular disappointment over efforts to revise general education, concluding that changes in this area are perhaps more difficult to achieve than in any other: "Some very worthwhile achievements are to be reported. But there was after the three-year period far less to show for all this effort, in terms of faculty agreement and actual experiment, than turned out

to be true of any other subject chosen for study in the Commission's experience" (Armstrong et al., 1944, p. 61). This remains a serious issue in part because of genuine and deeply held differences over the nature and content of general education make agreement on aims difficult and often produce disappointment (see Troyer & Pace, 1944, pp. 130–131). Nevertheless, perhaps there is no more important issue facing teacher education reform today.

When reviewing accomplishments in this area Armstrong and his colleagues identified a principle of reform worth stating, and offered a warning: "the Commission's experience seems to indicate that *where* you begin is not nearly as important as *that* you begin. This is not to say, of course, that careful study and preliminary thought can be omitted. On the contrary ..." (Armstrong et al., 1944, p. 94). They warned of twin dangers, of trying to take on too large a problem at the outset, like agreeing on the aims of general education, and of forming too many committees as a result of "unnaturally" subdividing issues into "specialized fragments" which inhibit communication and creativity (p. 94). Both dangers were apparent in the work reviewed on general education reform.

General education related to a wide range of issues addressed by study participants, such as the subject area concerns explored at the University of Texas. Armstrong and his colleagues recognized the serious need for teachers who were broadly and deeply educated, but they seem to suggest that the best way to address this need and issue then was by attacking more manageable issues first or by creating "natural" divisions for study. The first strategy appeared necessary as a basis for building the needed understanding and trust that would enable fruitful discussion. Moreover, they recognized that the complexity of the problems related to general education necessitated more time than was allowed by Commission funding, so perhaps disappointment might have been expected. This limiting condition was one that needed addressing up front, since it influenced decisions about which of the many serious issues could be tackled and in what order.

Faculty resistance to change grounded in narrow disciplinary specialization and turf protection

proved to be sources of difficulty especially for those who had relatively limited exposure to the study and its purposes. "General conservatism and indifference or even hostility to teacher education played their roles, as did departmental loyalties and unreadiness to agree on reduction of requirements in one's own field. Faith in the virtues of emphatic specialization was an influential element in several situations, as was the related conviction that any needed leeway in the existing pattern could be far more wisely obtained by sacrifices made by the other fellow" (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, p. 87). Comments like this one echo across the decades (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Goodlad, 1990).

Evaluation of one of the projects produced a set of generalizations of importance to educational reform, and to overcoming faculty resistance: (1) "... faculty developed most interest and gained the clearest insight regarding ways of improving the program when they were taking part in the evaluation" (Troyer & Pace, 1944, p. 117); (2) "the activities that were most meaningful to the college were the ones that called for the most participation by the faculty;" and (3) "the data that were most meaningful were the ones that were expressed in the least technical terms" (p. 116). These principles may yet prove valuable when tackling reform, general education reform in particular, which is more insistent than ever.

3.3. *Focus on children*

School faculties studied a wide range of issues: local communities, curricular and instructional problems, articulation of levels of schooling, school-community relations, teacher-pupil relations, the broad social scene, among others. But perhaps the most far reaching accomplishments came from the focus on children and child development which represented about one-third of the activity of the affiliated school systems (Prall & Cushman, 1944, p. 147). This focus, undoubtedly stimulated by work within the Progressive Education Association, is an impressive feature of the study that stands in stark contrast to current reform efforts dominated by the quest for subject area curriculum standards and competency testing. One wonders where, in the current debates, is concern

for children and the lives of children. In contrast, such concerns were central to the Commission's work with schools.

The challenge was to "understand" children. The Commission had a clearly articulated view: "our definition of understanding a child includes contrasting subjective and objective elements. On the one hand, it calls for the subjective acceptance and valuing of individual boys and girls — emotionally and philosophically rooted and serving to reassure and afford security to all children, even when they misbehave. On the other hand, it also implies objectivity in the use of sound procedures and knowledge to interpret the causes of a child's acts, to appraise his adjustment problems and personal needs, and to work out practical ways of helping him master his developmental tasks" (Staff of the Division on Child Development and Teacher Personnel, 1945, p. 12). The Commission argued that there were six characteristics of teachers who understand children: (1) They "think of their behavior as being caused"; (2) "accept all children emotionally, that they reject no child as hopeless or unworthy"; (3) "invariably recognize that each [child] is unique"; (4) "believe ... that the various sciences concerned with human growth and behavior have demonstrated that young people, during the several phases of their development, face a series of common 'developmental tasks'; (5) "know the more important scientific facts that describe and explain the forces that regulate human growth, development, motivation, learning, and behavior"; and (6) "habitually [use] scientific methods in making judgments about any particular boy or girl" (Staff of the Division on Child Development and Teacher Personnel, 1945, pp. 8–11). While the language used to present their views may strike an odd chord, the point made is a significant one: That teachers need to be experts in child development, and that knowledge of children should inform virtually every professional act.

To this end, and supported by Commission and the child study center staff, teachers throughout the nation undertook careful observational studies of children in their classrooms, typically one "normal" and one difficult child. First the teachers were taught how to make rich and detailed observations, to gather data void of quick and easy judgments,

and then to develop means for understanding this data in ways and in the light of a careful study of the research literature on child development that would facilitate instructional and curricular decision making. Implicitly the Commission supported an expanded role for teachers, one that recognized that the lives of children were changing, becoming more complicated and less secure especially in the face of growing tensions in Europe that eventually led to war, and that they needed the help of thoughtful adults as they matured. Conversely, they supported an expanded role for professors, one that led to intimate involvement with school problems and with teachers in supportive and surprisingly equitable relationships, a role reminiscent of recent calls of the Holmes Group (1995).

Through workshops, through the guidance of teachers who with the support of the Commission studied at the child study center, and especially through teacher-led study groups, teachers were helped by Commission representatives to break "the habit of making snap judgments about children's actions on the basis of personal preoccupations; [to establish] the habit of noticing exactly what a child does; and [to learn] to record clear descriptions of what the child did and of the situation in which he acted" (p. 21). The aim was to understand behavior situationally, in relationship to biography and personality. In the teacher study groups that cut across school faculties, teacher-generated data were shared, cases discussed in "conference", research disseminated for later study, and eventually hypotheses formed for testing in practice and discussion.

A particular teacher presented information about a child whom she was studying intensively. Then other teachers who had taught him in earlier grades or who knew something about him and his family, through work with his brothers and sisters or otherwise, contributed additional facts. General discussion of the child by all teachers present then took place. The aim was to sharpen everyone's skill in organizing and interpreting data to the point where a reasonably valid analysis of the subject's motives, aspirations, and needs could be made. At the close of the discussion, or after the meeting, each member

of the group often wrote answers to questions like the following: What meaning do you now see in the child's present behavior? What further information would you like to have about this child before reaching any real decision about him? (pp. 131–132)

Although time consuming, participation in the group meetings as a form of in-service teacher education had a profound effect on teachers beyond the formation of strong professional relationships. They learned from one another, and came to respect differences in understanding and to use those differences as sources of insight; they internalized strategies for thinking about children and for using the results of research to test and validate hunches and to temper the tendency to rush to judgment, to succumb to “middle-class folk prejudice”; they gained a deep appreciation of the deleterious influence of poverty on child development and of the place of prior life experience in shaping current classroom performance; they increased their ability to “see ... through the child's own eyes” (p. 424); they became less likely to offer unsupported judgments about children (Perkins, 1950, p. 554) and they came to welcome the assistance of other teachers in determining the most promising ways of helping the child (Staff of the Division on Child Development and Teacher Personnel, 1945, pp. 133–135). Preceding a time when special education became an industry that frequently reduces children to labels that make it unnecessary to attend carefully to the child beneath the label, the work of the Commission encouraged thoughtful and focused attention on individual children even as it stimulated creation of generalizations, but generalizations tempered by the experience of having systematically studied individual children for a year or more. The danger of labeling was explicitly recognized by the Commission: “When teachers are given a list of patterns of behavior to be checked in studying a child, they tend to look for and at these patterns as separate, independent items of information. As a result they do not gather the necessary facts in constellations related to each other nor describe the child's behavior against its situational context ... Checklists ... permit a teacher to fail to notice unlisted important things that are right

under his nose” (p. 415). In short, they do not see the child. Further, the teachers confronted bias, especially of “valuing of middle-class children above lower-class children [that] made them too quick to reject and blame children from lower-class homes” (p. 378). And, they came to “a more equitable recognition of the children's own standards and customs” (p. 378).

The impact of child study on children in some instances was profound, and not only because their relationships with teachers deepened and improved. The child study program resulted in some school faculty's rejecting long-established patterns of tracking, what then was called “grade-level accomplishment” (p. 385). New opportunities for education were opened that formerly had been closed to certain children. Punishment, particularly driven by the desire for retribution, became less frequent (p. 387). Adjustments were made in classroom procedure and in the curriculum to better facilitate a child's development (p. 389). Above all these outcomes, there was one nearly unanimous conclusion: Classroom teachers, principals, and supervisors nearly “all reported either that they themselves were happier in their work because they understood the children better, or they reported that the children were visibly happier in their classrooms than they had been before the study began” (p. 390). These results followed simply because of a program to systematically study children and share the results of the study.

The principles that guided the Commission were followed in the child study programs with one exception: the center was established before the study was fully underway. It was organized, however, based upon the understanding of Commission members about then current and widely recognized problems. Choosing to study at the center and to use its resources, including consultants, however, was a strictly local decision. The importance of workshops and the center as training grounds for local leadership in child study and as a source of materials, information, and support cannot be underestimated, but participation was entirely voluntary, as was all of the work sponsored by the Commission. Indeed, this is one of the basic principles guiding the study and one judged fundamental to its success by participants. Commission

members did not believe that change could be forced and be successful. Nor did the Commission believe that successful programs could be carefully laid out in advance, a conclusion reaffirmed at study's end: "On the whole the more elaborate, systematic, and 'logical' approaches [to improvement] proved less rewarding than those that simply enabled many teachers to get to work on specific jobs where study could fairly promptly lead to action respecting the educational program. [Furthermore, efforts] to begin by formulating an educational philosophy for the system or by deciding just what kind of school should be worked toward tended to bog down in verbal dispute, at least when concrete implications were not carefully developed" (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, p. 127). Successful planning was evolutionary, and ends not fully predictable. Indeed, the Commission concluded that "Anything that looks like an effort toward standardization imposed from without, like an encroachment upon basic institutional freedom, will provoke resistance and delay, hence become self-defeating" (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, p. 203). Similarly, clarity in aims was a product of teachers struggling to make sense of and to improve their practice. An understanding of the last two points might have prevented a good deal of grief and disappointment for would-be reformers who put their faith in systems, as one well-intentioned reform program after another has been carried into the schools often only to flounder.

Through its work with the schools the Commission confronted a particularly complex problem given its commitment to democratic methods of change, one that is of current significance: balancing "centralization" and "decentralization." In the words of the Commission: "The desire to manifest faith in individuals and small groups, to provide them with the greatest possible opportunity to exercise their own judgments and to take responsibility for consequent action, required guarding against tight controls at the center. But such a policy was seen to involve the risk that developments at various points within the system might be inconsistent, if not conflicting. This would inevitably lead to a swing back toward stricter controls. Such an outcome could be avoided, it was thought, only by

emphasizing common concerns and developing instrumentalities representative of the entire system that would so operate to preserve and promote what was essential to the maintenance of the right kind of unity" (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, p. 135). The Commission role, in effect, was to make certain that all participants kept talking and that opportunities to participate remained open.

3.4. *In-service teacher education*

Child study was but one of the many forms of in-service teacher education that the Commission supported. The program developed by the Des Moines school system was especially ambitious and risky.

The effort to identify important problems in need of study was begun in a general meeting of all the teachers of the school system. After a brief presentation of the cooperative study and its possibilities, the teachers met in small groups for free discussion. The comments and suggestions that were made in these meetings were recorded and became the basis for a more detailed inquiry. A subcommittee of the planning committee constructed from these statements a list of forty-two specific items. These were presented to the teachers for individual ratings as to timeliness and importance. (Prall & Cushman, 1944, pp. 78–79)

Six problem clusters identified as most "acute" were initially accepted for study and action including home-school relations, understanding children, and teacher welfare. Over time the focus of the various study groups, and the attitudes of teachers toward the topics changed, as one might expect. A conference was organized prior to the beginning of the school year of 1940 to further expand teacher involvement in the study. Beginning in the fall of 1940, faculty began meeting Thursday evenings, and eventually every other Thursday. Sessions ran from 4:15 to 6:00, and from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. with a dinner and social hour intervening. The project quickly caught on and during the first year on average more than a third of the total school staff attended each meeting. A workshop, a six-week "problems laboratory", was conducted at Drake

University during the summer of 1941 which was attended by 124 teachers from the Des Moines schools, among other participants, who were organized into thirty-one study groups around “down-to-earth” individual purposes and objectives (p. 214). Opportunities were provided for teachers to engage in arts and crafts activities as part of the study and as a means for opening them to new experiences.

When evaluating the Des Moines project, Prall and Cushman saw much evidence of teacher growth, but had difficulty attributing it directly to the project. The project, they concluded, “as a whole was uneven” (Prall & Cushman, 1944, p. 90). The large scale of the Des Moines project was a source of persistent difficulty, and led to several seemingly inevitable problems: groups working at cross-purposes, for instance. Too little effort was made by the steering committee to coordinate group work and to facilitate communication, they concluded: “... the committee could have made plans for the interaction and mutual cross fertilization of these groups” (pp. 90–91). A source of serious difficulty was the initial decision made to allow only teachers on the steering committee which, given their heavy work load and the nature of their work, limited the scope and influence of the committee. Under this arrangement, it simply was not possible for steering committee members to be knowledgeable about what the various study groups were doing. Moreover, members were “keyed into building constituencies” which limited their vision (p. 91).

Despite the extensive time demands on teachers, remarkably there was little complaining. “Indeed, as teachers took over new responsibilities connected with the study, there were numerous instances of their disregard of time pressure. The load, as measured in working hours, was often heavy, but not much was said about it; satisfactions were more than compensating” (p. 92). Much of the satisfaction seems to have originated in the value of working with colleagues on issues that mattered personally. Recognizing this, the conclusion reached from the Des Moines and other projects, was that “teachers should have a major role in planning the program for in-service improvement”, otherwise it will likely fail (p. 92). Successful programs

“must begin with tasks which seem [to participants] as practical and immediate” (p. 93), and include periodic “appraisal of effort, reinterpretation of function and working method” by a central planning committee (p. 94). Aims changed; so sometimes did methods. Evaluators concluded that every effort needed to be made to assure effective communication among and across groups. For planning and coordinating groups the challenge was less a matter of taking action than of facilitating the desired action of others (p. 96).

Standing back and reviewing the results of the various in-service programs supported by the Commission, and recognizing successes and failures, it was concluded that “a thoroughgoing attempt to broaden the basis of ... participation by classroom teachers [in reform] must ultimately lead to the elimination of traditional conceptions of school organization” which prevent success (p. 100). The problem was, then as now, a deep one of significance to both pre-service and in-service teacher education: “The ablest young people cannot be recruited to teaching — or if they are persuaded to prepare for the profession, will not enter and remain in it — unless the conditions surrounding their work are satisfying.” Serious effort to address this only came in the 1980s. “Moreover,” the report went on to state unless teaching becomes more satisfying “teachers on the job will not be able or encouraged to make the most of their powers, or likely to behave in such fashion as steadily to increase their competence” (Commission on Teacher Education, 1946, p. 263). The tenets of democracy supported by the Commission which insisted on wide participation could not be fully realized under established patterns of schooling and the accepted definitions of the teacher’s role and work. The structure of schooling required reform. Increasingly it was recognized that the school, rather than an entire school system like Des Moines, was the appropriate unit of change (p. 107).

A word should be said about the value of workshops. There was concern that workshops would lose their value, as there was a tendency to plan them *for* rather than *with* teachers. Under Commission sponsorship, and following on experience gained in the Eight-year Study, workshops were long, intense, and sharply focused on the concerns

of teachers. Their particular value was tied to two “closely related purposes — preparation for change and security while breaking with tradition.” A warning was given: “If they are not used properly for such purposes, the time will soon come when they may not be used at all” (p. 240). One expectation of the Commission that was generally realized was that workshops would provide a means for bringing colleges and schools into closer relationship.

3.5. *Problems of discontinuity*

Prior to the organization of the Commission and to the present era complaints have been frequent about lack of continuity in programs of teacher education. Beyond the difficulty of blending arts and science courses with education courses are fractures separating the schools from colleges of education and within teacher education itself where methods courses, foundations courses, and work in the field often lack coordination and common focus.

The common response then to problems of integration was to state that it was within student experience that integration took place (see Hopkins, 1937). While true, this response proved less than satisfactory to many participants in the study, including faculty at The Ohio State University. One feature of many projects that sought to address lack of continuity “was movement away from numerous short, specialized and distinct courses” (Stiles, 1947, p. 142), a curse that continues today. Such a move was part of the program developed by faculty in the College of Education at Ohio State but only part. In addition the entire program was reorganized around “laboratory experiences” as a means for developing “experimental attitudes.” Laboratory experiences were “designed to give the student opportunity to deal at firsthand with reality, to enjoy the adventure of discovery, and to assume responsibility for his own activity ...” (Klein, 1941, pp. 4–5). “The term *experimental attitude* is ... used to mean the ingrained tendency to employ the method of intelligence in attacking a problem; that is, to assemble pertinent data, to formulate a tentative conclusion or hypothesis on the basis of the evidence, to test the hypothesis by further

experimentation, and to revise the hypothesis in the light of new findings” (Klein, p. 6). The aim, then, was to encourage habits of reflection. These themes were strengthened by being grounded in a conception of democracy as an educational means and aim consistent with the Commission’s viewpoint, which is not surprising since Ohio State housed the Eight-year Study, and the Commission built on the work of that study.

What made the Ohio State program unique was the focus on the kind and quality of relationships teacher education students were to have with one another and with faculty. Continuity would follow not only from program focus, but from continuity of relationships, a belief undergirding the spread of cohorts in teacher education over the past decade. Special attention was given to the first stages of professional education, beginning with an orientation course largely devoted to educational planning. The focus in modern parlance was on self-exploration in community contexts: “What are my goals? What do I need to be and do if I am to attain these goals? Which of the qualities necessary for attaining my purpose do I now have? How may I proceed from where I am to where I want to go?” (Klein, p. 67). To assist students to answer these questions, they were organized into “conference sections” that met throughout the entire year with College faculty advisors who received special training for this work and who received a large amount of information on each student prior to the beginning of and throughout the school year. In addition they participated in one of two large “lecture-laboratory sections” twice weekly. An assistant dean coordinated the program.

The conference sections varied greatly. Student planning committees were formed that worked with the advisor to determine program activities: field trips to schools and social agencies, community study projects which deepened during the sophomore year (Klein, p. 104), and the like, each preceded and followed by discussion. Social functions were held to build and strengthen relationships. Students from previous years met with enrolled students to help them in their planning and to give advice. A good deal of diagnostic testing was done to help the student, with assistance of the faculty advisor, to think about and plan for the

future more productively. A student council was organized from among conference members to disseminate information, to link the groups, and to give feedback to faculty on the program: “As the [faculty] Executive Committee plans for [the future], every proposal is laid before the Council” (Klein, p. 84).

Evaluation of the program was ongoing, intense, and sharply focused. Revision was data driven. Results were promising, indicating that the program provided the beginnings of what Lortie (1975) would later label a “shared ordeal,” a lively sense of belonging to a professional group and of suffering together for a worthy cause. Consistent with Commission and Ohio State faculty commitments, a large portion of the success came because of efforts made to involve students throughout in planning and evaluating the curriculum over which they came to have a large measure of ownership, and the emphasis on individual and group study of problems of genuine concern.

4. Conclusion

The principles that grounded the work of the Commission on Teacher Education originated in a particular, and shared, conception of democracy. These principles, although taken for granted initially, were tested and proven: “[The Commission] emerges from its experience with its basic convictions corrected in detail and further clarified, yet fundamentally confirmed” (Commission on Teacher Education, 1944, p. 262). Evidence generated from the study supports the value of these principles as a basis for the reform of education generally and of teacher education specifically. They proved themselves then, and they have value now. Consider the following Commission conclusions: (A) Successful reform efforts were organized around genuine local problems. The standards that proved effective for identifying such problems were relatively straightforward: “(1) The problem or situation to be met should have more than temporary importance; it should be one that is likely to have long-time educational significance. (2) The problem or situation should have a local orbit as well as existence upon a regional or

national basis. It should be capable of much local illumination” (Prall & Cushman, 1944, p. 481). (B) Successful reform efforts maximized participation of stake-holders, and approached problem solution from positions of respect and equality. The spirit of equality was evident in many of the projects, especially in the workshops, where university and school faculty worked side-by-side and often shared planning responsibilities. It was evident in other ways as well. For instance, in work undertaken at Ohio State literally hundreds of teachers were intimately involved in creating an instrument to enable better quality feedback on teaching. The instrument and the follow-up interview was designed to be “used *with* [not on] teachers and student teachers” (Troyer & Pace, 1944, p. 187). (C) Successful efforts had built into them ongoing evaluation, and the results of evaluation were widely discussed. Moreover, the most powerful evaluation programs, those that most encouraged improvement, involved data gathering by those potentially most influenced by the outcomes. (D) Self and small group study were not only effective forms of in-service teacher education but also practical means for school improvement. (E) Although there were better and worse points of departure evident in the studies — some problems or issues were too large for small group study or too small—the important point was to begin. Projects evolved in response not only to changing social conditions, but also to changes in teacher skill and understanding; flexibility proved to be an important feature of the more successful programs. Thus, outcomes were unpredictable. Indeed, the most “logical” and most “elaborate” of plans often proved least rewarding to teachers. (F) Resistance to change originated in poor communication; conversely successful programs emphasized means for widely disseminating information even to those on the fringes of the study. Initial involvement often deepened over time. (G) A sharp focus on the study of children and the systematic sharing of the results of the studies had transformative power in part because it spoke directly and powerfully to the deepest commitments and most powerful motivations of the teachers. (H) Successful programs were dependent on teacher learning, but the teachers needed outside help to increase their knowledge and expertise

and to realize their leadership potential. This assistance took many forms and involved many different groups of people, including other teachers. (I) In the more successful programs, clarity of aims and of guiding philosophy generally came after the fact, after the program got underway and after the initial results of study groups began to be discussed and evaluated. Discussion clarified aims. (J) Effective programs demonstrated a balance, often a dynamic and shifting balance, between centralization and decentralization, between “bottom-up” (Prall & Cushman, 1944, p. 493) and top-down reform. (K) Successful programs engaged teachers and engendered commitment. (L) Ultimately, it was recognized that if reform was to be driven by the principle of maximal involvement, school structures needed changing. Structural change was most likely in higher education institutions, such as Ohio State, and least likely in the public schools; structural impediments to change proved to be a source of frustration. (M) Successful reform efforts in university-based teacher education programs supported the value of maximal participation of interested parties, including students, and required changes that enhanced the kind and quality of interactions students had with teachers, professors, and the communities within which they lived and worked.

These are some of the lessons learned by participants of the study, lessons obscured by the cold war politics of post-World War II America and the problems of building and staffing the nation's schools. The results were impressive, and the reforms powerful and apparently their educational value long-lasting for those who generated them. The results may not have met policy-maker standards for reform — and in this respect they might be dismissed as nothing more than a bit of additional content consistent with the story of impossibility — but they certainly met practitioner standards. Most of the results have been rediscovered recently, but not all. And in this respect the Commission's work illustrates the value of reconsidering the history of teacher education but from a vantage point outside the received and all too disappointing tradition of failed reform. As Commission representatives feared, the potential of workshops for inviting teacher change is probably

rarely realized in part because teachers generally have little involvement in agenda setting and the typical workshop is now of relatively short duration and narrow focus. As a form of in-service, and perhaps of pre-service teacher education, one suspects there is still great potential residing in the careful study of children and of the communities within which they live. Undoubtedly the current emphasis on teacher action research opens up rich possibilities for studies of this kind. Nevertheless, it is stunning to realize how little attention is given to child development and the lives of children in current reform debates and in teacher education despite the rising interest in constructivism. Moreover, surprisingly little attention is given to teacher learning and development, the essence of reform as the Commission understood it. The study presents compelling evidence that teachers can and will invest heavily in reform when the problems they confront are recognized as legitimate and the outcomes promised or hoped for will make a positive difference in the quality of the educational experience had by children and enhance teachers' learning. This remains true and is cause for optimism. However, the Commission reports also remind us that changed practice requires administrative and structural support, a point not well understood until the late 1980s. Finally, in an age enamored with marketplace metaphors, of fragmented publics caught in shrinking and increasingly walled spaces, and where all social institutions are suspect, the Commission reminds us that schools have a unique place in democracies and that democracy brings with it a point of view on reform that is both demanding and also forgiving.

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