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BOOK REVIEW

Inspiring Teaching: Preparing Teachers to Succeed in Mission-Driven Schools

Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Eran Tamir, and Karen Hammerness (Eds.)
Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press
256 pages; \$64.95 USD (hardcover), \$31.95 USD (paperback)
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Reviewed by Dan Reynolds, Vanderbilt University

The diversity of American schools, communities, and students demands a teacher preparation system capable of preparing future teachers for such diversity. In *Inspiring Teaching: Preparing Teachers to Succeed in Mission-Driven Schools*, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Eran Tamir, and Karen Hammerness present findings from the Choosing to Teach study, a comparative, longitudinal analysis of three non-traditional teacher preparation programs. The University of Chicago's Urban Teacher Education Program (UTEP), the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE), and Brandeis University's Day School Leadership Through Teaching (DeLeT) prepare post-baccalaureate students to teach in urban, Catholic, and Jewish schools, respectively. The book presents a comparative approach to these unique but similarly mission-driven programs and uses the lens of "context-specific teacher education" to investigate each of these programs' approaches. As a teacher educator and ACE graduate, I found the book a strong and necessary contribution to the teacher education literature about *how* such programs actually work.

The first three chapters detail each program. First, Kavita Kapadia Matsko and Karen Hammerness highlight UTEP's efforts to prepare its pre-service teachers for the challenges and intricacies of working in Chicago's public schools, Christian Dallavis and Anthony Holter outline the structure of the ACE's teacher formation for urban and rural Catholic schools across the US, and Sharon Feiman-Nemser explains how DeLeT equips its teachers to

integrate a professional vision of academic excellence with Jewish identity. These authors know their programs deeply, highlighting the book's and the study's strength in combining researchers from all three programs to produce interesting comparisons.

The work in the following five chapters showcases more of the study's strengths. Its innovative comparative approach, its longitudinal design following teachers in and after their time in-program, and its triangulation of many data sources are strong warrants for trustworthy findings. This is particularly true for Hammerness' chapter "Visions of Good Teaching," which uses teachers' interviews to show how the programs' broad values and visions filter down to the practices of their teachers, finding coherence between the programs' visions and their teachers'. Other chapters draw on interviews with principals who inducted these new teachers into their schools, interviews with the teachers during and after the program, and observations of teachers' classes after they left the program. The diverse data and strong qualitative presentation allow the passionate and, at times, frustrated voices of the teachers and principals themselves to advance the authors' arguments.

The book offers teacher educators different lenses on the programs' approaches. Bethamie Horowitz's chapter investigates why these teachers chose to teach in these particular programs, using the sociocultural lenses of identity and agency. Other chapters investigate how principals inducted these teachers into their schools, how post-program teachers took up their programs' teaching visions, and how the programs affected these teachers' career choices. Teacher educators will appreciate the different perspectives that illuminate the facets of these teachers' lives over the first few years of their practice.

The study's design choice to follow a sample of 10 teachers from each program has benefits and drawbacks. The focus on a small sample allows the authors to go in-depth and present rich interview data, revealing teachers' feelings, frustrations, and aspirations in a way that a quantitative study or a larger sample could not have. These interviews present the teachers in context, highlighting how the programs prepared them for the contextual challenges of their work. The authors repeatedly assert that "context has content", arguing that teachers must be positioned as learners of the cultures of their students, and revealing the nuances of how teachers navigated learning the content in the contexts of their schools as they prepared for teaching. To add a simple example, as an ACE teacher placed in Baton Rouge, it would be

useful to learn how to pronounce “Natchitoches” (It’s Nack-uh-tish) *before* attempting in class. I learned that the hard way.

However, the sampling does not offer an equally robust portrait of all three programs. The 30 teachers were suggested by program directors as exemplars, but a footnote explains that all 10 of the ACE teachers were from Los Angeles area. Though ACE serves across the country in dozens of dioceses, the authors claim generalizability to the ACE program as a whole and do not explain the reason for such sampling. The reader is left to wonder if the sample of 10 LA teachers within the 180-teacher nationwide ACE program is as robust as the sample of 10 teachers from the single-city programs with cohorts of 25 (UTEP) and 12 (DeLeT) elementary teachers.

Several contrasts between ACE and the other two programs are not fully explored in the book. For example, ACE teachers are immersed in their contexts as full-time teachers, participating in parent-teacher conferences, driving school buses, coaching sports, and directing plays, while the other programs’ teachers are interns and student teachers. Also unlike the other programs, ACE deliberately sends its teachers to new geographic contexts, inviting them to build new connections and avoid relying on personal networks. In addition, at the time of the study, UTEP and DeLeT prepared only elementary teachers, but ACE prepared both elementary and secondary teachers, in a range of disciplines from Theology to Latin to Calculus. Exploring these contrasts more fully might have sharpened the comparative insights of the study.

For Catholic educators, the book does richly illustrate how ACE’s vision of teaching as service and its mission of sustaining and strengthening Catholic schools pervades the program, its teachers, and their professional practice. Besides the discussion of ACE, the Catholic educator will be informed by the programmatic visions of UTEP and DeLeT. For example, Tamir and Hammerness’ chapter on exemplary teaching builds on the early chapters’ program descriptions to show how the programs’ values appear in their teachers’ daily practice even years later. Catholic educators may also be interested in the many ways UTEP’s graduates take up the program’s focus on social justice, discuss it articulately, and demonstrate it in their teaching. In addition, the authors carefully trace how DeLeT positions teachers as spiritual leaders in their classrooms and how the teachers consciously and explicitly integrate Jewish identity across their curriculum – which has obvious parallels to Catholic school teacher formation and practice.

In sum, the book informs teacher educators interested in exploring the contextual variables affecting early career teachers and expands the research base on teacher preparation in mission-driven schools. The study set out to answer the question “How do teacher education programs and school context interact with teachers’ backgrounds to shape their identities, practices, and career commitments?” (p. 5). The book’s nuanced and detailed answers to that question will help prepare teachers for the diverse schools of the future.

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