
Original Paper

Training Teachers to Become Future Educational Leaders: What are the Issues?

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Abstract

The current “state of the art” of teacher training is in flux and the demand for new teachers as well as new educational leaders is increasing. This paper examines some of the issues that teacher training programs have to take into consideration as they prepare pre-service teachers and student teachers for the profession.

Introduction

The current situation is dire. Teachers are retiring, leaving the field, some are changing positions- from teacher to guidance counselor to assistant principal and many are promoted or transferred to positions for which they have minimal if any experience or training. Such is the current “state of the art” of education. Teachers are retiring early, leaving the field, or some find themselves quickly promoted to positions that they may have had no training. Thus, teacher training programs have to not only prepare teachers to be effective on “day one” but also to fill the shoes of some other professionals in the structure with specific duties (technology, discipline, instructional design) for which they are minimally prepared.

A new “frame of reference” needs to be given to directors of teacher education programs and to those teachers who are in training and this frame of reference needs to include:

1) Flexibility for changing values, times, and the zeitgeist that they will encounter. Teachers have had to modify their teaching, their expectations, and indeed their roles due to COVID-19. Pre-service teachers (PSTs) need to be prepared for a shifting landscape five to ten years down the road. It is not enough to indicate that teachers will face changes – but those changes may be quite large.

2) The training of Pre-service teachers (PSTs) must consider uncertain times, such as the unexpected occurrence of COVID-19 and the changes it brought to the education sector.

Teachers had to adopt and exhibit a lot of flexibility in teaching students across the K-12 education spectrum. The challenges of the future, though hard to predict would require that teachers are trained with a wide-ranging variety of teaching approaches, to be competent in handling difficult and stressful situations like the COVID-19 pandemic (Lübke et al., 2021). The preparation and training of PSTs must inculcate skills of flexibility and adaptability to equip them to face the ever-changing education landscape. They must be willing to change plans, priorities, and ideas to help students thrive in multiple instructional formats be it in-person, synchronous and asynchronous online or hybrid.

3) Adaptability to future pedagogies- for example, online instruction, learning platforms, and most recently artificial intelligence and CHAT GPT- Most teachers who went through teacher education programs in the last ten years were not informed that there would be something that we now recognize as CHATGPT and Artificial Intelligence.

The teacher has traditionally been seen as the sole repository of knowledge to be conveyed to a class of “oblivious” students, but the internet age has dispelled this assertion. Now the teacher is tasked with facilitating learning, teaching critical thinking, and directing students to where they can get information relevant to their coursework. The rise of new technology and artificial intelligence (AI) has made it

clear that teachers are not the sole source of knowledge (Felix, 2020).

As teachers are being prepared to teach the current and next generation of students, they must be equipped to effectively deal with the changing sources of knowledge because of rapidly changing technology. Teacher education programs must train them to accept that technology will play a significant role in their teaching and must prepare them for the AI that is to come as they acquaint themselves with the AI-related changes that are already influencing teaching and learning. They must be trained on the positive aspects of these ever advancing technologies and how they can be used to enhance the learning experience of students e.g. ways that AI can make textbooks more understandable with content tailored to the unique learning preferences of each student (Felix, 2020). Pre-service teachers (PSTs) must also be trained on how to identify and assist students at risk with artificial intelligence systems that monitor how the students interact with course content.

It is also important that PSTs are not made to fear for their job security due to AI because the classical role of the teacher which includes the teaching of critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills are very much needed despite technological advancement (Qadir, 2022).

4) The community where the teacher and parental involvement or parental support or lack thereof must be addressed. These are issues that continually confront or plague principals and teachers across America. While we must recognize the diversity of families and respect their values and cultures, the education of children remains paramount in our society.

5) Action, initiative, and intervention strategies must be considered. Instructional leaders may need to be continually involved in learning the latest research-based strategies. Teachers need to have a “toolbox” of effective teaching strategies, homework assignments, communiques to parents and communication skills to utilize for consultative purposes. Teachers will have to attend conferences and conventions and be engaged in professional growth and development and principals will need to monitor this.

6) Future teachers will need to be acquainted with professional organizations for future support. If possible a network of mentors should be made available at least in the students' first year of full classroom management. Special Education teachers need to be made aware of the Council for Exceptional Children and the idea of a SIG- Special Interest Group. Professional organizations provide a wealth of experiences and networking opportunities for teachers and principals alike and should be seen as part of professional growth and development.

7) Curriculum- often seen as a negative or “dirty word” it, it is a construct that may remain with us into the future. We will continue to need curricular specialists and teachers who are not afraid to add/edit/embellish and modify the curriculum as the need arises.

The implementation of a curriculum undoubtedly requires the participation of teachers, however, if it is to be effectively and successfully implemented, teachers must be involved in the developmental process (Alsubaie, 2016). Curriculum development is a challenging process that requires the participation of all stakeholders who play a role in student education.

Paramount among these stakeholders are teachers, whose knowledge, experiences, and competencies will enhance the richness of a curriculum. When it comes to the practice of teaching, teachers are very well-informed and they are the main implementers of the curriculum in the classroom (Alsubaie, 2016). Curriculum specialists must support teachers with training and workshops to professionally develop them so that they can contribute effectively to the development of curriculum. The adoption of Standards like the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) means that teachers now have a lot of independence to design a curriculum that that converts the NGSS into a classroom experience that teaches students to think like scientists and engineers. This means teachers are not afraid to bring their problem statement skills, formative and summative assessment skills, and their implementation skills to bear on the curriculum design process (Huizinga et al., 2019).

8) Cultural awareness of different cultural, racial, ethnic., and generational values and challenges.

In classrooms across the United States, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is evident and this calls for

the adoption of a culturally responsive approach to teaching. Pre-service teachers must be trained to recognize the distinctiveness of the diverse backgrounds of students that make up their classrooms, schools, and communities because they bring a depth of knowledge that enhances the teaching and learning process (Molina, 2013). Teachers must be trained on how to develop “sociocultural consciousness,” to help them understand that race, ethnicity, and culture do influence the way their students think (Molina, 2013). The worldviews and values that students brought to the field of education are different from their parents' generation.

They approach education through a different set of lenses and energy levels, their beliefs, and values create a generation gap between themselves and the age group that their teachers fall into (Josephine & Jones, 2022). This requires a great deal of awareness, culturally and values-wise, to teach them effectively. Thus, there is a need to train PSTs to be aware of the generational gap between themselves and the students they will be teaching. PSTs need to be aware that students they will be encountering in the classroom tend to be confident, work smart instead of hard, and have an affinity for group work (Hart, 2017). Being aware of these characteristics means that PSTs will be in a position to leverage these strengths to enhance the learning experience of students because teachers can no longer continue to use the one-way knowledge transmission of teaching without alienating students in the classroom (Hart, 2017).

9) Mental health awareness is currently a pervasive concern, and teachers are instructional personnel and are not always sensitive to coping strategies, or suicidal ideation. Guidance Counselors are spread thin, and they have their own issues with which they are dealing.

10) Critical Thinking, critical evaluating, critical analysis of information, and higher-order thinking skills are all given short shrift currently, but these are important parts of the educational process.

Preparing teachers to meet the demands of 21st-century teaching and classroom leadership, requires the introduction of strategies that will help them develop critical thinking skills; which is as important as all the other objectives of teacher education. The acquisition of such skills will enhance their ability and know-how when it comes to examining issues related to the governance of education (Tawil & Locatelli, 2015). When teachers are well trained in the strategies of critical thinking they will not just have the tools to impart knowledge, but they will inspire higher order thinking skills in their students who will in turn develop analytical skills to decipher information they receive from multiple sources (Wang & Jia, 2023).

There is a critical need for problem-solvers and individuals who have good judgment, and wide-ranging analytical skills to lead educational organizations so that they can meet the needs of the current generation of students (Murawski, 2014). Most importantly, for PSTs to be the change agents that we want them to be, they must be equipped to teach students to reflect on values that promote humanity and eschew discrimination, divisiveness, and populism (Felix, 2020).

11) Ongoing quality professional development will become mandatory, long, and short-term follow-up of interventions will become increasingly important. All too often, professional growth and development is seen as a one-time event with little follow up. In order to ascertain the effectiveness of professional development as an intervention more data and follow up will be needed. In this day and age of Zoom and Microsoft Teams, this is facilitated by these approaches.

12) Supervision both by superiors and by peers may become much more of an integral part of teacher development. Teachers and principals will have to monitor paraprofessionals and be more involved with facilitative teams.

13) Teachers will each have to be prepared to cope with the issue of teacher turnover as they see their peers leave the field for other employment and or other positions. For some individuals, a peer leaving will leave a gaping hole in the heart of some individuals who have formed robust relationships.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper tried to give an overview of some of the issues facing the educational world. We are confronted with a lack of competent teachers and principals and over the next few decades teachers will have to consider enhancing their skills and become educational leaders and provide assistance for new

beginning teachers. The learning curve may be steep for some of these individuals and re-training and re-conceptualizing may be important things to consider.

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