Are Methods Enough? Situating English Education Programs within the Multiple Settings of Learning to Teach

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In this article, we try to extend the complex and provocative conver-sations that we held at the Conference on English Education Summit in Atlanta on the topic of "Roles of Methods Courses and Field Experiences in English Education." A compendium of our consensus belief statements and recommendations is available on the CEE Web site (see *What Do We Know and Believe about Methods Courses and Field Experiences in English Education?*, 2005). There we sketch out a set of proposals regarding English education programs, methods courses, and field experiences; offer lists of possible ways to implement each dimension of our recommendations; and reference a set of readings that influenced our thinking for each of these dimensions. We see this article in *English Education* as having a somewhat different purpose: to provide more of an argument on behalf of those proposals, one that we hope that readers can use both to reconsider their own English language arts teacher education programs and to make arguments to their administrators for resources to support any expanded efforts in preservice teacher education.

In the web-based document, we recognize that the beliefs and practices that we outline

> describe programs in English education that exist in more or less ideal settings. We understand that many dedicated English education professionals work in environments that do not provide the resources to incorporate all, or even most, of the ideas that follow. We offer an ideal depiction of an English education program because it provides a goal to strive

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> toward, and provides an argument that may enable under-funded programs to leverage additional resources that will enable them to expand the possibilities that they offer their teacher candidates. In no way do we wish to imply that the only high quality programs in English education are those that implement all of the recommendations that follow. Indeed, we have enormous respect and admiration for our colleagues whose universities provide little financial or material support, yet who labor above and beyond the call of duty to prepare the next generations of English language arts teachers. (*What Do We Know,* 2005, ¶3)

One fact that came out loud and clear during our discussions in Atlanta was that the work conditions and resources provided by different institutions vary tremendously. In particular, many institutions entrust whole English education programs to a single faculty member who must offer the best program possible under great duress. Such an exhausting assignment undoubtedly limits the degree to which this "one person show" may implement our recommendations.

Institutions also vary in the ways in which a teacher education program is embedded in the context of other obligations. Colleges and universities that offer master's and doctoral programs inevitably affect the availability of time for any single assignment; and if the master's programs offer certification in addition to an undergraduate program, each effort is no doubt compromised on behalf of the other. Institutions with a "publish or perish" culture make it difficult for faculty to take on a wholehearted dedication to teacher education programs, particularly when one's research interests fall outside teacher education. Faculty in Colleges of Education may face different performance expectations than do faculty in Departments of English and may have their work valued to different degrees. In other words, as faculty members at a variety of types of universities, we are well aware that our opportunities to offer programs of unrelenting excellence are compromised by a host of factors that vary from institution to institution.

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we hope may inform or stimulate further thinking, perhaps in opposition, on how to offer teacher candidates the richest possible preparation for their careers.

Programs

In Atlanta our first conversations centered on the nature of our task, which we understood to be to outline recommendations for methods courses and field experiences to prepare teacher candidates for careers as English educators. We realized quickly that these two dimensions are, ideally, closely related, not only to one another but to the additional components of the program as a whole. That is, we agreed that a program in English education ought to be—if we may engage in seemingly circular thinking—programmatic (see e.g., Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003). By this we mean that it should have the greatest degree of coherence possible in terms of relations across

- courses both within the program and with its complements in English, educational foundations, and other disciplines that contribute to students' required preparation;
- experiences and relationships with school-based mentors;
- organizations that connect students with broader institutions (e.g., NCTE);
- whatever other experiences comprise the university-sponsored educational experiences of preservice teachers.

This sort of program coherence is, by many accounts, difficult to achieve. Rather, many programs are characterized by what Zeichner and Gore (1990) call *structural fragmentation*—i.e., the absence of a sustained, consistent focus on a pedagogical approach or teaching philosophy. Many teacher education programs thus represent a "cafeteria style" approach to education that a number of commentators (e.g., Sizer 1992) find problematic in public schools: programs that offer an array of parts that rarely cohere into a whole through a sustained curricular effort. Applebee (1996) developed his notion of *curricular conversations*—those that enable participants to explore a domain across a variety of experiences through overlapping, interlocked talk that builds conceptual understandings—to describe an umbrella process for integrating secondary school curricula. This construct could also characterize a coherent teacher education program in which teacher candidates' experiences are deliberately structured to enable conversations about teaching and learning to be carried on so that their

consideration of praxis may be consciously and continually mediated by a range of related experiences.

Ideally, this extended, generative, synergistic set of conversations helps prospective teachers grasp and modify a conception of appropriate practice. The nature of this conception may vary from setting to setting, institution to institution, in all likelihood heavily influenced by the faculty members' preferences: social justice in one university, constructivist practice in another, inquiry-based learning here, authentic learning there. While this array of emphases might appear to be more or less synonymous or at least compatible on the surface, each is amenable to multiple constructions and so suggests the likelihood of particular readings, discussions, experiences, and other mediators to help teacher candidates understand and reflect on it (see, e.g., Phillips, 1995, for the problematic nature of a constructivist construct such as constructivism). Curricular conversations of the sort envisioned by Applebee (1996) might help to explore nuances across conceptions. Although some might argue that emphasizing any single conception may produce teacher candidates with pedagogical myopia, we see merit in Polya's view that

> in teaching as in several other things, it does not matter much what your philosophy is or is not. It matters more whether you have a philosophy or not. And it matters very much whether you try to live up to your philosophy or not. The only principles of teaching which I thoroughly dislike are those to which people pay only lip service. (quoted in Jackson, 1968, p. 113)

The most obvious area in which university faculty may promote curricular conversations about notions of teaching and learning is in the university-based course work. Yet the preservice teacher education program extends beyond the confines of the university and into the local community, most visibly and explicitly in the schools. While it may indeed be pleasant and uncomplicated to act as though the actual schools don't exist—and we have met many professional teacher educators who find great comfort insulating themselves from the off-campus world—the fact is that they do, and teacher education programs are charged with preparing students for life in these institutions. We needn't belabor the point that the ideals typically encouraged in teacher education courses—authenticity, engagement, justice, equity, inquiry, and so on—are often thwarted in the field

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by mandated testing, factoid-oriented curricula, skills-based instruction, cynical faculty, and other factors that comprise the context of field-based preservice experiences. And yet we soldier on, making the effort to inculcate ideals, even if far too much evidence from research on teacher education reveals that the values of the schools ultimately trump those of the university for most preservice teachers (Grossman, Thompson, & Valencia, 2001).

Given this common gulf between universities and schools, we believe that special efforts are necessary in order to form productive relationships with school-based educators who both become involved in teacher education and ultimately may become our graduates' colleagues. We have considered a variety of ways in which to establish relationships that improve articulation between universities and schools and increase the possibility that the transition between the two will be, if not seamless, at least less of a shock. We say this with the recognition that if the relationship becomes so well integrated that prospective teachers experience few disturbances in their initial conceptions of teaching, they may ultimately struggle if they accept a job in a school in which the values are radically different from those learned in the initial settings of learning to teach (see, e.g., Veenman, 1984, for a discussion of *praxisschock*).

This need to attend to the context of initial teaching experiences may be realized in a variety of ways, some of which may not be valued by all university-based faculty with whom prospective teachers take courses. A pet theory, for instance, may be undermined in the setting of the schools—a constructivist philosophy, for instance, is easier to extol on the university campus than within a curriculum that evaluates students through district-wide end-of-course exams that rely on shared, factual knowledge of the sort advocated by Hirsch (1987). University faculty are often much better at critiquing such curricula than they are at helping students to teach within them; and school-based teachers and administrators are likely to conclude that novice teachers who can critique but not teach the curriculum are not worth hiring or renewing. Attention to the contexts of schools—including policies, local histories, state standards, district curricula, testing mandates, and much else that is anathema to many university professors—helps to ground students' development of a conception of teaching in the settings in which their praxis occurs.

At the CEE Summit in Atlanta, we considered how to integrate the university-based teacher education program with the practices and policies of schools. One way is to create formal partnerships with schools along the lines of that described by Graham, Hudson-Ross, and McWhorter (1997), in

which a stable group of field-based mentor teachers works with the education faculty on the design of the program. Through such an effort a program may stay informed about the conditions of teaching, the policies that shape instruction, and other factors that student teachers must address in the field, without acquiescing entirely to these field-based restrictions. Further, the mentor teachers may feel empowered to be involved in the program design, rather than feeling disconnected as so often is the case in the bureaucratic placement and supervision of student teachers.

In addition to forming partnerships with local teachers, university faculty can encourage broader participation in professional communities. These might include NCTE and its state affiliates. A more energized faculty might sponsor an NCTE student affiliate organization or host a National Writing Project site, which serves as a professional development site for practicing teachers, promotes articulation between school and university faculty members, and serves as a recruitment tool for graduate programs. Teachers who become involved in such activities undoubtedly benefit from an active inquiry stance and an understanding of the importance of participation in the larger field of English teaching and other learning communities.

So far, so good: On paper, this sort of programmatic coherence and disciplinary conversation is working flawlessly. In practice, problems inevitably occur. We would like to illustrate the up and down sides of one vehicle for helping to promote the ideals we have outlined, that of having teacher candidates go through their various teacher education experiences in cohort groups. A cohort surely promotes curricular conversations because students go through both classes and field experiences as a stable group. They can develop a common knowledge base through their readings and a common discourse through their discussions. While each might develop a variation on a conception of teaching, it is likely that they will develop similar concerns orchestrated around a topic or theme, thus sharing at least the core beliefs embedded in a concept. Faculty will learn more about students' learning in the other sites of their class and field experiences because they inevitably become reference points during discussions. Cohort arrangements, then, have great potential for helping teacher candidates to realize the potential we see for structurally coherent teacher education programs.

We do not wish to valorize cohorts as unproblematic, even if some (e.g., Burnaford & Hobson, 1995) find them to be the optimal way to structure teacher education course work. Radencich et al. (1998) and Sapon-Shevin and Chandler-Olcott (2001) have found that different cohort groups can be quite uneven in performance, even when experiencing identical

curricula, field experiences, and other dimensions of a preservice education program. Different cohorts, for instance, have different degrees of comfort with discussions of race, class, and gender, especially when students with strong personalities or charismatic relationships with their classmates disrupt efforts to explore questions of educational equity. The whole question of a cohort's community-building potential may be contested within some groups of students. Conceptually, a cohort may become insular and, if a program stresses a single construct such as constructivism, runs the risk of inculcating students with dogmatic beliefs about teaching that may be contradicted by their experiences in the field. If we believe that orthodoxies are counterproductive to generative thinking and conceptual growth, then faculty who teach cohorts should make sure that whatever beliefs a program emphasizes do not become doctrinaire. Their challenge is to accomplish this feat while also avoiding a less discriminating menu of concepts from which to sample, an approach that inevitably provides a superficial exposure to various approaches without the benefit of rich engagement with any.

Thus far we have considered the broad, programmatic aspects of teacher education programs. We next look more closely at the two primary components of programs, the course work and the field experiences.

Course Work and Field Experiences

Richmond and Whyte (2004) state that "designing methods courses effectively requires teacher educators to make countless choices" and that such considerations when carried out in isolation "can be a daunting endeavor" (p. 327). In our next section we hope to ameliorate some of that isolation and provide further impetus for discussion of our methods and fieldwork. (See specifically, belief statements 5–16 in *What Do We Know,* 2005.) Although all lend themselves to further discussion and exploration, the following issues seem particularly pressing.

Political Climate

We begin by discussing the present political climate and the ongoing question of pedagogical course work's value. Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995) draw attention "to the ways in which education courses are often dismissed by many reformers as a waste of time. The belief among many is that prospective teachers should immerse themselves in the content of their discipline rather than wasting their time learning teaching methods" (p. 111).

With increased pressures to certify teachers through alternative routes (see Zancanella & Noll, 2004, for a discussion of the potential of NCLB to "reshape teacher preparation in dramatic ways" [p. 101]), especially in hard-to-staff areas of the country, the debate as to the importance of methods classes and other aspects of professional preparation seems more critical than ever.

McCracken (2004) discusses several pertinent issues that reflect the threats to teacher education as we know it. One of these is the government's increasing control over the kinds of research that will be "counted" when making decisions regarding educational reform. Another amounts to a "full-scare public relations campaign to undercut the credibility of the present work of teacher educators in the eyes of parents, students, publishers, and the business community" (p. 107). Pedagogical coursework and the kinds of research that the educational community conducts are often the prime targets of these attacks. McCracken quotes several prominent speakers, from Robert Slavin, Chair of the Success for All Foundation, to former Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, all criticizing the "ideological" research we conduct and calling for "the same rigorous standards of research as those applied in medicine" (Paige, as qtd. in McCracken, pp. 110-111).

An example of how this mandate can play out for educators can be seen in the influence of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Reading Panel on literacy approaches. Both conducted studies and issued "government-sponsored reports [that] clearly lay out what the scientific evidence says about teaching young people to read" (Stern, p. 2). Both reported that "systematic phonics instruction was the most effective approach" (Stern, p. 2), even though that claim distorted the findings from the limited range of research reviewed (Allington, 2002). Most teachers who have followed the "reading wars" have come to embrace the studies that show that a balanced approach, using a combination of phonics and Whole Language, has the most success. However, as Stern further notes, "Partly because of this accumulating evidence, Congress voted twice, . . . that federal reading funds must go only to school districts that use instructional approaches based on scientifically validated research" (Stern, p. 2). New York City, for example, stands to lose federal reading funds of nearly $40 million a year because it has chosen a program that has been criticized for not meeting this standard as assessed by "reading scientists and consultants connected with the federal Education Department" (Stern, p. 3). Clearly, the demand for "scientific" research has eroded educators' ability to make choices based on a wider reading of many kinds of studies, ones that also value teacher knowledge (see DiPardo et al., 2006).

Discussions of the social forces and ideologies that can drive and inform research in such fields as medicine, agriculture, and technology can serve to counteract the contention that such research is "objective" and purely "evidence based," or that colleges of education are "uniquely subject to the vagaries of ideology and belief" (p. 110; see Latour & Woolgar, 1986, for a critique of the presumably "scientific" findings in medicine that are often strongly affected by human subjectivity and cultural forces). Otherwise, comments in reference to administrators' choices of reading programs, such as "[S]cience must eventually win out over ideology, even in New York City, . . ." (Stern, p. 4) may go unchallenged.

Calls to Action

McCracken (2004) outlines some "calls to action" that we might do well to consider in our methods courses. She believes, "It is important to write and talk about political matters that influence the education community at times like this" not just among ourselves, but with our students (p. 112). We must explore and critique the rhetoric of NCLB as well as the common myths that permeate the national conversation about the "crisis" of public education. We encourage our professional community to pay more attention to what's being said about teaching, teachers, and schools of education and to educate ourselves, the public, and our preservice teachers about the facts that can counter the distortions and myths about the state of education in this country (see, for example, Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bracey, 1997).

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While analyzing and assessing the present educational reform movements, McCracken also calls on us not to "shrink from the government's demand for clear evidence of student learning" but to promote rigor in our students' teacher inquiry projects by including such standards as suggested by the principles for "Scientific Research in Education" (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). McCracken argues that "the demand for more studies that provide a comparative perspective might be helpful" (p. 113), but these studies must reflect the strongest models of teacher inquiry if we are to counter the Department of Education's "determination to publish only studies that exclude teacher knowledge"(McCracken, p. 114).

Investigating the Effects of Teacher Preparation

Grossman (1990) argues that professional preparation, in the form of methods courses and fieldwork experiences, account for significant differences in the ways that beginning teachers approach their classroom practice. Her study suggests that those who are prepared through these experiences are better equipped to teach a variety of students using a range of approaches. Furthermore, these teachers better anticipate the demands and limitations of the culture of schools and are less apt to become discouraged and disenchanted and leave the classroom. Further comparison studies are necessary, and the alternate route certification programs that many of us have seen proliferate in our cities and states offer a rich opportunity to do so. Our stance as a professional community has largely been to reject these programs and the premise they are built on, that "subject matter knowledge and classroom experience can suffice as teacher education" (p. 141). But our experiences are suggesting that we have important data to collect by being open to the significant questions these programs naturally raise.

In New York, for example, several alternative programs such as the New York City Teaching Fellows, Teach for America, and Teaching Opportunity Program Scholars offer fertile opportunities for following the early careers of a contrasting group of teachers. Teaching Fellows take their initial courses during the summer and begin teaching in the fall, placed in hard-to-staff schools. They are required to complete a Masters degree (paid for or subsidized by the City) within two to three years of their entering the program. Since these individuals are side-by-side with more traditionally prepared students in our graduate classrooms, they offer us the chance to learn about how both groups of new teachers are experiencing and approaching their work. Our exposure suggests that the Teaching Fellows reflect the very qualities that the public and the profession would want in teacher candidates. Many of us have found students who are strongly prepared in their content area, but who are also compassionate, creative, flexible, and open to the demands of teaching diverse populations of students. Many bring important skills learned in other professions. Why have they entered teaching through alternative programs? What is it about our traditional programs that hasn't previously attracted them? We would do well to interrogate the perceptions they have of the value of course work and fieldwork experiences. Their perceptions may be built on the "folk wisdom regarding the ineffectiveness of teacher education" (Grossman, p. ix). If so, perhaps we have not done enough to articulate for ourselves and the public what we know about the substance and usefulness of our own courses and programs.

Grossman (1990) and others (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Zeichner, 1988) have found that "we know very little about the content of methods courses or of professional coursework in general" (p. 13). English educators themselves may have limited knowledge of the range of approaches and philosophies that inform our methods syllabi beyond our informal conversations with our peers (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). In the three most recent years of the annual NCTE conference, the CEE sponsored Colloquium on the teaching of the methods classes has had record attendance, suggesting the desire for more dialogue within the profession about what and how and why methods matter. Collecting the data to articulate that beyond our own ranks (and with our English department colleagues, who also may have limited understanding of what teacher education programs do) is a vital next step.

Examining the Nature of Learning

We must also think carefully about what we know about the nature of learning as we conduct these studies. Bullough (1989), for example, in his case study of a first year teacher, found the effect of teacher preparation on the teacher he studied to be "modest" and seemingly "more irrelevant than inadequate." His research suggests that "with respect to planning, little seemed to have transferred from teacher education to her actual classroom practices" (p. 140). Yet, Bullough draws on other research to note the stages of development that new teachers go through, including an initial stage of "survival." Often first year teachers are the most vociferous in claiming that their methods classes and other aspects of professional preparation were not useful and that "they learned to teach by teaching." We must work harder at asking the questions that will help early career teachers interrogate more carefully the sources of their pedagogical knowledge as they proceed through their early years. Once the "survival stage" is over, teachers may have the opportunity to be more reflective, not only about what they remember, but about the ways in which knowledge, learned during teacher education, begins to make sense and be of value in the context of their new experiences in the classroom. Bateson (1994) reminds us of this nonlinear aspect of learning which she describes as "spiral" in nature. "Spiral learning moves through complexity with partial understanding, allowing for later returns. For some people, what is ambiguous and not imme-

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diately applicable is discarded, while for others, much that is unclear is vaguely retained, taken in with peripheral vision for possible later clarification." (p. 31).

In her interviews with beginning teachers, Featherstone (1992) found that teacher educators can function to prepare teachers to learn from experience and that teacher educators' "ideas may sometimes resurface as the answers to questions posed by classroom experience" (p. 18). Featherstone's research suggests that "the voices of teacher educators sometimes echo forward into these first years of teaching; the novice sometimes re-hears, with a new ear, propositions which have seemed to make little impact on them at the time they were offered" (pp. 17-18).

One informal research project we have conducted on the effects of a teaching of writing methods course supports this theory. Students studied over a period of five years after taking the course found that as they strengthened the discipline and management aspects of their classrooms and became more comfortable in their teaching environments, they found themselves revisiting their experiences with class work and texts (Dickson, 2001). One anonymous responder wrote, "I have so many good questions *now* for my old professors. Maybe methods courses should have a five year renewal clause." Another commented, "I found that I learned more from my classes the longer I had been out of school and the more time I had to reflect on my practices."

Again, Bateson's (1994) work has implications: "Increasingly, we will cease to focus on learning as preliminary and see it threaded through other layers of experience, offering one of life's great pleasures" (p. 10). Bateson's work urges us to investigate teachers at various stages of their careers to see how course work has been accessed and assessed and to be more thoughtful about the ways in which we frame our investigations. One example is UGA-NETS, a collaboration of teachers, professors and graduates who co-investigate issues of teaching and learning at many career stages. Their emphasis is on redefining teacher education as primarily concerned with the training of "*future* teachers" to one where the concern is the "support of all teachers" (Graham & Hudson-Ross, 2001, p. 127). Their collaboration posits teachers as life-long learners who are willing to disrupt the concept of "expert knowers" and become co-investigators with others over time.

Valuing Fieldwork

Our final section addresses the nature of fieldwork and some of the issues that might influence the ways in which we consider and reconsider their

value. Observations in schools and classrooms are a vital part of preparation and many states require substantial hours prior to clinical practice or student teaching (New York, for example, requires 100 hours of observation prior to student teaching), the nature of that observation has often not been looked at critically enough by our profession. As observations are often not directly supervised, professors may be inclined to have limited involvement in those experiences, sometimes requiring no more than a log of hours. However, we see the potential for field experiences to play a richer role. Although we state, for example, that "Reflective practice [should be] fostered throughout field experiences" (see Belief 15 in *What Do We Know*, 2005), much needs to be done to direct and support that reflection. Grossman (1990) found that "While prospective teachers can learn much from their field experiences, they do not seem to develop new conceptions of teaching their subject matter from classroom experience alone" (p. 143). In order to do that, "teacher candidates may require support in focusing their observation and initial interactions with students" (see Belief 14 in *What Do We Know*, 2005). Bullough (1989) argues that "more fieldwork may actually be miseducative unless it is carefully articulated with university or college work and brings the student into contact with the best educational practices" (p. 148-149). Similarly, Vinz (1996) argues, "Observing a classroom is not constructive in and of itself" (p. 240), and the NCTE *Guidelines for the Preparation of English Teachers of English Language Arts* (National Council of Teachers of English Standing Committee on Teacher Preparation and Certification, 2005) state that "field experiences for the sake of field experiences are not sufficient."

Teaching Purposeful Observation

Students, of course, have already spent at least twelve years in an "apprenticeship of observation" that may suggest to them that they have little further to learn by continued observation. However, as Lortie (1975) and others (e.g., Britzman, 1991) point out, uninterrogated observations may just serve to preserve the status quo and a limited view of teaching, one that does not encourage a more complex understanding of the goals and decisions that daily influence teachers' work. Fieldwork, therefore, cannot consist simply of assignments to observe and reflect, but must include structures to help preservice teachers engage in more purposeful observation. Several come to mind. Vinz (1996) uses present tense narratives called "critical teaching incidents" to promote discussion and reflection on the "multiple and contradictory ways that any incident might be interpreted in relationship

to the context in which it occurred" (p. 240), reinforcing our belief statement that "instruction that addresses the teaching of English language arts emphasizes that teaching and learning are social practices influenced by specific contexts" (Belief 6, *What Do We Know*, 2005). VanDeWeghe and Reid (2000) argue for "viewing the classroom as text," a disposition that "presupposes an active, meaningful model of reading, and it presupposes that the teacher sees the text much the way a teacher researcher would see data in her research project" (p. 131). Margolis (2002) encourages "genre reflections," creative descriptions of classroom events and relationships that "aim to develop new teachers' capacities to observe and responsively act" (p. 214). Margolis asks preservice teachers to represent their initial classroom experiences through multiple creative genres (e.g., memoirs, monologues, news accounts, poetry) that give "tangible credence" to the complexity of teaching.

Specific structures that encourage and support meaningful observation might be addressed at future CEE Colloquia and through other forums for discussion, such as our professional journals. But beyond the practical structures, we might also investigate more fully what it means to observe. Bateson (1994) again lends insight:

> In my work, I have always been able to start from listening and looking. . . . These are skills that spill over into all areas of life. I cannot know which observation will propose a theme that proves key to understanding. . . . It is common to gather data in fieldwork and continue to mine that data years later to illuminate questions still unposed when the original material was collected. (p. 11–12)

Helping our students to observe as an act of "listening and looking" without moving immediately to judgment can open fields of inquiry that can have the potential for continued learning. Structures such as the ones we have already mentioned can aid in this quest, as well as Berthoff's (1978) strategy of the double entry notebook, which helps separate observation from judgment.

Creating Exemplary Programs

We are arguing, then, for a two-fold approach: both to engage in more provocative research that can help us and our students articulate the ways our work has import, and to use that knowledge to help us continue to improve our programs. As Grossman (1990) says, "Teacher educators can counter the movement toward waiving and limiting pedagogical coursework not by arguing for the commonplace but by creating exemplary programs and

courses and investigating their effects on prospective teachers" (p. 147). The articulation of our beliefs, through the work of the participants at the CEE Leadership and Policy Summit as well as the NCTE Standing Committee currently revising the *Guidelines*, can serve as important support systems for improving and or revamping programs.

We recognize, once again, the ways in which continued dialogue can help encourage new thoughts and reflections. Given the current political climate, as well as the "hard financial times" that have seen the end, for example, of the annual spring CEE meeting, there is, as McCracken (2004) points out, "a growing need for English educators to meet together and to support one another in the difficult battles we all face" (p. 115). As each of us looks for insights into how to improve our own coursework and programs, we have much to gain by being part of a larger conversation that challenges our own notions of what is possible. "Insight," Bateson (1994) says, "refers to that depth of understanding that comes by setting experiences, yours and mine, familiar and exotic, new and old, side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another" (p. 14). We welcome the further conversations that our work in Atlanta may yet provoke.

Authors' Note

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