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Reforming Teacher Education

Something Old, Something New

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Schools of education and teacher preparation programs have been under attack for decades. On the one side, opponents of traditional teacher preparation programs and state certification requirements argue for reducing or doing away with those requirements, reducing the number of education courses, and increasing the number of alternative certification programs that can prepare students for teaching in a shorter period of time without overloading them with education courses. On the other side, proponents of teacher education programs call for greater professionalization of the teaching profession through a variety of means—by defining the knowledge and skills that teachers must possess to teach effectively, by using accreditation of teacher education programs to ensure that the programs are transmitting the necessary knowledge and skills, and by testing and certification to ensure that teachers do in fact have the knowledge and skills.

In summer 2001, Carnegie Corporation of New York (hereafter Carnegie) took on the challenge of reforming teacher education and launched an ambitious initiative called Teachers for a New Era (TNE), which is aimed at bringing about radical changes in the way that teachers are prepared for their profession. RAND and the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) followed and evaluated the initiative for a period of three years (October 2002 through September 2005). This monograph presents the results to date of that study.

The Teachers for a New Era Initiative

The ultimate goal of the TNE initiative is to improve kindergarten through twelfth grade (K–12) student outcomes by improving the quality of the teachers in K–12 schools. TNE seeks to do this by stimulating construction of excellent teacher education programs at selected colleges and universities; in turn, these programs would become exemplars for other institutions and would offer lessons learned about best practices, thus improving the quality of teacher graduates produced by a broad range of institutions of higher learning.

To assist institutions in this endeavor, Carnegie, joined by the Annenberg and Ford Foundations, awarded $5 million over a period of five years to each of several
selected colleges and universities. The first round of awards was announced in April 2002. The first four grantees were Bank Street College of Education in New York City; California State University, Northridge (CSUN); Michigan State University (MSU); and the University of Virginia (UVa). The second round of awards to an additional seven institutions was announced in summer 2003; those institutions are Boston College (BC), Florida A&M University (FAMU), Stanford University, the University of Connecticut (UConn), the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), the University of Washington (UW), and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). The grantees were chosen to be representative of the various types of institutions that prepare teachers—public and private institutions, large research universities, comprehensive education universities, stand-alone colleges of education, urban universities, institutions preparing large numbers of minority teachers, and small and large producers of teachers.

In 2002, the Rockefeller Foundation asked RAND and MDRC to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of TNE at the first four sites—Bank Street, CSUN, MSU, and UVa. In 2004, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, primarily because of its regional interest in institutions in the Northeast corridor, asked RAND and MDRC to include BC and UConn from the second cohort of grantees in the evaluation. In December 2005, the Ford Foundation asked RAND and MDRC to extend the evaluation to include two other sites—FAMU and UTEP—because these two institutions are large producers of minority teachers.

While the long-term objective of the evaluation is to provide evidence of whether the initiative has been “successful,” both from the individual institutions’ point of view and from that of the TNE funders, in the short-term, the evaluation seeks to examine the extent to which the grantees are implementing Carnegie’s TNE design principles and to understand the factors that foster or hinder implementation.

This monograph, which builds upon an earlier RAND report (Kirby et al., 2004) that examined first-year implementation in the first cohort of grantees, seeks to place the TNE initiative in the larger context of the current politics surrounding teacher education and other education reform efforts, to understand the evidence base underlying the principles that TNE espouses, and to provide an overview of the sites’ progress in implementing the three major TNE design principles:

- A teacher education program should be guided by a respect for evidence.
- Faculty in the arts and sciences disciplines must be fully engaged in the education of prospective teachers.
- Teaching should be recognized as an academically taught clinical-practice profession.
We also address the question of sustainability of TNE and its likely long-term legacy to the field of teacher education, although the findings are necessarily speculative, given that these questions can be addressed only in the long-term.

This monograph is based primarily on information collected during an annual site visit to the eight sites whose evaluations were funded by sponsors, and it draws from the sites’ annual reports, TNE renewal application materials, literature reviews, and Web site searches. At each site, we interviewed various faculty members and administrators working on TNE issues—university leaders, TNE leadership teams, arts and sciences faculty, teacher education faculty, and new faculty hired specifically under TNE, among others. Because we are simply tracking process implementation, we report on activities and initiatives under way at the sites as reported by TNE participants during our site visits.

The latest round of site visits was conducted from September 2005 through January 2006, although due to FAMU’s organizational changes and delays in getting funding, we were unable to conduct the first site visit at FAMU by the time of this writing. For the remaining three institutions whose evaluations were not funded (Stanford, UW, and UWM), we collected data from the site’s individual TNE Web sites and/or materials from the TNE project director at each site.

As of September 2005, the first cohort had been implementing TNE for three years, and the second cohort had been implementing TNE for two years.

**Theory of Change**

As Weiss (1972) explained, it is important to know not only what a program expects to achieve but also how and why it will achieve certain goals. We developed the logic model, or “theory of change,” used in this study in three stages: we (1) delineated the assumptions underlying TNE and examined their validity, (2) listed enabling factors that need to be aligned for the reform to be implemented, and (3) determined the potential outcomes that are likely to occur in the short term and long term, if the theory is well-implemented.

The TNE prospectus (Carnegie Corporation of New York, no date [n.d.]) outlines three broad design principles that the TNE funders believe characterize excellent teacher education programs and to which the selected institutions are expected to adhere:

1. A teacher education program should be guided by a respect for evidence. A culture of research, inquiry, and data analysis should permeate the program. Attention needs to be paid to pupil-learning gains accomplished under the tutelage of teachers who are graduates of the program.
2. Faculty in the disciplines of the arts and sciences must be fully engaged in the education of prospective teachers, especially in the areas of subject matter understanding and general and liberal education.

3. Teaching should be recognized as an academically taught clinical-practice profession. Adherence to this principle requires close cooperation between colleges of education and actual practicing schools, appointment of master teachers as clinical faculty in the college of education, and a two-year residency induction period for graduates of a teacher education program.

The guiding themes or design principles espoused by TNE are remarkably similar to those of several other reform efforts and teacher education accreditation organizations, suggesting a consensus in the field regarding the themes that should govern best practices in teacher education. However, while the principles themselves pass the test of logical reasonableness and draw from a variety of literature, the evidence supporting the principles is mixed at best. This does not necessarily negate the principles’ validity—we simply point out that evidence does not exist or seems to be weak with respect to the assumed effect of some of the elements of the theory of change underlying TNE, and this may have an impact on TNE’s desired outcomes.

TNE’s thesis is that adoption and implementation of these design principles will result in an “excellent” teacher education program, whose teacher graduates will be well trained, capable, and qualified. Teachers trained by institutions that are well aligned with the TNE principles will be “high-quality” teachers, whose quality is measured by the learning gains made by their pupils. However, TNE is a complex initiative that requires institutional and cultural changes for it to succeed. It is designed to introduce fundamental changes to two institutions (universities and schools) and requires them to work collaboratively. Earlier reform efforts, most notably the work of the Holmes Group (1986, 1990, and 1995), have shown that these interorganizational collaborations are challenging to maintain. These efforts (and education reform efforts more generally) have highlighted the importance of several factors in implementation of teacher education reform—university-wide commitment; strong, stable leadership and depth of leadership; high-quality and committed faculty; high-quality students; strong partnerships with K–12 schools; and supportive policy environments. The policy environment—which is largely exogenous to the reform—is particularly important because, although TNE is looking for out-of-the-box thinking, these institutions still have to comply with state rules and regulations governing teacher licensure and certification.

TNE1 builds on lessons learned from previous reform efforts in several ways. First, it recognizes that a complex program of reform requires both substantial funding and external technical assistance, and TNE provides both. Second, to ensure that the

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1 References to “TNE” in this report are to both the initiative itself and the TNE funders. The architect of TNE, the design of which is discussed in depth in subsequent chapters, is Carnegie Corporation of New York.
participating sites are best positioned to undertake such a reform, TNE selected institutions that were considered among the best in their “class” of institution and placed the grant in the provost’s office rather than in a school of education. Third, support for TNE efforts is being fostered by informational sessions to educate policymakers about the initiative and engage them in it.

A national evaluation of a program of this magnitude and complexity faces several challenges, chief among them that the outcomes of interest—e.g., effectiveness of teachers as measured by students’ learning gains and teacher retention—are not likely to be seen or measured until several years after the initiative ends. In the short run, we are limited to tracking implementation and some of the in-program outcomes.

“Value-Added” of TNE

Overall, the TNE design principles fit well with the culture and mind-set of the TNE sites, partly because the sites were chosen for their pre-TNE alignment with these principles, and because many of these institutions have tried to implement various versions of these principles as members of other reform networks. This section covers the value added by TNE through the three major design principles.

Decisions Driven by Evidence

All the TNE sites reported that participating in TNE has led to a growing respect for evidence-based decisionmaking across the institution.

First, TNE has brought about a new emphasis on collecting reliable, valid, and multiple measures of teacher education program effectiveness in schools of education, including pupil-learning gains made under the tutelage of program graduates, and using such evidence for program improvement. However, the sites are also aware of the complexity of using standardized test scores to provide valid evidence of the value added by the teacher education program. Many sites struggle to obtain data linking K–12 pupils to their teachers due to limitations in state and district data systems and privacy regulations. Even in cases in which such data are available, it is unclear how these data could and should be used to inform teacher education program improvement due to problems of attribution—i.e., being able to link teacher-related effects to particular elements of a program. Further, some TNE sites simply have small sample sizes that would not allow them to make inferences with any degree of confidence.

Second, TNE has resulted in a cultural shift across these institutions, with a new emphasis on evidence and assessment permeating many departments, not just the teacher education program.

Third, TNE has forced a new realization of the need to develop and implement integrated data systems capable of housing linked data elements, tracking student
progress over time, and being updated and expanded on a regular basis as new data are collected or new data-collection efforts are undertaken.

**Engagement of Arts and Sciences Faculty**

TNE funds have enabled new and increased participation in teacher education by those in the arts and sciences. While participation of arts and sciences faculty is strongest in departments with historical ties to teacher education, the sites report an overall deepening of these relationships and new participation from other arts and sciences departments. Faculty members participating in TNE noted that working together on a common project has led education and arts and sciences faculty to have a greater understanding of each other’s motivations and goals, greater respect for one another, and recognition by arts and sciences faculty that many of their students are future teachers. Many education faculty members, after an initial period of resistance, are increasingly seeking out arts and sciences colleagues for collaboration and to discuss issues concerning teacher candidates’ content knowledge.

TNE has made arts and sciences faculty more aware of how they can contribute to the preparation of future teachers and, at some sites, has involved them in teacher education program planning and evaluation, joint development of teaching and knowledge standards, joint advising, team-teaching, study groups, and developing courses or sections aimed at future teachers. This is not to suggest that many of these activities were not occurring pre-TNE but simply that the sites report a more systematic cross-discipline involvement in teacher education and a greater recognition of the need for collaboration in this effort across departments.

Some sites have hired new arts and sciences faculty with ties to teacher education. These faculty members are placed within their disciplinary departments but, by contract, are required to spend some amount of time working on teacher education issues or acting as liaisons between their department and the teacher education program. Some of these faculty members are on joint appointments.

Junior faculty working on TNE expressed the concern that, given the responsibilities of TNE, they may not have sufficient time to meet their requirements for scholarship and publishing and, as such, may be disadvantaged when it comes time for promotion and tenure decisions. When these issues are raised, the TNE leadership teams have had several responses: They provide ample assurances that research and publications on education issues will count toward promotion and tenure; they point to the new and exciting possibilities for joint research that exist in schools (“a natural lab”); or they simply acknowledge that junior arts and sciences faculty need to be less involved in TNE and will have those individuals work for only short periods of time on TNE activities or will have senior faculty involved in the TNE work instead. The sites will need to continue working on this issue to ensure that TNE faculty are fully accepted by their peers and are successful in their positions.
Teaching as an Academically Taught Clinical-Practice Profession

Involvement of K–12 Faculty. While all the TNE sites recognize the importance of developing strong relationships with K–12 schools, and some are attempting to develop professional development schools at some clinical sites (classrooms in which student teaching and education research is done), the TNE sites have not been uniformly successful in implementing this principle to the degree that the TNE creators envisaged. Developing clinical sites is useful in the sense that those sites provide model laboratories to distill best practices and enhance conversations among partners in teacher education, but scaling up clinical sites is time-consuming and expensive.

Most of the sites have some K–12 representatives on their TNE teams, selected in consultation with leaders of the schools, but the degree to which K–12 faculty are involved varies considerably by site and across TNE teams. In terms of hiring teachers in residence, some sites have been successful, while others have not, for a variety of reasons largely having to do with problems in hiring away experienced teachers from secure and relatively well-paid positions, reluctance on the part of school districts to release teachers for temporary university assignments, university-district pay differentials, and lack of clarity about the roles and expectations of teachers in residence.

Induction. The induction component of TNE (a two-year “residency” period for graduates of teacher education programs, during which teacher graduates would be provided with various supports during the crucible years of teaching) was hailed as one of the most innovative of the TNE elements, but it has proven to be the most difficult to implement in practice. Because the induction concept was new to many of the sites, they initially struggled to define their role in this effort and to find induction activities that they could actually implement and sustain. Some TNE sites have moved ahead with developing Web sites to provide a variety of online induction help, developing stronger relationships with the school districts, setting up small model induction programs in cooperating districts, and institutionalizing induction by creating master’s degree programs linked to induction. Other sites reported that they do not believe they have enough staff to provide such support and continue to struggle with this piece of the design. Almost all the sites agree that involving arts and sciences faculty in direct induction activities—or indeed, in supervision of student teaching—is a real challenge.

In addition, the state and school district policy environment has been a barrier to implementing university-based induction programs. The sites are seriously concerned about whether there is or will be a demand for university-based support and whether new teachers will be willing to pay for such programs, because these factors will determine the sites’ ability to sustain such programs in the long run. This concern arises for several reasons. First, most states and some districts have mandated induction programs for beginning teachers, many of which are provided to teachers free of charge. Second, in some instances, programs or courses designed by the sites have not been endorsed by the state and, therefore, do not count toward continuing education or for
permanent licensure. Third, the sites are finding that new teachers are overwhelmed with the realities of the classroom and their state or district induction requirements, and, as such, feel that they are unable to participate in additional activities. Fourth, sites are also finding it difficult to track their graduates; state-maintained teacher databases may offer the best means of tracking graduates, but getting access to those databases can be difficult.

Those sites that have been successful in offering or piloting induction programs have collaborated with and sought to fulfill the needs of the local districts.

**Thinking About Sustainability**

When asked about sustainability of TNE, the sites reported that many of the changes occurring at the sites are likely to become institutionalized over time. First, apart from TNE, a confluence of other factors, such as accreditation requirements and the new demand from policymakers, parents, and students for accountability for teacher education, is forcing all institutions to build comprehensive databases on teacher education students, collect evidence of student learning, and track students to gather outcome data farther “downstream” from a student’s graduation date to prove effectiveness of teacher education. However, it is important to note that a wide chasm exists between collecting and analyzing data and actually using the data for program improvement. Organizations often emphasize the collection of data to convey “an illusory sense of rationality,” in which the purportedly rational and deliberate activity to collect data masks the fact that they fail to actually use these data to make decisions.

Second, part of this new push to collect and evaluate evidence will require arts and sciences faculty to become involved in ensuring that students get a good undergraduate liberal education. Thus, the discussions and partnerships between education and arts and sciences faculty—particularly faculty in those departments that historically have had ties to teacher education—are likely to deepen and to continue. As new TNE arts and sciences faculty with an interest in or ties to teacher education become more accepted and more numerous, they will help to sustain a culture of involvement in teacher education by those in the arts and sciences.

Third, if the TNE induction programs can work with the states and school districts to provide or to extend the induction offerings in ways that the state is willing to endorse and that the states and districts can financially support, the induction programs and support systems for graduates that are being designed now are likely to endure.
Likely Legacy of TNE

TNE has taken an ambitious and well-funded approach to what has been called an intractable problem—the reform of teacher education. Ultimately, TNE will be judged by its long-term impact on the field of teacher education, and, more importantly, by its impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the nation’s schools. Thus, to evaluate TNE’s legacy, we need to examine what has been or will be the likely impact on the quality and retention of new teacher graduates being produced by these institutions, how that impact will translate into improvements in pupil learning, and how these new and improved methods of preparing teachers will be disseminated across the nation.

Thus far, the actual changes in the teacher education programs at the TNE sites appear to be small and incremental. This is not surprising, given that these institutions were selected because they were among the best in their “class” of institutions. However, the process by which these incremental changes to a program will result in highly qualified, competent teachers who will be markedly “better” than the graduates before them is not well defined.

Under the TNE design, the grantees would become exemplars for other institutions, which would learn from the grantees and seek to emulate their TNE programs in part or in whole and thus extend the reach of TNE and its impact on the field of teacher education. But these anticipated outcomes are based on several assumptions that may not hold. First, the evidence regarding the effect of the changes adopted or proposed by the sites on the quality of teacher graduates will accumulate only over a very long period of time and will require substantial effort to assemble. Second, earlier reform efforts have shown that institutions are slow to emulate others, even when faced with evidence of successful changes. Third, a key premise of TNE is that it takes substantial amounts of money to reform a teacher education program. Thus, how are the peer institutions expected to successfully transform themselves, absent this level of funding? Even with the funding, the changes seen so far in the teacher education programs at TNE sites are small, piecemeal, and incremental. Fourth, it is not clear that TNE constitutes a coherent reform program that can simply be ported to peer institutions for adoption. Fifth, the question of attribution is a tricky one. Even if one observed non-TNE institutions adopting principles that seem to resemble those of TNE, how can such a change be attributed to TNE? After all, several reform efforts and accreditation bodies share the same principles, particularly the emphasis on the “culture of evidence.” From the point of view of correctly identifying the legacy of TNE, this question remains the thorniest one of all.

Like every reform effort, TNE has several goals. Given that among its goals are changing institutional culture, bringing new awareness of the role that all faculty play in preparing teachers, and helping to make teacher education a priority for institutions of higher learning, the TNE initiative is likely to be a success. The goal of improving teaching more generally across a college or university and improving the quality
of general and liberal education that undergraduates receive may also be met. But these successes cannot be attributed solely to TNE, given the political, economic, and social forces also driving change. With respect to whether TNE’s other goals will be met—radical changes in the way teachers are prepared, evidence that these changes will produce high-quality teachers capable of bringing about marked improvements in pupils’ learning, and clear guidance for peer institutions to adopt and to adapt the TNE program design principles, the answers are less clear, and, given the less-than-stellar history and cyclical nature of past teacher education reform efforts, perhaps less optimistic.