

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LABORATORY SCHOOLS  
SALT FORK TASK FORCE REPORT  
1989**

"THE VARIOUS EDUCATION REFORM REPORTS  
ON TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE U.S. FROM  
1983 TO PRESENT DAY"

**NALS EDUCATION REFORM TASK FORCE**

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## INTRODUCTION

The National Association of Laboratory Schools (NALS) is an organization of nearly 100 schools in colleges and universities across the nation. The faculty of these NALS campus based schools are scholar/practitioners involved in elementary, secondary and higher education. It is because of this unique orientation that this NALS task force has chosen to set forth its position relative to the various education reform reports published from 1983 to the present. Among others, these reports include: The National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education (NCETE) - A call for Change in Teacher Education; Excellence Commission - A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century; The Committee for Economic Development (CED) - Investing in Our Children; Theodore Sizer - Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School; and the Holmes Group - Tomorrow's Teachers. These reports take different approaches in their observations and recommendations for improving teacher education in America.

The member schools in NALS are similar because each has a higher education orientation, and because all are campus based. These member schools are also different in that each operates according to the needs and orientation of its parent institution. Many are completely staffed by higher education faculty, others have regularly certified public school teachers assigned to them under special agreements, and still others operate with both

certified public school personnel and university faculty working together under one approved leadership plan.

The common strand that threads its way through all NALS schools is a responsibility to teacher education in a higher education setting. Thus, the scholar/practitioners associated with the schools provide the pre-service clinical teaching setting frequently mentioned as necessary for the effective training of future teachers in these national reports. The NALS schools are organized to provide clinical teaching experiences, research, curriculum development and staff training through cooperative planning with elementary and secondary specialists in education departments and in certification programs. Conversely, public and private schools are organized for the primary purpose of educating the children of the community which they serve.

NALS campus schools have a dual commitment to educate children and to educate prospective teachers. As a direct result of this role the children in these schools receive an outstanding education from top scholar/practitioners who are master teachers. Therefore, because NALS is involved in both teacher education and with children in a school setting, the National Association of Laboratory Schools (NALS) Salt Fork Task Force represents the need of our organization to address the conclusions and recommendations of the various reports where, as an organization, we find areas of concern as well as areas of agreement.

## NALS, TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE REFORM REPORTS

### Makeup of the Study Groups

It is clear that throughout the decade of the eighties American education has been perceived as being seriously deficient. The various reports represent the first major reassessment of American education since the early and mid-1960's. We are concerned that the deficiencies cited in these reports have been noted by prominent individuals whose fields of expertise are largely outside the field of education. We are equally concerned about the composition of the reform groups who authored the various reports. Teachers, administrators and parents were minimally represented on the Excellence Commission, the Carnegie Forum, the Education Commission for the states, and the committee for Economic Development. The remaining reform groups including NCTE, NSB and the Holmes group were skewed toward heavy representation from higher education, particularly from research universities, and the business community. The Boyer, Goodlad and Sizer reports have the distinct stamp of their respective authors. Despite some duplication of membership among the groups, differences of opinion are evident. Each report is coherent and well articulated in isolation and common themes are evident. However, attempts to derive any consensus for action from the many conclusions of the various reports present considerable difficulty.

### Preparation of Teachers

The mindset of the various reports was established with the release of A Nation at Risk. A Nation at Risk presented a serious indictment of secondary education, teacher preparation, student achievement and even the American work/study ethic. The impact of this report resulted in educators at all levels being lumped together. For example, the criticism of the quality of secondary teacher preparation was generalized to include elementary as well as secondary teachers. Similar inferences are a part of the Carnegie and Holmes Groups conclusions.

There is consensus among these reports that lack of content knowledge is the most serious deficiency possessed by American teachers. The NALS Salt Fork Task Force suggests that the restructuring the professional core curriculum does not address the real problem -- the inability of secondary teachers to transmit their knowledge base into student gains in achievement. Nutter (1986) places this concept in perspective:

"The fact that some teacher education programs do need more work in discipline(s) does not mean that the professional education component is any less important or that it should be diminished."

Furthermore, we believe the recommendations to increase content coursework for elementary teachers in order to improve teacher effectiveness are suspect. We believe that such a conclusion is premature until certain fundamental questions are addressed. To what extent does the elementary generalist need to be proficient in the many subjects that he/she will be expected to

teach? Will expertise in a content area, transfer to other knowledge domains? This task force recommends that the academic coursework for prospective elementary school teachers be more prescriptive. Further, rigor needs to be increased to provide opportunity for the student to possess a stronger knowledge base with a greater depth of understanding. Teachers must be exposed to coursework which enables them to be proficient in the subject areas they are expected to teach.

The task force believes that the commissions have reached a faulty conclusion by over emphasizing increased coursework in content areas. It is our belief that increasing content is not the issue. As Nutter (1986) observes:

"When teachers fail in the classroom, almost always their basic problem is pedagogical, not mastery of subject matter. To a considerable extent, good teachers, teachers who know how to teach, can and will compensate for some weakness in subject matter, whereas subject matter experts will fail if they cannot gain and hold children's attention and communicate subject matter."

The task force suggests that too little attention has been given to accountability in higher education. Responsibility for what happens in the teacher preparation process rests with colleges and universities. The task force has already pointed out the incongruity between elementary education and secondary education vis-a-vis the proportion of time devoted to the professional core. Elementary Education preparation programs generally are under the domain of a separate department which can control the process and the curriculum. Secondary Education programs, however, are typically under the control of several academic departments.

Consequently, the coordination of secondary programs is difficult to achieve.

There is also little attention paid to the commonality of goals in the professional coursework required of prospective secondary teachers. Student teaching is almost always the only common element in the training of secondary teachers. The NALS Salt Fork Task Force perceives that secondary programs are ineffective because governance structures on college and university campuses mitigate against success. Subject matter specialists tend to perceive that knowledge in the discipline is the singular ingredient for successful teaching. The evidence in the various reports suggest otherwise and fault the wrong component, pedagogy.

We suggest that improvement in teacher preparation at the secondary level might best be achieved by ensuring that control, accountability and responsibility be placed in the hands of departments of secondary education. This strategy will keep academicians in their area of content strength and preparation and remove them from an aspect of education, the training of teachers, that they know relatively little about.

The issue of control of teacher education programs is largely avoided in the reports. This issue is germane to the institution of higher education in that it defines the areas of influence of the "academics" and "professionals" as well as the setting in which each is allowed to apply their respective knowledge. The Holmes Group and John Goodlad recognize the problem of control and attempt to deal with it by calling for Professional Development Schools and

demonstration centers. There are lessons to be learned from business and industry in this area. To produce a quality product each step of the production process must be controlled by the manufacturer. Higher education is in the business of preparing graduates who will enter into a host of endeavors. In the realm of teacher preparation tighter control must be exerted by professional schools at every step of the teacher training process.

Both the Holmes and Goodlad proposals skirt the issues of complexity and diversity among the colleges and universities as they attempt to interface with public schools. The public schools are just as diverse and complex but are driven by different values. To interact effectively with public schools, colleges and universities must make fundamental concessions. It is problematic whether the field-based programs they suggest can be more than another unsuccessful fad. The external pressures exerted by the public, legislators, state education departments and federal programs upon the college and universities will likely be intense and could doom any attempts at meaningful reform to failure.

An example in point is the Professional Development School concept proposed by the Holmes Group. The concept of the PDS is congruent with the objectives of other reports in that it aims to strengthen the clinical teaching experience for prospective teachers. The PDS is designed to link together professionals in higher education with public or private school systems to improve teaching.

This task force must point out that the PDS model is not

inconsistent with the goals and objectives of college/university controlled laboratory schools. Professional Development Schools, if initiated, must be under the control of the host institution. We suggest that the PDS's will face difficulty in acquiring necessary resources at a research university where they will have to compete for resources with equally worthy proposals, many of which will be more consistent with the goals and objectives of the larger institution. Programs in science, mathematics and computer science interface with university goals and objectives better because the potential for tapping alternative funding sources is greater. Further, the history of higher education vis-a-vis laboratory schools and teacher education programs in times of budget crunching does not bode well for the establishment or reestablishment of schools which have and continue to provide a tradition of excellence and service in the preparation of teachers.

If, as the Holmes Group and others suggest, clinical teaching experiences are to become a strong component in teacher preparation, care must be given to maintain control of the process. Re-institution of college/university controlled teaching laboratories require a major commitment and establishment of Professional Development Schools. Teacher education institutions have a long history of supporting the teaching practica and field experiences on a shoestring. Providing minimal dollar remuneration or tuition waivers to participating supervising teachers will hardly be the type of compensation necessary to attract the most competent teachers. Colleges and universities desiring to establish

independent or collaborative Professional Development Schools must be prepared to devote considerable monetary resources to the effort if PDS's are to succeed. Otherwise, there will be little or no incentive to produce change. Should resources not be forthcoming, Teacher preparation programs will have little chance to improve clinical experience programs. In essence, the profession will continue to reflect the current status of what happens in public schools. As Howey (1986) reports:

Certainly many of the experiences that preservice students have in schools lie more in the direction of largely unchallenged pedestrian activities that in well-conceived activities where prospective teachers have opportunities to inquire, to experiment, and to reflect on the subtleties and complexities of the classroom including the moral as well as technical dimensions of teaching.

Even in the best of economic times financial support for teacher preparation has not been adequate. The NALS Salt Fork Task Force commends the various commissions for their attentiveness to the most critical element of teacher preparation - clinical teaching experiences. However, past experience demonstrates that monetary support does not necessarily follow sound philosophy.

#### Financial Consideration

Paralleling the call for reform in teacher education and revitalization of the schools is a similar thrust in the area of tax reform. The United States Congress passed the most comprehensive tax reform legislation ever during the 1986 legislative session. Elements of the revision pose an ominous threat to charitable giving in all sectors of society. It is apparent that

universities and colleges, foundations and other charitable causes will be among those institutions which are likely to be affected most. Should analysts be correct, institutions of higher education, particularly those which rely heavily on private funds to enhance or initiate research thrusts, may be in for lean times. At the same time public institutions are receiving increased scrutiny and tight dollar support from legislatures. In such situations, internal competition for financial support may force decision makers to opt for programs which have the potential for developing additional funding source.

A major source of money for universities, particularly those with a research thrust, has been the federal government. The record is clear that federal support for educational research has decreased and will continue to decrease for the next several years. Major research universities may have difficulty implementing many of the recommendations of the various reports as a result of funding constraints. Conversely, state schools traditionally receiving their major financial support from state budgets are less dependent on private giving. These schools are likely to be more successful in implementing and supporting recommended changes in teacher education. The task force suggests that the best opportunities for change rest at the state level.

#### Clinical Teaching Experiences and the Public Schools

The reform reports, when addressing utilization of public schools, base their recommendations on the assumption that public

schools support, and are interested in, having their local schools extensively involved in the preparation of teachers. There is no evidence in the reports which justifies or documents a willingness on the part of local public school taxpayers use their schools for the purpose of preparing teachers.

Throughout the reports is a theme calling for a strengthening of the practical classroom experience component in teacher education programs. The task force believes the philosophical rationale for clinical experiences to be sound. However, our concern is that the reports may not really view clinical experiences in teacher education programs as more than basic window dressing. Some very real issues associated with public schools including public attitude, costs, role differentiation, control, selection of critic teachers and reward systems are totally ignored.

The citizens of a community support their local public schools to educate their children. Neither the general public nor the public school teachers working with children perceive it to be their responsibility to prepare teachers. When colleges operate in a public school setting they enter as guests, hat in hand, to secure a service which entails minimal financial reward for those teachers who are willing to help. The degree to which this pattern has succeeded for so many years is more a tribute to the professionalism of the teachers involved than to any institutional commitment to prepare new teachers.

Also overlooked in the commission reports are parent

perceptions regarding the teachers who are selected to participate in teacher preparation. When an excellent teacher is removed from the classroom a void is created and a school's educational delivery system is weakened. Even though in theory the school will be strengthened in the long run, the perceptions of the parents that the teacher isn't devoting his/her full attention to their children is justified. Parents have a right to know, or even demand, that the replacement teacher be of similar quality. This is an issue which has not been addressed in the various reports. It is a serious issue that must be faced. Even where the master teacher does not withdraw from the learning environment, as in laboratory school settings, the issue of teacher time and responsibility will surface.

#### Clinical Teaching Experiences and the University

If clinical teaching experiences are to be of the highest quality, there must be a commitment from both the classroom teacher and the college professor. Each must perceive that quality practical experiences are of the highest priority. In the past, reward systems for each group have been inadequate. This issue has not been addressed very well by any of the commissions. Typically, public school teachers have received minimal monetary awards and tuition waivers for this service. College and university professors have not been recognized for providing quality field experiences. Promotions, discretionary raises, merit pay and recognition have come slowly or not at all for faculty engaged in

this activity. Often the least qualified professors are assigned to supervise these experiences. Many of the research universities have a history of using unqualified graduate students to carry the burden of supervising the field experience. There is continued lip service to sound educational philosophy, but is not matched with specific recommendations to correct and improve the situations as they now occur. The issue of the increased costs associated with the desire to provide high quality clinical teaching experiences has not been properly addressed. If universities do indeed wish to support high quality clinical teaching experiences programs they must demonstrate a willingness to support them monetarily.

#### Control of Programs of Clinical Teaching Experiences and the Role of Laboratory Schools

Attendant with quality field experiences is the control of these experiences exercised through teacher education programs. A product is only as good as the quality control exerted and it is difficult to control quality in many public school settings.

However, control can and is evident in college/university operated laboratory schools. Laboratory schools offer a controlled environment which can be easily manipulated to meet changes in teacher preparation programs. Faculty in laboratory schools know that working with prospective teachers is a part of the job. Laboratory schools are designed to provide an environment in which neophytes can begin the process of induction into the profession with success oriented experiences. In a laboratory school those



involved in the process know, understand and accept the philosophy adopted by the college. Consequently, the best established principles of education and use of proven classroom instructional techniques are the foundation of the clinical teaching experience.

## A PROPOSAL

Laboratory schools have a long history of service in teacher education. Graduates of many schools are distinguished by their early induction into the profession in a laboratory school. This pointed out by Howey (1986):

"Throughout the history of teacher education, colleges and universities have developed continuing working relationships with laboratory or demonstration schools. For a variety of reasons in recent history, there has been a decline in such arrangements. With enlightened legislative support, however, these collaborative arrangements will expand once again, and the likely focus for such arrangements will be on schools that have demonstrated policies, practices, and conditions consonant with the growing school effectiveness literature."

Howey is optimistic and the NALS Salt Fork Task Force believes his analysis to be right on target. Therefore, we would suggest that the Holmes Group, in particular look to laboratory schools in the establishment of Professional Development Schools. Of the 123 institutions invited to join the Holmes Group, eleven have laboratory schools. These eleven laboratory schools should serve as pilot Professional Development Schools. Rather than establishing new schools, resources from Holmes could be devoted to laboratory schools in order to demonstrate the viability of their suggested preparatory programs.

These eleven schools provide instructional settings from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Their collective school populations would provide a sample of 5800 students, sufficient

numbers for any worthy research project. Admittedly, this sample may not include sufficient numbers of minority students or children with handicapping conditions. However, this could be readily corrected by extending the sample to include laboratory schools which have significant minority and special education enrollments associated with universities not invited to join the Holmes Group.

Further, an interesting comparison might be possible wherein schools emphasizing four year preparatory programs could be studied. These schools would also utilize existing laboratory schools, thus providing useful data on alternative approaches to teacher preparation. Valid reasons and justification can be made for each approach. Careful studies providing useful data could be generated which would be beneficial to everyone. Under this proposal there is no need to re-invent the wheel - it is already there, ready to be used.

The NALS Salt Fork Task Force reiterates that the assumption by the commissions related to increasing academic content is faulty. It would appear that these commissions have ignored the history of numerous commissions task forces and blue ribbon committees which have made the same recommendation, increase content, for the past half-century. Teacher education programs have indeed arrived at a critical point. The decisions made and the goals established in the next few years will determine the future direction of our programs to prepare the nation's teachers.

This task forces welcomes the challenges and opportunities which lie ahead. But we also believe that the future of teacher

education programs in the United States will be more secure if we can learn from mistakes of the past. A strong clinical teaching program must be a basic component in every teacher education program. Our strongest teacher training institutions have historically supported philosophically sound, well articulated programs of clinical teaching to supplement the academic training of prospective teachers. Somewhere in our recent past many of the decision-makers who shape our educational programs have lost sight of this fact. The recent educational reform reports give us the opportunity to renew our commitment to the role of clinical teaching experiences. Students preparing to be teachers in our colleges and universities deserve the best educational experiences we can give them. Only then will they be of maximum effectiveness in shaping the minds of the generations of public school students yet to come.

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