

Introduction

Each fall, more than one hundred thousand new teachers enter classrooms across America. Some enter with strong preparation, competent and confident to help their students learn. Many, however, are unprepared to meet the challenges they face. The beginning teachers who enter U.S. schools in growing numbers each year vary greatly in the skills and experiences they bring to the job and the formal preparation they have been given to assume the demanding responsibility of educating America's youth. Most are recent college graduates who have gone through a formal teacher education program. A growing number are career switchers with widely varying preparation—from a few weeks to a year or more. Some teachers hired on emergency permits have had no preparation at all. Tens of thousands of new teachers, especially in low-income urban and rural areas, have had little or no exposure to basic information about children, curriculum, or schools. And too many of those who have gone through a teacher education program have not received a rigorous education in some of the essential knowledge and clinical training that would prepare them for success in the classroom.

Why is this the case? How is it that we permit so many ill-prepared individuals to assume such an important role in society? And why do we let some of the least prepared teach our most needy children in the most difficult circumstances? There are many answers to these questions, including at least the following:

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- As a society, we do not invest seriously in the lives of children, most especially poor children and children of color, who receive the least-prepared teachers.
- The conventional view of teaching is simplistic: teaching is viewed merely as proceeding through a set curriculum in a manner that transmits information from the teacher to the child.
- Many people do not understand what successful teaching requires and do not see teaching as a difficult job that requires rigorous training.
- Others believe that there is not much more to teaching than knowing the subject matter that children should learn.
- Many state licensing systems reflect these attitudes and have entry requirements that compromise standards, especially for teachers who teach poor and minority students.
- Researchers and teacher educators have only recently come to consensus about what is necessary, basic knowledge for entering the classroom and about how such knowledge and skill can be acquired.

Although there are many reasons current teachers are not always well prepared, we have learned a great deal about the importance of good teaching and about what effective teachers do. Far from the popular image of the teacher standing at the front of the room lecturing from a textbook and giving a quiz at the end of the week, we now know that teachers whose students demonstrate strong achievement do much more. Effective teachers use many different tools to assess *how* their students learn as well as *what* the students know. They use this information to help all students advance from where they are to where they need to be. They carefully organize activities, materials, and instruction based on students' prior knowledge and level of development so that all students can be successful. They know what conceptions students bring with them about the subject and what misconceptions are likely to cause them confusion—and they design their lessons to overcome these misinterpretations. They adapt

the curriculum to different students' needs; for example, making content more accessible for students who are still learning English and for those who have special educational needs.

Effective teachers engage students in active learning—debating, discussing, researching, writing, evaluating, experimenting, and constructing models, papers, and products in addition to listening to and reading information, watching demonstrations, and practicing skills. They make their expectations for high-quality work very clear, and they provide models of student work that meets those standards. They also provide constant feedback that helps students improve as they continuously revise their work toward these standards. They design and manage a well-functioning, respectful classroom that allows students to work productively. Finally, they involve parents in the learning process and help create strong connections between home and school so that students have fewer obstacles and more supports for their learning. And they do all of this while collaborating with other teachers and administrators to create a seamless curriculum and a supportive environment throughout the school.

Clearly, there is much more to effective teaching than standing in the front of the room giving information to students. And there is much that teachers need to learn in order to do this complex job well. We outline here what teachers need to know before they enter the classroom and what supports they need when they first enter to ensure their development into the effective teachers described above.

The Focus and Organization of This Report

Although we know a great deal more than we once did about how people learn and how to teach effectively, much of this knowledge is only haphazardly available to those who most need it to do their work—the teachers who today are charged with enabling students to reach the highest standards of accomplishment ever envisioned for the full range of students in our nation's schools.

This volume focuses on the preparation of new teachers. It is based on a longer volume sponsored by the National Academy of Education, *Preparing Teachers for a Changing World: What Teachers*

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Should Learn and Be Able to Do,¹ which summarizes research on learning, teaching, and teacher education. Drawing on the recommendations of that volume, we offer in this report a set of core ideas, skills, and dispositions that are essential for beginning teachers to acquire. We

- Present what beginning teachers need to know in order to enter the classroom
- Describe best practices for acquiring that knowledge, and
- Lay out the policies needed to assure that beginning teachers can adequately serve the very first students they teach

In addition to describing the core concepts and skills teachers should learn, we discuss how this core knowledge can be acquired, taking into account the different experiences of the teacher candidate pool and the diverse routes for preparing teachers. While acknowledging that it takes many years of experience to develop sophisticated expertise, we focus on the initial preparation that will allow candidates to practice responsibly with the full range of students they first teach and enable them to continue learning on the job and from their peers. We address initial preparation programs of all kinds, including traditional undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs and alternative programs designed for recruits who prepare in post-baccalaureate programs based in universities or school districts. Our focus is not on the format, length, or location of teacher education but on its substance: what beginning teachers need to learn and how they may best be enabled to learn it.