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On Learning to Teach English Teachers: A Textured Portrait of Mentoring

Emily R. Smith, Kevin G. Basmadjian, Leah Kirell, and
Stephen M. Koziol, Jr.

As state and federal organizations and legislators continue to negotiate the definition of “highly qualified teachers” in response to such mandates as “No Child Left Behind,” university teacher education programs find themselves in the midst of a complex situation—being called upon not only to document and improve instruction but also to increase enrollments in order to produce sufficient numbers of teachers to meet the anticipated shortages such legislation might create. As a result, to meet the need for

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faculty in expanded teacher education programs across a variety of institutions, some universities—especially Research I universities with advanced degree programs—are thus being pressed to increase enrollments in those doctoral programs that produce competent and qualified teacher educators. However, while much attention has been devoted to articulating what constitute quality educational programs and expectations for students in K-12 classrooms and for beginning teachers, relatively little attention has been placed on the design and quality of these advanced degree programs that produce the teacher educators who staff and lead teacher preparation programs.

What does it mean to prepare highly qualified teacher educators? For those of us in English education, a partial answer comes from a recent report from the Conference on English Education’s Commission on the Prepa-

ration of English Teacher Educators (Young, 2000). This Commission, meeting over the course of a decade to discuss issues involved in the development of new faculty as English educators, articulate in their report a vision for the type of individuals they hope will complete graduate programs in English education and become the next professors of English education: Self-aware individuals, with a commitment to lifelong learning and on-going inquiry into practice including their own. Knowledgeable individuals who are well aware of the current research and theory that guide effective practice in the English classroom. Individuals committed to collaboration—in their work with school and university colleagues in their own programs, and in their work with colleagues nationally through their affiliations with professional organizations and other professional networks. Individuals who are astute observers of teaching.

While these certainly are desirable goals for the advanced degree programs that prepare English educators, what the profession also needs is direction on how programs can or ought to support the acquisition of these dispositions, understandings, and abilities. Recently, select doctorate-granting universities have introduced efforts to address these concerns—including pedagogical seminars and colloquia, teaching portfolios, and models of expert-novice mentoring. In this article, we will demonstrate the need for such formal and sustained mechanisms for preparing English educators even as we focus on a textured portrait of one form of support, namely mentoring. We recognize, even as we look in depth at the mentoring model at one institution, that such an effort is not a panacea to a larger, institutional concern. But we offer it as a beginning toward what we hope might be a fruitful discussion within our field about how to sustain the types of supports necessary for fully preparing future English educators.

In this article, we will demonstrate the need for such formal and sustained mechanisms for preparing English educators even as we focus on a textured portrait of one form of support, namely mentoring.

Research First, Teaching Second

In their comprehensive study of doctoral students' program experiences across the disciplines, Golde and Dore (2001) note that it is not preparation for teaching in higher education that comprises a significant portion of graduate student work. Rather, preparation to conduct research in the chosen field tends to be of primary importance and receives the greatest systematic and ancillary attention in course work, guided practica, and faculty-student interactions. Amundsen, Saroyan and Gryspeerdt (1999) argue that a pau-

city of scholarly work on teaching development in postsecondary institutions, including schools of education, compounds the tendency to ignore teacher development at this level. Taken together, the lack of emphasis on teaching in higher education, little formal dialogue about how instructors become effective teachers, and little informal dialogue within academic units and professional schools about teaching result in "an atmosphere that is often not conducive to the investigation of teaching as a scholarly, intellectual, or even interesting topic of professional discourse" (Amundsen et al., p. 2).

Pruitt (1998) suggests:

The graduate experience inducts its students into the life of the mind through a rigorous program of advanced studies. At the same time, it inculcates a set of norms and beliefs through a plethora of policies, practices, values, attitudes, requirements and relationships. Until now, the object of these socializations has been to produce the consummate researcher. In our judgment, doctoral education can, through these same processes, also equip those who choose careers in the professoriate to develop the other characteristics of a faculty member. (p. 7)

Preparing Those Who Will Teach Teachers

While it seems logical to expect that doctoral programs in teacher education might do a better job than other disciplines by carefully attending to the pedagogical training and development of those who will prepare prospective K-12 teachers, this is not generally the case. Like their institutional and departmental counterparts, these programs too seem to perceive their mandate first and foremost as developing educational researchers. In their national study of the design and practices in doctoral programs for teacher educators, *The Next Generation of Teacher Educators: Preparing the Professoriate*, Yarger and his colleagues (1999) report:

Those responsible for doctoral study in education, for the most part, seem not to have recognized that the single most prevalent role most of their graduates will play in their professional lives is that of educator of teachers. Instead, doctoral candidates have been prepared primarily as scholars. Their study has been directed to the function of inquiry and knowledge production, critically important functions for the professoriate to be sure, but not the prime responsibilities that will justify the salaries their employers pay them, namely, the day in and day out obligations of preparing rising generations of teachers for America's schools. (p. 1)

While the report acknowledges that pockets of exceptions to this trend exist, the authors call for university faculty and administrators to begin pre-

paring their graduate students for “the full range of their teacher education responsibilities” (Yarger et al., p. 2). In doing so, the authors acknowledge the irony that, while

so many university faculty and administrators have been at the forefront of the protest against policies and practices that would allow college graduates to be hired for teaching positions in public school classrooms with little or no formal preparation for the role, in many instances this is what doctoral faculty are, in effect, allowing their own graduates to do when they are placed in teacher education roles. (p. 2)

Because most graduate students enrolled in teacher education doctoral programs have themselves been teachers, college and department administrators have assumed that these students know how to work with beginning teachers both in coursework as well as field experiences. Ironically, these same programs have rejected this assumption when it comes to accepting a subject matter major as sufficient to warrant teacher certification or teaching experience as sufficient to warrant effectiveness in the role of mentor for student teachers and interns.

This lack of attention to the development of English education doctoral students for their roles as teacher educators is particularly problematic when we recognize the substantial role these students play in teacher preparation. It is widely accepted that graduate students, across disciplinary boundaries and including those in teacher education programs, teach undergraduate or preservice courses in their departments as part of their graduate programs. English education students often are also engaged in the supervision of preservice teachers in laboratory and field experiences, including student teaching and internship placements. Entering graduate students anticipate such expectations; in fact, they rely upon such work for financial assistance as well as professional development. Despite this reality, the bulk of graduate English education students’ preparation focuses on their future roles as researchers.

Current Efforts in Preparing Future Faculty

Perhaps the most extensive effort to improve the preparation of doctoral students for their roles as university educators is offered by the Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) program. This national initiative, formed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools, involves 43 doctoral degree-granting institutions and more than 295 partner institutions to address “the mismatch between doctoral education and the needs of colleges and universities that employ new Ph.D.’s” (p.

4). The program promotes learning about and experiencing different aspects of faculty life through participation in departmental and cross-institutional learning opportunities. Doctoral students can be mentored by faculty within their own department or by faculty in partner institutions. Participating institutions provide an array of learning opportunities to prepare doctoral students for their roles as teaching faculty, including creating teaching portfolios; participating in courses, workshops and seminars on teaching; observing and being observed by faculty; and one-on-one mentoring from faculty on the design and teaching of courses (*Preparing Future Faculty*, 2003).

Outside of PFF, several institutions have developed support programs, providing a variety of support structures for doctoral students. At Duke University, The Mentor Training Program offers doctoral students a week-long summer training program, coupled with weekly sessions throughout the year, to assist students as they prepare for and teach courses. These sessions help doctoral students define teaching and learning roles, develop a teaching philosophy, appreciate different learning styles, and gain content background for particular courses. At the University of Georgia, experienced graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), recognized for their strong teaching, are selected to mentor new GTAs in the Teaching Assistant Mentor Program. Selected GTAs are prepared for their role through a year-long mentoring experience that includes faculty mentoring, group discussions on teaching, and mentoring other GTAs. At the University of Virginia, doctoral students who are teaching for the first time participate in the Tomorrow's Professor Today program, which provides workshops about teaching and an on-line forum for sharing and getting feedback on course syllabi. Across the various programs, participants are often selected (based on their teaching performance) to participate in a mentoring or support opportunity, with some offering certificates in college or university teaching at the end of the program. In addition, several schools cater their programs to advanced doctoral students getting ready to assume a faculty position (*Re-envisioning the Ph.D.*, 2005).

Within English departments, future faculty receive similar forms of support. As part of the PFF, doctoral students at Syracuse University, for example, receive several types of support once they begin teaching undergraduate courses in their third or fourth year. They select a faculty mentor to work with, attend teaching seminars, and produce a teaching portfolio (*Future Professoriate Project*, 2005). Ph.D. students serving as literature or composition/rhetoric GTAs at Texas A&M—Commerce complete seminars in pedagogical issues concerning the teaching of college writing and litera-

ture and more general issues of pedagogy and professionalism. Finally, the Georgia Institute of Technology offers three competitive fellowships to ABD or postdoctoral candidates in the humanities or social sciences. Before fellows teach three courses in the School of Learning, Communication, and Culture, they attend an orientation that introduces them to the school's writing program and curriculum and different teaching models. In addition, all fellows are assigned a faculty mentor with compatible teaching and scholarly interests to share scholarship and teaching ideas and to provide feedback (Re-envisioning the Ph.D., 2003).

Across these various programs, a common component of the support offered is some form of mentoring. In Louisiana State University's Graduate Assistant Teaching Mentor Program, for example, major professors nominate a doctoral student whom she/he will supervise in the teaching of a course. The faculty member provides feedback on course syllabi and periodically visits the student's class. Similarly, faculty at University of California-Santa Barbara mentor doctoral students in the instruction of a course. And at University of California-Irvine, teaching assistant consultants provide discipline-specific mentoring. In the Developing Future Faculty as Teacher-Scholars Program at The University of Tennessee, faculty members mentor interdisciplinary teams of six students. Faculty who have been recognized for their outstanding teaching and scholarship facilitate small group meetings where they discuss topics such as preparing to teach, motivating learning, testing and grading, publishing, and writing grant proposals (Re-envisioning the Ph.D., 2003).

Amundsen et al. (1999) suggest that, while the extant research on how faculty and administration can meet the demands for a more comprehensive preparation of the future professoriate is scarce, there appears to be consensus across the research that more organized and systematic use of mentoring in instructor training will yield positive results. However, conflicting definitions of mentoring and institutional demands on faculty time make implementing a successful mentoring program for teacher development difficult. Dolly (1998), drawing on the work of Sands, Parson, and Duane (1991), points out that the lack of an operational definition for mentoring with respect to teacher development has been a source of faculty conflict in the past and can result in ineffectual attempts to socialize new faculty or prepare teaching assistants for teaching roles. However, Dolly suggests that with careful attention to mentor/student matches, articulation of program expectations, and development of department collegiality, mentoring can be valuable.

Through excerpted examples of conversations among the doctoral students and the senior faculty member, we describe and explain how a mentored teaching experience in a preservice teacher education program contributed to the development of the kinds of dispositions, skills, and understandings that the CEE Commission identified in their vision for the preparation of English teacher educators.

This paper draws on a model of support and mentoring similar to the models described above but unique to the particular context and needs of the doctoral students at our institution: The Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. In the following section, we describe the context in which a senior faculty member mentored three doctoral students as they learned to teach a secondary English methods course. In addition, we describe the nature of our mentor-novice relationship and work. Through excerpted examples of conversations among the doctoral students and the senior faculty member, we describe and explain how a mentored teaching experience in a preservice teacher education program contributed to the development of the

kinds of dispositions, skills, and understandings that the CEE Commission identified in their vision for the preparation of English teacher educators.

One Case of Mentoring: A Textured Portrait

Context and Participants

As a graduate, research institution, Michigan State University (MSU) is committed to quality doctoral education. For graduate students in the Department of Teacher Education (TE), this includes expectations that they participate in research and development projects, teach appropriate topics and methods courses in the preservice program, and supervise students in their teaching practicum and internship experiences. Overall, graduate students teach approximately half of the course sections in the teacher preparation program. At the time of this study, the department had no formal or systematic induction program for beginning teaching assistants, although there has been in the department a faculty commitment to the informal mentoring of graduate students for their teaching roles as teacher educators. The belief in practice is that "the goal of teacher education . . . is not to indoctrinate or train teachers in prescribed ways, but to educate teachers to reason soundly about their teaching as well as to perform skillfully" (Shulman, 1987, p.15). This belief guides the faculty's approach with preservice teachers, as well as their work with doctoral students.

The undergraduate teacher preparation program at MSU follows a five-year model. As part of their undergraduate studies, secondary English

majors complete an English major that includes several content courses in the English department that address topics in writing, reading, and language study especially germane to prospective teachers. In their junior and senior years, students take courses in educational foundations and a two-course English methods sequence (11 credits) that includes an on-campus seminar and school-based field components. Students finish the program with an internship experience plus graduate coursework on professional issues and advanced subject-specific methods during the fifth year. In this paper, we focus on our work in the second of the two senior-level English methods courses, which by design emphasized the teaching of literature and media. There were two sections of the course, with enrollments of 23 and 25 students, respectively.

Emily, Kevin, and Leah are graduate students in the TE doctoral program at MSU. Steve is a senior faculty member in English education and Chair of the Department. At the time of this study, Emily was a second year doctoral student. In her first year, she observed and assisted in the two senior English methods courses (taught by a faculty member) and served as a field instructor (intern supervision). Kevin was a first year doctoral student. In his first semester, he taught one section of a multi-section introductory education course and worked on an outreach project that provided professional development in technology for middle school teachers. Leah was also a first year doctoral student, but had begun her program in the second semester. Because of unexpected shifts in faculty availability, Emily and Kevin were asked to be lead instructors for sections of the spring term English methods course (TE 402); Leah was assigned as an assistant/apprentice to both Emily and Kevin.

As Chair of the Teacher Education Department, Steve coordinates and oversees courses taught by faculty and graduate students across subject matter areas. In addition, given his extensive background in English education, he works closely with faculty and graduate students who work with preservice secondary English teachers. As former secondary English teachers, Emily, Kevin, and Leah brought what they thought was a wealth of experience and knowledge to the planning of this English methods course. Emily had taught middle and high school English at a Quaker school in Philadelphia, where she carefully co-planned interdisciplinary lessons for her students. Kevin had taught English language arts at a diverse public charter high school in Michigan where he helped 99% of his students to pass the state-standardized writing test. Leah had taught English at a Washington, D.C., public high school for three years where she became inter-

ested in the relationship between language, culture, and education. Their knowledge and experience as English teachers, they soon learned, was insufficient for guiding their planning and teaching of an English methods course. As the analysis of the mentoring sessions will show, they needed to transform their knowledge for teaching middle and high school English into a knowledge for teaching teachers.

In the weeks before the spring semester, Emily and Kevin met to review existing syllabi and plan the English methods course. Based on the available materials and what they believed to be the wisdom of prior experiences, they organized the course to cover a different theory or pedagogy topic each week, reflecting what Smagorinsky and Whiting (1995) term as the survey approach in the design of methods courses. They also planned for students to have opportunities to demonstrate their capacity to plan and teach lessons in relation to these theories and pedagogies (in effect building in a workshop component in the overall design). They chose to structure the class such that on Wednesdays (seminar meetings were on Monday and Wednesday mornings) instructors would introduce a topic (i.e., using film with literature, teaching vocabulary, reader-response theory, etc.), and on Mondays a student (or student team) would teach a 50-minute lesson that enacted that theory or pedagogy. The instructors selected two texts commonly used in the local public schools, *Freak the Mighty* (Philbrick, 1995) and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1986), that would serve as class texts on which to base the lessons. Further, they set up assignments such that students not doing the teaching themselves would respond as middle or high school students during the "lessons."

Though Emily and Kevin were excited about the syllabus they had created, Steve raised concerns about some of the assumptions behind their design decisions, including assumptions about the efficacy of a survey approach given the overall structure of the English Education program. He also raised concerns about the use of single-experience 50-minute lesson demonstrations, favoring instead shorter and more frequent group-developed experiences. After much discussion, Emily, Kevin, and Leah remained committed to their design, so Steve encouraged them to proceed. But together, the four of us—Emily, Kevin, Leah, and Steve—decided to "study" the effectiveness of the design of the course. At this point, Steve agreed to provide faculty support and mentoring throughout the semester. At the heart of this support was a weekly mentoring meeting during which the four of us talked about the class sessions, with particular attention to course design and how instruction and student learning were meeting expectations.

Data Collection and Analysis

To support this study of our practice, Emily and Kevin agreed to keep journals to document their thinking as they taught the course, while Steve and Leah agreed to record notes on what they observed during the class meetings. Periodically, class meetings were videotaped and later reviewed during mentoring sessions. In addition, several mentoring sessions were audiotaped and later transcribed. Finally, artifacts of teaching and learning—including syllabi, assignments, and lessons plans—were saved for later review and often served as points of reference during the mentoring sessions. These documents were helpful in tracing the evolution of our thinking about the goals of the methods course as well as the pedagogical techniques most appropriate for meeting those goals.

When the four of us first met to talk about writing this paper, we reviewed data from all of these sources. Emily, Kevin, and Leah reviewed Steve's notes and reflections, while Steve examined Emily and Kevin's journals. Together, we looked at transcripts of the mentoring sessions, as well as the videotaped class meetings. Then, as Emily, Kevin, and Leah drafted cases from their teaching and the mentoring sessions, Steve analyzed the data and wrote memos of what he had learned through and from the process. Over the next year, the four of us met regularly to share insights and to synthesize learnings and perspectives, all of which culminate in this paper. Throughout, the process was collegial rather than hierarchical: Steve talked and wrote about what he learned and provided, while Emily, Kevin, and Leah talked and wrote about how their understanding of teacher education was enhanced by sharing thoughts and experiences with their peers as well as a faculty mentor. In short, the data presented in this paper represents a combination of all four participants' perceptions of class activities and the mentoring sessions. The findings offer important implications about the process through which novice teacher educators are inducted into the profession, all of which are delineated in the final section of this paper.

The Mentoring Sessions

The mentoring sessions were rather informal. We generally met in Steve's office around a small conference table and talked about what transpired in the undergraduate classes. Typically, either Steve or Leah attended one of the two sections of the course and took detailed notes from wherever they were seated in the classroom. At times, they also participated in or assisted with the lessons. Since both sections were scheduled at the same time and both were held in buildings away from the College of Education (COE), Steve

and Leah usually walked back to the COE with either Emily or Kevin. These were occasions during which we would share and compare thoughts on the lesson and on the teaching. The immediacy of the experience was important, as it gave all four of us the opportunity, albeit brief, to confirm initial impressions, talk about specific events, and identify issues to pursue more deeply during our mentoring session.

Once we were all gathered around Steve's conference table, conversation often picked up from where we left off on our walk back to the COE. At other times, when Steve and/or Leah could not make it to observe one of the

These conversations were at the center of our mentoring sessions. We had no formal procedures and followed no obvious or prescribed protocol. We simply talked for about an hour (or often longer) about issues we confronted and ways to improve our practice as English educators.

two sections, one of the two might open with the question, "So, how did things go today?" Emily or Kevin, invariably the one most affected by the day's events, would share a moment of frustration or success. The others joined in, asking clarifying questions or sharing parallel experiences. Collectively, we pushed each other to go further, asking for explanations behind events, rationales behind instructional strategies, purposes and expectations for student assessments, and assumptions about student learning. These conversations were at the center of our mentoring sessions.

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Across our mentoring sessions, Steve assumed two types of mentoring roles: mentor as more experienced other and mentor as reflective coach. As more experienced other, Steve was able to scaffold Emily, Kevin, and Leah's learning through conversation (Vygotsky, 1978). Drawing on his knowledge of teacher candidates and the content of English methods, Steve asked questions that helped the three novices to think about their practice in ways they could not or did not do independently. While some of the questions he asked, such as, "How did things go today?" were questions that Emily, Kevin, and Leah could have asked of each other, other questions reflected his extensive experience as a teacher educator. He drew on his experience to help Emily, Kevin, and Leah to question and examine the assumptions they were making about their students as learners and the knowledge they drew on to teach the course. Steve also helped them develop a knowledge base for teaching teachers in ways they could not do on their own.

In serving as a mentor, Steve did not enact a traditional and hierarchical role as expert. Instead, he served as a thoughtful and informed colleague,

helping Emily, Kevin, and Leah to be reflective about their practice. Steve was a “co-thinker” who helped the three doctoral students to see new perspectives and to “reason about and learn from [their] teaching” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 2). To this end, Steve taught Emily, Kevin, and Leah how to think and act as teacher educators, all the while acting as and treating them as colleagues.

Rather than continue in abstract terms about our mentoring sessions, we offer two specific examples. In each of these cases, we describe what happened in the methods class, what transpired during the mentoring session that followed, and explain how these sessions helped Emily, Kevin, and Leah to grow and learn as beginning teacher educators. We selected these particular cases because they demonstrate how the mentoring sessions:

- ▶ created opportunities for us to interrogate the depth of our English teaching content and methodology;
- ▶ provided occasions for us to talk about and learn from our practice in coherent, meaningful ways with the support of our peers and a mentor;
- ▶ offered multiple perspectives through which to reflect on our teaching and the design of the English methods course; and
- ▶ challenged us to examine our assumptions about teacher preparation students as learners.

Case #1: Transferring Theory into Practice

Numerous scholars have addressed the disconnect in teacher education programs between the perceived idealistic and theoretical perspectives of the university courses in contrast with the practical (and realistic) needs of the beginning teacher in practice (Dewey, 1904; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Grossman, 1990; Wilson, 1990). Most have suggested that prospective teachers find it challenging—if not impossible—to transfer teaching and learning theories learned in university-based teacher preparation programs to K-12 classroom practice. As Emily, Kevin, and Leah designed the course, they thought hard about this disconnect and tried to plan the course to minimize students’ struggles in making this connection. They tried to sequence activities carefully and believed that by planning and modeling lessons that were informed by theory, in front of students, they could help their students see how theory guides practice. The vignette below, drawn from Kevin’s notes following a class meeting early in the semester, suggests that, among other things, their assumptions about their students were quite flawed.

On this particular day, Perry, one of Kevin's students, taught a lesson on *Freak the Mighty*. Four days earlier, the class had discussed reader-response theory, focusing on several chapters from Beach's (1993) *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories*. Steve arrived to the class just before Perry began his lesson. As things unfolded in the class, Kevin became increasingly grateful for Steve's presence:

Kevin's Notebook Entry: Monday, January 24, 2000

Following a brief and somewhat disjointed whole-class discussion, Perry asked the students, "Okay, so what does all of this mean?" There were perhaps ten minutes left in class, so I figured he was going to try and get them to think more broadly about the story, to perhaps connect the discussion to some of the larger themes we had previously discussed. The students looked puzzled. After a few moments, Perry rephrased his question. "Today's lesson was an example of what?" he asked. Then, "Does anyone know what we did today is called?" Now, I was puzzled as well. When it was apparent to Perry that no one had any idea what he was after, he continued. "Does anyone remember what we talked about on Wednesday?" he inquired. After a few moments, one student offered, doubtfully, "Reader-response theory?"

Perry was relieved. Someone finally gave the "correct" answer to his question. "Good! Right! Reader-response theory is what we just talked about here," he said. I was thoroughly confused and looked to the back of the room where Steve was seated. He raised his eyebrows as if to ask (and later *did* ask), "What the hell was *that* all about?" I had no idea. Four days earlier, after Wednesday's class where we had discussed reader-response theory and applications in the way teachers could approach literature with students, I thought my students at least minimally understood the concept and its implications for teaching. Apparently, I was mistaken. On the lesson plan for our next class session I scribbled, "Revisit reader-response theory—Perry's lesson."

Mentoring Session: Monday, January 24, 2000

During our mentoring session that afternoon, Kevin shared what transpired during Perry's lesson; Steve added details and insights extracted from his notes. In the excerpted mentoring session that follows, Kevin struggles with questions about the depth of his own pedagogical content knowledge and how preservice teachers understand theory in relation to practice. In the discussion, all three of the novices began to develop a way to talk about their own practice—the struggles and successes—that moved them forward. They had opportunities to see their practice from multiple and contrasting perspectives and examine the assumptions they held about their students.

KEVIN: But I mean I had no idea . . . what (Perry) was even doing. Sometimes, it seems . . . well, in the past I have been able to see that, okay, they seem to understand what is going on. But . . . I don't . . . when he asked, I mean, what he did at the end, I just looked around—

STEVE: Okay, now, why might that have happened? How might that have been connected to what happened last week?

KEVIN: Well, clearly he—and perhaps they were all—was confused. I guess I thought they were familiar with literary theory, or at least reader-response . . . but I guess—

EMILY: I've had the same experience. Not with this particular topic—although, it is possible—but in getting them to think about stuff they must have done in their English preparation . . . I mean—

STEVE: But think about what you're saying. As I watched Perry today, and I could see in his face, he was lost! So I'm asking you to think about last week, which I did not see . . . but where there might have been a disconnect between the theory you were trying to teach—reader-response—and the practice of literature instruction.

LEAH: Although it seems like, if most students didn't seem confused, then maybe *they* understood and only Perry . . . had things turned around, right?

KEVIN: Yes, and, I guess if I think about last week, and, Leah, you were there, but I wonder if part of it may have been limitations in my own knowledge of reader-response theory. . . . But then, how could he . . . I mean I guess he really thought this was something one teaches directly to middle school students. I guess I thought he would be able to connect what we learned on a theoretical level—reader-response—to how a teacher would use this theory, in the classroom.

STEVE: Remember that as you think about the activities and experiences you provide in this type of class, all of you, you need also to think about your learners, where they are, and what you think you know about them. . . . You shouldn't assume any more than you would about teaching high school students, in terms of how students learn. These students are older and know more, but they are still learners.

Lessons and How We Learned Them

The mentoring sessions unearthed the possibility that Kevin—and perhaps Emily and Leah as well—lacked sufficient knowledge of the literary theories they were trying to teach. In probing what might have happened in the class meeting prior to Perry's lesson, Steve pushes the novices to think about how they planned and taught reader-response theory to their students in relation to what they expected them to learn and be able to do. Together, they considered what Shulman (1987) calls "pedagogical content knowledge," or how content is organized and then taught to students, not as it applies in the school setting but as it applied in their setting—as teacher educators working with novice learners. Shulman suggests that teachers who are uncertain about content knowledge necessarily lack the ability to think about ways to effectively teach it to students. Among other things, this mentoring session forced Emily, Kevin, and Leah to consider the possibility that their students' inability to connect theory to practice may have had something to do with the assumptions they themselves had made about how their students—prospective English teachers—learn.

The mentoring sessions also helped Emily, Kevin, and Leah develop comfort and competence in talking about their practice in coherent and meaningful ways. In the example above, Kevin's introduction of the incident is jumbled and unclear. He stops and starts multiple times as he tries to explain what transpired to his colleagues. Steve allows Kevin to stay muddled in his own language briefly, but then intervenes with two straightforward

questions about what transpired during the previous lesson. He asks, "Okay, now, why might that have happened? How might that have been connected to what happened last week?" In this way, Steve helps the novices to consider what might be important and where to look for answers to questions and puzzlements. This move, in effect, forces Emily, Kevin, and Leah to assign words and

meanings to what transpires in their classrooms. Near the end of this transcript—which reflects only a portion of this particular mentoring session—Kevin identifies a potential source of the problem using clear, lucid language. He says, "I guess (Perry) really thought this was something one teaches to middle school students. I guess I thought he would be able to connect what we learned on a theoretical level—reader-response—to how a teacher would use this theory, in the classroom." In this way, the mentoring sessions helped

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A third way the mentoring sessions advanced Emily, Kevin, and Leah's development as teacher educators was by providing occasions for them to view their practice from multiple perspectives, through two (or more) sets of eyes. As noted earlier, Kevin and Emily rarely taught without either Steve or Leah present in the classroom. In general, when Steve observed Kevin, Leah worked with Emily, and vice versa. In Perry's lesson, because Kevin chose to participate as a student—flipping through copies of *Freak the Mighty* looking for details and writing responses to the teacher's questions—he could not follow closely Perry's actions during the lesson. Steve, on the other hand, paid close attention to Perry's non-verbal behaviors. In the mentoring excerpt above, Steve notes, "As I watched Perry today, and I could see in his face, he was lost!" Steve then offers his interpretation of Perry's countenance in relation to his uncertainty about reader-response. These kinds of details and insights, which Leah and Steve regularly offered during our mentoring sessions, afforded Emily, Kevin, and Leah more meaningful and textured conversations about their teaching.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the mentoring sessions forced the novice teacher educators to examine the assumptions they held about how their students learn. Steve's final comment in the above excerpt was especially useful. He suggests that Emily, Kevin, and Leah needed to draw upon the ways they were used to thinking about students from their experiences as high school teachers. As high school English teachers, they thought carefully about ways to appropriately scaffold instruction. Few if any of their lessons were "one-shot" deals, where a concept was introduced and assessed one day, forgotten the next. Yet, as Emily, Kevin, and Leah discussed and examined their practice with Steve, they realized that this was how they had conceived and enacted their practice as teacher educators. They assumed their students had the capacity to quickly assimilate new theories and strategies on Wednesdays, and then make the complex transition to practice the following Monday. Emily, Kevin, and Leah thought their students would readily make a seamless transition between theory and practice. After all, they were only months away from graduating as English majors and beginning their teaching internships. Didn't this mean they should be ready and able to use theories such as reader-response to inform their practice? Through dialogue with each other and with Steve, the novice teacher educators eventually came to realize that they were operating out of a "banking concept" of teaching and knowledge (Freire, 1995), and one that was in need of a nearly complete overhaul.

Case #2: Knowing Our Students as Learners

The second case illustrates other ways in which Emily, Kevin, and Leah's experiences in the course and mentoring sessions afforded them space to examine additional assumptions about their students and preservice teacher learning. The case also demonstrates the value of multiple perspectives in the mentoring sessions. These perspectives helped the novice teacher educators to locate their problems and concerns among much broader issues of teacher education. Finally, this example shows how the debriefing conversations served as "collaborative engagements" (Young, 2000), providing the support and empathy the novice teacher educators needed as they realized they were encountering similar teaching experiences. It was a source of much-appreciated relief to hear each other report almost identical experiences and difficulties in teaching the course.

In the following vignette from Emily's section, we focus on a problem faced by most teacher educators as they attempt to engage preservice teachers in careful and critical reflections of their teaching. We examine Emily, Kevin, and Leah's reactions to students' first attempts to debrief and critique their peers' 50-minute lesson. In both sections, the novice teacher educators were surprised and confused by their students' resistance and inability to analyze and critique their peers' lessons.

Classroom Vignette: Monday, February 21, 2000

On this particular day, which Steve observed, two students taught a lesson on *Freak the Mighty* using literature circles, the week's pedagogical focus. In Emily's mind, the lesson was a disaster. The schema activator—although "fun"—showed no connection to the main activity of the lesson. The students worked in literature circle groups for 20 minutes on a task that required only five. The teachers did not intervene in the group work at any point. As a result, students gossiped about their weekends for as much as 45 minutes. Finally, there was no closure or assessment to the lesson. From Emily's perspective, there was little evidence that the two "teachers" or their "students" understood the purpose or substance of literature circles. Unfortunately, the worst was yet to come.

Following the lesson, Emily tried to transition the class into a debriefing and analysis of the literature circles lesson. She expected her students, in the class-wide analysis, to analyze and critique thoughtfully and constructively the two teachers' instructional methods. To her surprise, the class overwhelmingly praised the lesson and the teaching. Among their comments were statements like, "I had a lot of fun," "You did a great job," and "I like

that the teachers didn't hover over or bother the groups." Not one comment addressed possible weaknesses in the instruction or lesson design.

As the course instructor, Emily felt a responsibility to help her students see that a "fun" lesson that "fills" the 50 minutes is not necessarily an educative lesson. After fifteen minutes of praise, she initiated a different line of analysis aimed at identifying some of the lesson's limitations. She began by asking about the connection between the schema activator and the main activity. Students began to chime in with additional questions about the lesson, with the two "teachers" responding to each of them. Emily left the class feeling a bit better that her students had learned something about teaching literature circles. When she came to the mentoring session the next week, however, we learned that her efforts had backfired. Emily came to the mentoring session shocked and frustrated by what had happened during the class session that followed the literature circles debriefing. The mentoring session that follows begins with Emily sharing what happened in her class:

Mentoring Session: Wednesday, February 23, 2000

EMILY: I cannot believe what happened in class. When I walked in to class, I felt like something weird was going on. They were all quiet and looking down, not at me. What eventually came out—after my prodding—was their anger at the mistreatment during the debriefing of the two teachers who taught the lit circles lesson last week.

STEVE: What were they angry about?

EMILY: I was in shock. The two teachers went on and on about how they felt "attacked" by me and the class when we debriefed the lesson. They said it went against the learning community goals we established in the class. They went on for almost an hour!

LEAH: What did you do? How did you respond?

EMILY: I tried to explain the difference between analyzing and critiquing the lesson versus the teachers up there, but they weren't having any of it. I mean, I didn't know what to say. I couldn't even believe they were reacting that way.

To Emily's relief and comfort, Kevin and Leah had experienced a similar response in Kevin's section. All of his students thought the two "teachers'" lesson on *Freak the Mighty* was exceptional, whereas Leah and Kevin thought it was rather weak. After Emily shared, Kevin and Leah talked about

the resistance they experienced in attempting to initiate a critique of the lesson taught by two students.

KEVIN: And our class was even *more* difficult because none of the students saw *anything* wrong with the teachers' lesson. So now it came down to, I mean, I really didn't know what to do. I kind of looked over to Leah, and I think we had the same sense that this was not a good lesson, but maybe the students really did think it was a good lesson because all of the students were on task, or, I don't know. But I know it was not! And I was going to raise some issues to talk about, but then it was so hard because all of the students were like, "Oh, what a great lesson!" "It was really good!" How do you get them to step back and look at the lesson through the lens of, I don't know, a teacher, I just don't know how to do that.

LEAH: They weren't even willing to ask questions. You said at one point, "What questions do you have for the teachers about how they chose what to do?" And there was a real hesitancy on their part even to question the decisions, not even to be critical about them, to just raise questions. How do you push them to even do that?

STEVE: Keep in mind the big jump you've asked these students to make. The way you've set it up, they've got one chance to teach a lesson this semester, and they are being graded on this lesson. You've put them back in student mode, where this is the performance. That makes your task of trying to get them to be self-critical, or critical of each other, all the more difficult. The more self-critical they are, the more critical they are of the others, the more they will see this as undermining their grade. In the grade-conscious world that we live in, they may not be willing to take that risk. They also have their egos to protect. So, it's both grade . . . and ego.

In spite of Steve's comments, Emily, Kevin, and Leah could not understand how the students possibly could have thought the lessons their peers taught were in any way effective. As the conversation continued, Steve pushed Emily, Kevin, and Leah to understand the teaching experience from their students' perspectives:

EMILY: But how is it possible that between the four of us, and the 40 of them in the two classes combined, they unanimously thought the lessons went well, and we unanimously thought they did not. I mean, I don't think we have such dramatically different standards for what counts as good teaching. I really don't.

STEVE: Well, try to put together, piece together the criteria you heard coming out from them about why this was good.

EMILY: It was fun.

STEVE: What features did it have—it was fun, what else?

EMILY: Students didn't have teachers hovering over them when they worked in groups.

KEVIN: It, uh, filled the whole time . . . they filled the time period.

STEVE: Even though in Emily's class, the 50 minutes got filled by students just talking in their groups.

As the conversation continued, Emily, Kevin, and Leah expressed an additional frustration: their students—future English teachers—did not seem motivated or interested in making connections between course readings and activities.

KEVIN: I guess I was thinking that students would draw on the class content when participating in the literature circles lessons. I thought they'd make use of the readings even if the instructors didn't specifically tell them to. They didn't though—they just did exactly what they were asked to do with the assignment and nothing more.

LEAH: Well, I thought so too, but they aren't really applying the course readings and discussions to their teaching. I didn't see any of that happening in Emily's section either. Did you think they were, Emily? I mean, umm, were they using course content to model their teaching after?

EMILY: You mean what I had been doing to model as a teacher or what we have been reading?

LEAH: I guess I mean either one. They don't seem to be doing either in Kevin's class, like he said and I'm not sure they are in your class. I don't know why though, maybe they are but we aren't seeing it

EMILY: Well, I think on a surface level, they were trying to implement the bare bones of literature circles, which is that the kids are in groups, they each have a role, they each have a chapter, and . . . then after you complete your task, you do it with your group . . . um, but I guess for me they missed the whole gist of literature circles which is . . . these authentic discussions, or really, I mean I guess my biggest shock was that, here they were, they have the opportunity to

discuss a piece of literature and they're all English majors . . . and they sat there, like, I mean like seventh graders, and said, "Here are my questions about the book—boom, boom, boom." They finished the task and just socialized.

LEAH: I know, they did that in Kevin's class too—the tasks assigned were the same in both sections and they responded the same in both places. It's like they all understood how literature circles were supposed to look, "did" the literature circle actions and then disengaged. They moved on to conversations about the weekend or the basketball game. As soon as the worksheet was finished they stopped talking about the book—just like my high school students.

EMILY: Right, they couldn't make the best of the situation and say, "We're supposed to be discussing this chapter." . . . It's almost like they played the part of the student too well. They were like, "Okay, we're done. What did you do this weekend?"

STEVE: Okay, so let's move on to talk now about you as teacher educators: What adjustments do you need to make?

LEAH: Well in both classes, Emily and Kevin taught—modeled, explained—literature circles, so that the students who were to be the teachers could create the lesson plan using the literature circles. But it's like they didn't understand what to do with the students or what to do to push beyond the idea of sitting in the circles.

KEVIN: I guess we didn't really explain how to use literature circles very well then.

EMILY: Or they are still acting like young kids and aren't trying to move beyond the surface.

STEVE: What do you need to review with them to help them get beyond the surface?

Lessons and How We Learned Them

The conversations in this case sparked an examination of Emily, Kevin, and Leah's assumptions about their students as learners. As a result of this mentoring session, they realized three specific assumptions they held about their students that shaped their teaching and began to interrogate and revise these assumptions.

First, Emily, Kevin, and Leah assumed that their students could easily shift between their ingrained roles as students to their new roles as teach-

ers. When analyzing lessons, the novice teacher educators assumed that their students could and would interpret the lesson from the perspective of a teacher, not a college senior. They assumed that their students would be comfortable critiquing their own and their peers' teaching attempts, much as they were used to analyzing and critiquing literary texts. The novice teacher educators overlooked the overwhelming force that the evaluative, grade-driven culture of schooling has on college students' participation and motivation in their classes. Their preservice teachers were still students, acting in the best interest of their grades and their egos. They saw the teaching episodes as a performance to be graded, not as a practice opportunity to explore and learn about teaching.

Also in this case, Emily wondered whether or not the problem stemmed from different ideas about good teaching. Their students' evaluation of the literature circles lesson relied entirely on a student's point of view. For students, a successful lesson using literature circles is one in which they have fun, one that fills the whole hour, and one that allows students to talk without the teacher hovering over them. By contrast, Emily, Kevin, and Leah expected their students to see the lesson as *they* did—as teachers do—and to see the lack of learning and coherence in the lesson. As teacher educators, Emily, Kevin, and Leah needed to help their students learn to see teaching through the lens of a teacher, not just from the perspective of a student.

Second, the novice teacher educators deepened their understanding of how their students as learners were both similar to and different from the secondary school students they themselves used to teach. As teacher educators, Emily, Kevin, and Leah had underestimated the needs of their teacher candidates as learners who needed scaffolded experiences to help them to learn how to teach (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996). Emily, Kevin, and Leah thought they knew what their students needed to learn how to teach—content knowledge and theory related to teaching language, writing, and literature—but did not realize that they needed to learn *how* to learn from teaching. As students of teaching, the preservice teachers needed to learn how to analyze teaching episodes and how to ask questions about teaching and learning. Emily, Kevin, and Leah assumed that their students could raise questions about teaching and planning based on what they experienced as “students” in their peers' 50-minute lessons and as “teachers” designing the lessons. Emily, Kevin, and Leah also assumed that their students could translate issues of lesson coherence into questions about practice. These assumptions, again, proved wrong.

Finally, the novice teacher educators in this case assumed that their students possessed an inherent motivation to discuss and engage in teach-

ing activities. They presumed that, as future English teachers, their students would willingly and excitedly engage in learning, push instructors and peers to maximize class time, and demonstrate independent thinking. Many students, however, treated the teacher education courses as obstacles to overcome prior to graduation and entry into “real classrooms.” In many ways, their reactions were similar to high school students’ responses to “school work.” Thus, it would have been easy for Emily, Kevin, and Leah to begin to position either themselves as not capable or their students as poorly motivated or of low ability. The mentoring sessions kept both of these issues in perspective: that the instructors had good skills but needed to refine their understanding of how to use them effectively in the teacher education context and that their students would respond as students—not experienced teachers—unless the novice teacher educators designed experiences and provided support to help them make this transition.

Observations on Mentoring and Professional Development

The literature on teacher induction cites mentoring as a key component of new teachers’ learning and survival; from our experiences, we now recognize mentoring as just as important in the preparation of beginning English teacher educators as it is in the preparation of beginning K-12 teachers. According to this literature, successful mentoring relies on a number of factors:

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from mentors guiding novices to reflect on and learn from their teaching experiences (Boreen et al., 2000) to setting an “affective and intellectual tone” for their work with novices in order to shape what novice teachers learn (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987, p. 285; Ganser, 1996). This literature also emphasizes the importance of having an experienced teacher to

assist novice teachers in “contextualized practical experiences” (Brooks, 1997) since, as practitioners themselves, mentors are familiar with the problems of practice new teachers face.

In addition to fulfilling those factors, our mentoring sessions also provided an example of the enactment of professional development in English teacher education. Ball and Cohen (1999) criticize traditional professional development opportunities for teachers as being “intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented, and non-cumulative” (p. 4; Cohen & Hill, 1997; Little, 1994). Effective professional development, Ball and Cohen argue, must focus on teachers’ learn-

ing about curriculum, students, and teaching; and they offer several criteria for making judgments about effective professional learning for teachers, all of which apply in assessing our mentoring sessions.

First, Ball and Cohen assert that professional learning should be situated in critical activities and artifacts of teaching—students' work, videotapes of teaching, and lesson plans. Our mentoring sessions drew upon such artifacts as Emily and Kevin's teaching and was "the object of continuing, thoughtful inquiry" (p. 6). The problems, questions, and frustrations Emily, Kevin, and Leah discussed drew directly from their teaching experiences in each week's lessons. In the first case, Emily, Kevin, and Leah assessed their own understanding of the uses of reader-response theory in the teaching of English through their exploration of Kevin's journal reflection on a student's attempt to enact elements of the theory through his teaching. In the second case, they investigated their assumptions about their students as learners by reflecting on particular methods class lessons where students resisted critique of their teaching. Throughout the mentoring sessions, Steve's prompts and questions helped the three novices to look carefully at and learn from artifacts from class sessions, to unearth their assumptions, to identify holes in their knowledge for teaching, and to better understand their students. In his role as mentor, Steve kept Emily, Kevin, and Leah engaged in the difficult issues of practice while attending to but not hiding behind lofty theories and buzzwords. Moreover, because Emily and Kevin taught from a common syllabus and because either Steve or Leah observed and/or assisted in classes each week, our conversations could focus on immediate issues of practice by discussing "commonly accessible referents" (p. 24). Though Ball and Cohen argue that this immediacy can detract from learning due to a focus on our immediate needs and stresses, it proved in our case to be an important resource and development opportunity.

Second, Ball and Cohen (1999) argue that effective professional learning requires opportunities for teachers to learn how to carry out the investigation, analysis, and critique of these artifacts of teaching, echoing what the CEE Commission described as opportunities to "examine, through reflection and analysis, acts of teaching and principles of learning" (Young, 2000). As a more experienced teacher educator, Steve's questions during the mentoring sessions, supported by his and Leah's observations and Emily and Kevin's notes and reactions, allowed the novice teacher educators to stand back from and analyze their teaching in the two methods class sections. His perspectives and opinions as a more experienced and knowledgeable peer ultimately helped Emily, Kevin, and Leah to understand their lessons from both their students' perspectives as well as from the larger

themes of teacher preparation and English pedagogy. This helped them to distance themselves from their teaching in ways that enabled them to move beyond a preoccupation with their individual attempts (or failures) and to use their teaching as a context for all of their learning. Opening practice to the group for analysis and discussion made what is typically a private process of trial and error “a more publicly deliberative process of inquiry and experiment” (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 19). Emily, Kevin, and Leah often left the mentoring sessions with new understandings that helped them to navigate future situations.

Third, Ball and Cohen emphasize that professional learning opportunities must be cumulative, vivid, and immediate, allowing teachers ongoing opportunities among a community of learners to investigate their own and others’ practices. The immediacy and continuity of the mentoring sessions gave all of us time to develop as a community of learners and create a safe space and discourse for sharing our observations, reactions, fears, and

questions. This space allowed Emily, Kevin, and Leah to share their mistakes and “stutter”—literally and figuratively—as they learned to talk about their practice. Through the mentoring sessions, the novice teacher educators assigned words and meanings to events in their classes that were difficult to articulate. As a group, we began to develop a “discourse of practice” that focused on assumptions, questions, and alternative conjectures (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 17).

Taken together, the cases above remind us that being a good English teacher does not translate directly into being an effective English teacher educator. They highlight differences between our knowledge and experience in the teaching of English in school settings and the

knowledge and understanding that we need to be effective teacher educators. As beginning English educators, Emily and Kevin designed this methods course by drawing on their knowledge of adolescents, their English education subject matter understanding, their understanding of current emphases in research and theory as applied to English instruction, and their experiences and “preconceptions” of what a methods class was and needed to be. The mentoring sessions then played a central role in helping Emily, Kevin, and Leah to unearth assumptions about curriculum and students in a methods course and strengthen their understanding of issues and prac-

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tices in the teaching of beginning teachers. In effect, the sessions engaged us all in a dialectic, reflecting reasoned thought about our practice, as called for in the CEE Commission guidelines (Young, 2000).

Although the focus of our study is on Emily, Kevin, and Leah's learning and development as novice teacher educators, we should note that the mentoring sessions were equally generative and instructive for Steve. For example, he learned how to probe more effectively Emily, Kevin, and Leah's thinking with brief, concise questions. At the beginning of the semester, Steve often felt compelled to contextualize every question, to account for any and every situation. But over a semester of conversations together, Steve learned that what Emily, Kevin, and Leah needed most was space to think, reflect, and share. In fact, the process afforded Steve himself space to think about and discuss issues of teacher education more broadly. Although Steve had mentored numerous graduate students and beginning faculty over the years, our mentoring arrangement, one situated in actual practice, taught Steve new ways to think about the induction of novice teacher educators.

While the mentoring sessions described here were unique to a particular situation and not part of a formal program of graduate student support such as the PPP initiatives, the Syracuse University Future Professoriate Project, and LSU's Graduate Teaching Assistant Mentor Program, they are an example of the type of learning that prospective English teacher educators need to have, whether these occur in formal programs or because of the commitments of individual faculty. Of central concern is not the formality of the program, but that the experience occurs and reflects practice indicative of the qualities of effective mentoring and professional development.

However, we also recognize the tenuousness of initiatives that rest solely on the good will and commitments of individuals. While the mentoring experience was extremely valuable in this case, it was not part of an institutional initiative and, as such, was an extremely resource- and time-intensive undertaking. Happily, since our experience, the department's desire for consistency in the opportunities for graduate teaching assistants and concerns for issues of equity of load and recognition of effort have led to the initiation of a more formalized approach to the mentoring of beginning doctoral students; new graduate students and graduate students taking on new teaching responsibilities must now enroll in a College Teaching Practicum, with separate sections for students who are going to be teaching different subject area methods courses or foundational courses or doing field instruction. By design, these practicum courses capture the quality of the mentoring sessions described above. Students in small groups work with an experienced faculty member in the specialized area on a regular basis

throughout the academic year. Peer and faculty observations complement formal sessions, which meet bi-weekly for 1-2 hours. The curriculum focuses on the teaching assistants' syllabi, observations of classroom teaching, and student artifacts. Together, these experiences afford opportunities for analysis and discussion of theory and practice in teacher education under the guidance of a faculty mentor. The environment is supportive rather than evaluative, with an emphasis on inquiry into practice rather than the affirmation of selected predetermined approaches.

The CEE Commission on the Preparation of English Teacher Educators set ambitious expectations for advanced degree programs engaged in preparing English teacher educators. Providing good mentoring experiences for beginning teacher educators is vital if we are to meet those expectations.

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2003 CEE Election Results

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