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DARLING-HAMMOND, L. & J. BARATZ-SNOWDEN. (2005). A GOOD TEACHER IN EVERY CLASSROOM: PREPARING THE HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS OUR CHILDREN DESERVE. SAN FRANCISCO, CA: JOHN WILEY & SONS.

Andrea Bien

A Good Teacher in Every Classroom is, essentially, a blueprint. It aims to outline what new teachers must know not only to ensure success in their first years of teaching, but also to expedite the progression from neophyte to seasoned professional. Co-editors Joan Baratz-Snowden and Linda Darling-Hammond posit that a higher level of preparation can not only contribute to better instruction in the short and long terms, but could serve to combat the high rate of attrition which currently plagues the profession. Proper training of our teachers is integral to securing the future of education and this volume offers solid recommendations for codifying such training.

A Good Teacher in Every Classroom is organized into four chapters: what new teachers must know upon entering the first year of teaching (Chapter 1), how this knowledge can be acquired (Chapter 2), the implications of such preparedness in the classroom (Chapter 3) and the effect of public education policy on the education and licensure of new teachers (Chapter 4).

As a recent graduate of a university-based teacher education program, this book served as a veritable checklist for me, in many ways. Readers of this book should not, however, be limited to new teachers. The expressed purpose of this report is to offer a coherent set of the core ideas new educators should understand about effective teaching. Baratz-Snowden and Darling-Hammond assert that these basic ideas are 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” (p. 3). While new teachers may be an aptly chosen primary audience, it is equally important that such information find its way into the hands of teacher educators, such as: administrators, superintendents and other school faculty working in leadership roles; personnel responsible for recruiting and hiring new teachers; and the policy makers at both state and federal levels who determine the licensing and entry requirements for teachers joining the field.

This book’s recommendations are intended to provide a means of ensuring that our children’s teachers are qualified beyond the most elemental definition of the word. In order to achieve the highest level of success that compliance with these proposed ideas can potentially deliver, everyone who impacts the field - no matter what level - must work together.

A Good Teacher in Every Classroom is a synthesis of information gleaned from extensive research. This research has determined that in order to achieve success a beginning teacher must possess an understanding of three things: learners, subject matter and teaching. While it may be accurate, such a list is deceptively simple. Perhaps the assumption that effective teaching only requires understanding of a few basic ideas contributes to the common misconception that teaching is easy. The complexity and interdependence of the three elements of learners, subject matter, and teaching are often underestimated. Well-prepared new teachers may not have the depth of understanding they will come to acquire with experience, but they will, at the very least, be cognizant that such complexities exist.

As the book conveys, the topics of learners, subject matter and teaching are broad. It expounds upon each of these general terms which serves to illustrate just how deep the requisite knowledge is. The spectrum of knowledge necessary to be truly effective as an educator is staggering.

Throughout Chapter 1, a real understanding of *learners* is defined, more specifically, as understanding language, the processes by which we learn and how the stages of human development affect these processes. It is also essential for teachers to know how to capitalize on the students’ personal experiences and cultural backgrounds in order to create opportunities for them to make connections with curricular content.

A real understanding of *subject matter*, as it relates to teaching, transcends mastery of content. It also encompasses a teacher’s ability to make decisions about what to teach and why. More than identifying the key concepts within a subject area, there is a need for teachers to know how such concepts are relative to their students’ lives and how they correlate with the concepts emphasized in national, state and local standards.

A real understanding of *teaching* includes knowledge of content-specific pedagogies, classroom management strategies, techniques for teaching to diverse learners and approaches for creating and using assessment. And while this does begin to offer a clearer definition of what is meant by “an understanding of teaching”, terms such as classroom management and diverse learners can also - and in this volume are, to a degree - broken down into even more specific definitions. The book suggests that all of this must be understood in order to be effectual as a teacher. This is no small task.

Chapters 2 and 3 seek to answer the question: How does a prospective teacher gain this vast knowledge base, as well as the critical thinking skills necessary to interweave the knowledge once it is acquired? This volume offers a clear formula. Teacher education programs (and even mentoring programs) must offer beginning teachers “consistent opportunities to apply what they are learning, analyze what happens and adjust their efforts accordingly” (p. 31). If teacher educators and model mentors commit to providing prospective teachers with this type of preparation - preparation that is designed to provide educators with exactly the skills and knowledge research shows they must have – we will find an entire generation of well-equipped teachers with long-standing careers.

Ultimately, all of the research and recommendations focus on a common goal: providing our students with the highest level of education we are able to offer them. The tenets in *A Good Teacher in Every Classroom* are not proposed as a means to enable new teachers to merely “get by.” They are designed with an intention to provide the next generation of educators with a foundation that not only makes them more comfortable once they assume the role of teacher, but allows them to be optimally effective inside the classroom.

While factors of policy and school conditions are addressed in Chapter 4, at the heart of this book is the belief that providing prospective teachers with adequate preparation can help combat some of public schools’ shortcomings. “If the American public education is to meet the aspirations this nation has assigned to it, the preparation of excellent teachers is the central commitment without which other reforms are unlikely to succeed” (p. 69).

“At least 30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years of entry” (p. 53). While the factors which contribute to this loss are varied and many, it is conceivable that inferior preparation, as the book suggests, is largely responsible. Inconsistencies and, in some cases, inferiorities among teacher education programs leave new teachers unequipped to handle the complexities of teaching. Let the ideas prescribed in this volume be a key to preparing and retaining a generation of teachers who will best serve our children.

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