

## INTRODUCTION: THE JOURNEY TO TEACH

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Many years ago, John Westerhoff, a theologian and professor of divinity at Duke University, joined a group of teachers and teacher educators at Teachers College, Columbia University to shape a retreat for beginning teachers. In his work with us, Westerhoff asked us to think of the work we were about to embark on as a pilgrimage. Our job, he said, was not only to get the new teachers started but also to be their guides along the way. In other words, we were to travel with them. We were not to point and say, "Your destination is over there." We were not to say, "I've got everything you will need in this backpack, and all the necessary tools are labeled so you'll know exactly when to use them." No. We were to travel with them. We'd been on the route before, so the idea he used with us was that we were to guide but from the side, being willing to take detours when it seemed necessary but also to simply stop with our groups of pilgrims, gather more supplies, and then move forward. The goal of the pilgrimage, he cautioned, did not always look the same to everyone and might even look different to those of us who thought we'd been there before. The way we'd know we had gotten our pilgrims to the goal would lie in the way they were greeted on arrival and on their perception that they had gotten to the goal! Westerhoff's analogy was both exhilarating and scary. Quests can be fun but uncertain quests such as the one he described? Perhaps, not for everyone.

For a variety of reasons, the thrill and uncertainty of this long ago experience came to me as I read through the various papers that make up this issue of *Perspectives on Urban Education*. First was the boldness of vision and clear excitement that these papers hold for teacher educators about, for example, new ways of construing relationships with the field as both Mindy Kalchman and Katrina Bartow Jacobs posit or about ways of using humor to get beneath the surface of cultural understandings as Ellie Fits Fulmar, Nia Nunn Makepeace and their colleagues suggest. Second was the very clear focus on the urban landscape—not just on schools and teacher education, though both are critical to every one of these papers. What makes these urban-focused papers so compelling is the confident assumption that there must be a firm commitment to the journey and toward an expanded vision of the destination. This expanded vision must include what Ramon Goings and his colleagues describe as the "layered perspectives" of researchers, educators, and community members on how to better support Black boys. As well, this expanded vision must also be informed by a willingness to look deeply and broadly at the landscape of urban schooling and not to treat this complex work with what Rowan Machalow, in her review of *American school reform: What works, what fails, and why* by MacDonald and colleagues, describes as the "typical level of remove between policy and implementation" that so often describes urban schooling.

A third reason for my enthusiasm has to do with the thoughtful examination of practice that many of these articles embrace, for it is there, in practice itself, that the work of becoming a teacher, of teaching itself, is realized. Marga Madhuri and colleagues' description of using literacy circles to deepen understandings of students and their worlds and Amanda Cottone's review of Douglas Larkin's new book: *Deep knowledge: Learning to teach science for understanding and equity*—these provide a close look at practice that pushes each of us who teach to really look to see if we are "making the match" for each of our students. Are we working in ways that enable each to succeed or, to get back to the notion of pilgrimage, to reach their goals? Equity requires this of us as teachers and teacher educators.

Each prospective teacher and each teacher educator who reads these papers will come to them with different visions of the landscape that they are in; each will take away different understandings of what they read; each will find material here to help them make the journey toward their goal more educational, thoughtful, and just. The difficult part of the business of putting out a journal issue like this one is that we don't know whom it will impact or where it will lead. So, the analogy of pilgrimage becomes particularly helpful.

If we conceive of learning to teach as a life long pursuit that begins long before individuals come to teacher education and continues long after they leave, then we can look at this issue of *Perspectives on Urban Education* as a powerful support for the journey. Conceived in this way makes it possible, even highly likely, that an individual might stop along the way and shift positions as Daniel LaSalle in his essay, *When a teacher switches schools*, describes doing. The pilgrim does not travel a straight line from the beginning of the journey to the end.

This last point brings us to the notion of guidance during the journey. Just as there is no direct route to becoming what Berliner (1988) describes as the "expert" teacher, there can be no one time period or place or set of courses that can be called "teacher education." Simply put, if we are to consider the work of becoming a teacher as a journey over a professional lifetime, we have to understand that what currently counts as teacher education is actually a way-station—one of many—in a long journey in which many individuals, lessons, and experiences will combine to move each teacher toward wisdom.

For teacher educators acting as guides for the new teacher, the common charge must be to accompany to the best of our ability and to learn from one another as we do so. This is likely to mean developing new conversations and deepening current ones so that there is congruence between the academy, the school, and the community. It will always require what Grossman and her colleagues (2009) describe as essential for every professional: Our students have to see models of practice, i.e., “representations” of practice. They have to be able to take practice apart, analyze it, think aloud about it, i.e., “decomposition.” Finally, they have to be able to engage in “approximations” of practice, i.e., they have to be able to try on their own, make mistakes, learn. Trusted others, guides, are critical in this process, and guidance of this sort is what Daniel LaSalle missed and what only sometimes was present in the field settings that Mindy Kalchman and Katrina Bartow Jacobs studied.

However, there is more to say about guidance on this journey. Remember, it is about staying with. Do preservice educators need to continue with? For how long? Dewey (1938) writes about good teachers being those who can apprehend the “soul life” of the classroom. What the studies and essays in this issue of *Perspectives on Urban Education* make clear is that if we want schools where teachers are so finely tuned to children’s ways of knowing as Ramon Goings and his colleagues would have them be; if we want schools to be places where beginners can engage with their students in ways that are supportive of their capacity for knowledge building and respectful of their cultural competence; if we want teachers to stay and become great and change the quality of practice—if we want all of this, what is introduced at the beginning of the journey has to be supported throughout. This means that somehow those who begin the journey with new teachers have to help them find new way-stations and new mentors—something like Madhuri and colleagues’ literature circles or the network of experienced others implied by Goings and colleagues’ “layered perspectives,” or the thoughtful work in science that Amanda Cottone’s review gives us a glimpse of. In so many ways, this particular issue of *Perspectives on Urban Education* expands our understanding of teacher education to encompass the individual and collective journey that is implied in learning to teach.

#### **References:**

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