

STEP Renewal

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History and Context

The context of renewal efforts in the Secondary TEP was not one in which most faculty considered the program to be in need of major change. Secondary faculty have historically considered their program to be of very high quality, and there are a variety of data which can be easily used to substantiate that view. The program enjoys a strong reputation in the Puget Sound area, the Northwest, and nationally for preparing secondary teachers which have unusually strong subject matter competence. Graduates very often ascend to leadership positions in their schools and districts. The program is usually listed among the top ten in the country in the U.S. News and World Report rankings. In short, this is not a program which engaged the prospects of a major overhaul out of any sense of disarray or failure. Program faculty and staff are justifiably proud of what they have accomplished.

Given this history, renewal efforts in the secondary program could not be sensibly (or appropriately) undertaken from a “deficit” view. We chose instead to begin the process with an inquiry orientation—asking ourselves what we really knew (empirically) about what students were taking up from their experiences in the program and successfully enacting in their teaching practice. Several pre-TNE inquiry activities, most notably the study of TEP graduates teaching in urban schools undertaken by Gene Edgar, Manka Varghese, Anita Lenges and Sue Feldman in 2003, as well as the video produced by TEP students of color, raised a number of new perspectives on the program. However, the most compelling “news” about the secondary program came from the Nolen, Horn and Ward (2004-06) study funded by TNE. This study is clearly one of the most comprehensive and in depth ethnographic accounts of learning in teacher education ever conducted, and its findings have challenged many assumptions about what and how students learn in TEP. One senior faculty member said this to her colleagues in a recent faculty meeting:

As you know, I was one of the major “foot draggers” on this idea of renewal—I thought the program was fine. Being a part of the study with Lani and Chris, and living in the back pocket of the students for a year—that’s made me more radical.

Program faculty have been highly responsive to these data, and in a very important sense the renewal process began immediately as they engaged a variety of issues which were made visible to them by the Nolen, et al study. In Spring Quarter of 2006, STEP program faculty and staff voted formally to undertake a substantive process of program renewal in order to pursue issues arising from the new kinds of conversations and concerns they were having

about their students learning in TEP. During the following summer, a work team comprised of faculty (including field supervisors), partner school teachers, and program graduates met to develop a set of “design principles” for renewal in STEP. During Fall quarter these were vetted with the larger STEP community, and the PEAB, and revised per their feedback. A second work group has been identified, with similar composition, to develop a formal proposal for changes in STEP structure, curriculum, and staffing. This proposal will be presented and deliberated at the Spring step Division meeting.

Lessons Learned

- Faculty satisfaction with program outcomes is maintained in part by global outcome measures that indicate that the program is well regarded, graduates are generally successful, and (generally) satisfied.
- Faculty readily initiated renewal once the need for change was made visible, and connected with their individual practice as teachers
- Richly contextualized and concrete accounts of TEP student learning (and failure to learn) were by far the most motivating data for renewal
- Some aspects of renewal are undertaken by individual faculty and staff immediately in the context of new data describing TEP student struggles in the classroom.
- Renewal processes operate at several levels of individual and collective practice, and on different cycles or “frequencies”. Many of these processes are not visible to those outside the program.

Challenges

- The TNE funding timeframe may be too short to achieve stable institutionalization of renewal processes
- sustaining renewal in the absence of systemic change in University policies which are well known barriers to faculty participation in teacher education
- sustaining faculty research initiatives in teacher education (e.g., the Nolen, et al., and Windshitl and Thompson studies) which are fueling the renewal process.