

## **Is Teacher Preparation "Broken," as Arne Duncan Asserts? How do we respond?**

By Sheila Tobias, member of ASTE and co-author,  
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Where is the evidence that "Teacher Preparation in America is broken?" (ref: Arne Duncan's Teachers College speech, October 2009)

As an organization of science teacher educators we have a right to demand "evidence" for the claims that are being loosely made that "teacher preparation in America is broken" and the counterpart claims that non-traditional alternatives, as in a five-week training of well educated recent college graduates (Teach for America), can lay the foundation for a long-term teaching career.

Why are we being set up to compete - teacher vs. teacher, school vs. school, teacher preparation program v. teacher preparation program? Such rhetoric and all the testing our students are made to endure send out the message that we (just as our students) must compete individually to succeed. Perhaps it's the language we use. "Better" vs. "Worse," "Passing" vs. "Failing." We may need new words to describe the cooperative classroom. But even more urgent is documentation that a classroom in which all students learn is our goal as teacher educators and the mark of good teaching.

Where does an individual begin to fight back on behalf of teacher educators?

I'd suggest we begin with some hard-nosed self-examination. Is the bad science teacher really the "Exception" as my bumper sticker claims? Do we have hard data as regards our graduates' long-term competence in the classroom? Ought *we* not figure out how to do this? And, related to this, are we asking our graduates (and their school supervisors) for feedback about our programs? And using that feedback to make "continuous improvement?"

What about the alternate models? Can we not collect our own data about Teach for America teachers in the schools that we supply with our own graduates? How long they stay; how well they perform. And what about the much touted "clinical" model for teacher preparation? (The one that eliminates cognitive psychology, discipline specific pedagogy, and educational foundations.) It's been tried in Indiana. Let's see how well their graduates are doing, compared to ours.

And finally, let's publicize the importance and value to future teachers of the courses we teach that are *not* taught elsewhere: courses in theories of learning and conceptual development; courses in pedagogy and instruction; courses in classroom interactions, courses, in short, that define our discipline and are not taught elsewhere.

It is not enough for us to meet NCATE standards. We have to do even better. Let's start collecting the hard evidence that proves that we do.