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# *Using Textbooks and Teachers' Guides: A Dilemma for Beginning Teachers and Teacher Educators*<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Based on data from a longitudinal study of teacher preparation conducted at a large Midwestern U.S. university, this article describes and appraises what elementary teacher education students were taught about textbooks, what they learned, and what they did with these lessons during student teaching. Although the student teachers were enrolled in two different teacher education programs, all of them developed the impression that if they wanted to be good teachers, they should avoid following textbooks and relying on teachers' guides. They believed that good teaching means creating your own lessons and materials instead. These ideas proved difficult to act on during student teaching when the student teachers worked in classrooms where textbooks formed the core of instruction and they confronted the fact that they were beginning teachers lacking knowledge, skill, and experience.

This article points out that deciding what to teach beginning teachers about textbooks poses a significant dilemma for teacher educators. Although many textbooks have weaknesses, student teachers lack the knowledge and experience needed to develop their own curriculum. The authors argue that, rather than telling novices not to "teach by the book," teacher educators should consider contextual constraints and the limits of beginners' knowledge and skills and teach beginning elementary teachers how to learn from using published curricular materials.

## INTRODUCTION

The textbook programs that dominate U.S. elementary school classrooms have been criticized for their representation of content; their implicit assumptions about teachers, students, teaching, and learning; and their social and cultural biases. In the area of reading, for example, Schmidt, Caul, Byers, and Buchmann (1984) report that the

selections in basal readers often lack substance and variety of literary form. The accompanying reading workbooks and other practice materials are badly designed, often confusing rather than helping students (Sykes, 1985); the teachers' guides contain unclear suggestions (Durkin, 1981) and a single lesson may include a large number of unconnected activities and skills (Duffy, Roehler, & Putnam, 1986).

The picture is equally dismal in the content areas. In mathematics, most textbooks generally emphasize practice in arithmetic computation at the expense of other mathematical topics such as geometry, probability, and statistics. Problem solving is often trivialized and math portrayed as a collection of algorithms to be followed. The texts in social studies and science books are frequently obscure—ironically, as a result of authors' efforts to simplify complex language to meet readability guidelines (Kantor, Anderson, & Armbruster, 1983). Science teachers' guides fail to provide teachers with necessary information about common student preconceptions and instructional strategies likely to promote appropriate student learning (Smith & Anderson, 1984). The content of social studies textbooks is shaped to meet the demands of conservative markets (Fitzgerald, 1979; Jenkinson, 1979). In all subjects, texts contain both explicit and implicit biases based on gender, ethnicity, and social class.

Despite these critiques, textbook programs dominate elementary instruction. This raises a serious issue for elementary teacher education. What should prospective elementary teachers learn about using these ubiquitous curricular materials? Should they be urged to avoid textbooks? Should they be prepared to use them since they are likely to work in schools where textbook use is mandated? What do they need to learn in order to abandon the texts or to use them wisely?

The significance of these questions was brought home to us while conducting a longitudinal study of learning to teach and the pre-service curriculum. Although we had not specifically set out to investigate these matters, the issue of textbooks and learning to teach emerged in the course of our inquiry. Sitting in on teacher education courses, we noticed that many instructors promoted the idea that good teachers do not use textbooks and teachers' guides but develop their own curriculum instead. Our student informants also articulated this view in interviews. Moreover, when we followed them into student teaching, we were struck by the difficulty they had teaching both with and without the standard textbook programs. Having uncovered this issue, we turned back to our course and interview data to examine more closely what each program had communicated about textbooks, curricular decision making, and the teacher's role. We also reexamined our student teaching data with this theme in mind.

This article presents the results of our analysis. First we address three questions:

1. What did the teacher education programs that we documented convey about textbooks, planning, and curricular decision making?
2. What did the prospective teachers in our study come to believe about the use of textbooks, about planning and curricular decision making?
3. What did these prospective teachers do with textbooks and teachers' guides during student teaching?

We conclude with a discussion of implications for the initial preparation of elementary teachers.

## METHODOLOGY

### Site and Sample Selection

We were initially interested in exploring what prospective teachers learn in preservice teacher preparation. Between 1982 and 1984, we conducted an exploratory study in which we followed six elementary education students through two different two-year undergraduate teacher education programs. The programs were part of an effort to reform teacher education. We selected them because we thought their structural and ideological differences would enhance our ability to learn about the role of formal teacher education in learning to teach.

Program A emphasized the importance of theoretical and subject matter knowledge in teaching; one of its central themes was "conceptual change" teaching and learning. At the time of our study, the program provided only limited field experience prior to student teaching. Program B emphasized generic methods of teaching and research-based decision making, and encouraged teacher candidates to become "professionals." Much of the program took place in a local elementary school where teacher candidates spent time aiding, observing, and teaching lessons.

To select our student informants, we asked the program coordinators to nominate several teacher education students who represented demographic variation and also differed in their reasons for entering teaching. We then compared these students' responses with those of other teacher education students on a survey administered by the College of Education, and selected our six informants to be generally representative of the overall population. All the students we selected agreed to participate. The six students were all women; two were older, returning to college after having a family. One student was black. Two had strong academic records, three appeared average, and one had a weaker academic record.

## Data Collection

In pursuing our inquiry, we collected two kinds of data: information about what the programs taught and information about how our student informants made sense of what they encountered in their programs.

### *Course observations.*

To learn about the programs, we observed and documented courses and field experiences. Each term, we selected one course or course/field experience from each program. While we tried to pick comparable courses (e.g., social studies methods, educational psychology), we also sought to document key components in each program (e.g., a curriculum course in Program A designed to be foundational in Program A that had no counterpart in Program B). We attended all class meetings, writing detailed narrative field notes about what instructors and students said and did. We also collected course syllabi, handouts, and assignments. Looking back, we wish we had interviewed the faculty whose courses we observed, but our original intent was to focus on the thinking of the teacher education students using data about courses to ground the student interviews.

### *Interviews.*

To track how our student informants were interpreting their experiences, and whether and how their ideas about teaching were changing, we interviewed the students four times each year, using semistructured interviews. We asked them questions about what they were learning and doing, and we developed particular probes and questions based on what we were observing in their courses. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

### *Student teaching observations and interviews.*

In addition, we followed the students closely during student teaching, observing their work with pupils as well as their conversations with cooperating teachers and university supervisors. We interviewed the students informally throughout the term. Because student teaching is often regarded as the most potent component of preservice teacher preparation, we wanted to learn how this experience unfolded for each of our informants.

## Data Analysis

We conducted various analyses of these data, sometimes pursuing our original questions, other times focusing on emergent themes like the issue of textbooks and learning to teach. Below we describe how we worked with course field notes, interviews with our student informants, and the student teaching field notes and interviews in conducting our analysis of this issue.

First, we developed a set of analytic questions with which to examine the data, beginning with questions logically connected to curriculum, curricular planning, and learning to teach. Our concurrent review of empirical and conceptual work on curricular materials, curricular decision making, and teacher education informed that task as well as our familiarity with the programs we had been documenting. The questions, grouped under four headings, served as a framework for scrutinizing what each program taught, what the student teaching experiences conveyed, and what sense our student informants made of what they encountered:

1. *The nature of textbooks and other curricular materials:* How were textbooks portrayed? What are they good for or not good for? Were students encouraged to evaluate curricular materials and on what bases (e.g., the text's implicit conception of learning, content coverage and representation, bias, the appropriateness of the material for the intended age group)?

2. *Curricular decision making: the teacher's role, other influences on curriculum:* What should be taught and how should it be taught? Who should decide? Are teachers supposed to decide what to teach? If so, how should they decide? Are they supposed to "adapt" what is in the text or the curriculum guide and, if so, what does "adapt" mean? What else influences the curriculum and how should teachers respond to external policies or pressures (e.g., district curriculum guidelines, testing, state competency objectives, federal legislation, colleagues, principals, parents)?

3. *Planning:* What does teacher planning entail? What is the role of the textbook, teacher's guide, or other curriculum materials in teacher planning?

4. *Practical experiences:* What kinds of experiences did the students have with curricular materials and curricular decision making? How were these experiences structured? What kinds of experiences did the teacher candidates have in planning, either in courses or field experiences? Did the prospective teachers have opportunities to develop curriculum or "adapt" materials? How were these practical experiences guided and evaluated?

In examining the course and student teaching data, we looked for explicit statements about textbooks and planning as well as messages implied by particular assignments. We also identified and analyzed

opportunities that students had to plan or work with curricular materials (e.g., critiquing textbooks, constructing units, teaching reading lessons). Our informal and formal interviews with the student teachers helped us understand how they were thinking about textbooks, planning, and teaching.

## WHAT DID THE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS TEACH ABOUT TEXTBOOKS AND TEACHING?

In this section we describe the messages of each program and analyze two class assignments in detail. Our analyses show how both programs communicated the same mandate but for different reasons and in different ways. Table 1 provides a course by course summary of the recurring themes in each program.

TABLE 1/Summary of Program Messages About Textbooks and Teaching Across Three Courses

PROGRAM A
1) <i>Educational psychology</i> : To help students acquire disciplinary knowledge, teachers must determine what to teach and how to teach it. Teachers need a solid grasp of the subjects they teach as well as an understanding of how individuals construct knowledge.
2) <i>Curriculum</i> : Teachers' theories of learning drive their curricular decisions; textbooks are but one of several sources of information for teachers. A critical examination of textbooks often reveals that they are deficient and inadequate to help students learn.
3) <i>Science methods</i> : Good teachers teach for conceptual change in their students. Science textbooks can provide the teacher with helpful information about activities and content, but not about student thinking or misconceptions.
PROGRAM B
1) <i>Educational psychology</i> : Making decisions and planning are central tasks of teaching. Good teachers proceed systematically, using scientifically verified principles from psychology as well as their own experience.
2) <i>Reading methods/field No. 1</i> : Basal reading programs are one of a range of optional instructional tools for teachers, but professional teachers make decisions themselves about what they should teach and how they should teach it; they don't follow teachers' guides.
3) <i>Reading methods/field No. 2</i> : Textbooks must be enriched and extended. Good teachers do not inundate students with dittoes and workbook pages; they spend time developing their own plans and activities for children.

### Program A: "Using Textbooks as Resources But Don't Follow Them"

Program A was driven by a view of learning focused on student thinking. Instructors promoted a model of teaching in which teachers

focus on student thinking and teach for understanding—referred to in the program as “conceptual change teaching.” According to this view, teachers should identify and seek to change students’ naive conceptions about subject matter. To produce this kind of learning, teachers, not teachers’ guides, must be responsible for decisions about what to teach and how to teach particular students. In addition, several instructors emphasized the flaws of textbook programs in particular content areas (e.g., science, reading).

*A view of meaningful subject matter teaching and learning.*

In the educational psychology course, students were told that teachers need a “solid grasp” of subject matter and an understanding of the central concepts in a discipline and the relationships among them in order to help their pupils learn. Textbooks, said the instructor, may not fit the teacher’s goals or theories of learning. Furthermore, a teacher may not like the way a textbook treats a particular topic or may not think that everything in the book is equally important to learn. Teachers should use textbooks only to get ideas or activities that fit what they are trying to do. To help their students learn the important ideas in the disciplines, teachers often develop their own units, lessons, and materials.

*The deficiencies of textbooks.* Several instructors in Program A were explicitly critical of textbooks and teachers’ guides. These criticisms fit with this program’s view of meaningful learning. For example, in the reading methods course, the instructor advocated a whole language approach to reading instruction and spoke against basal readers for their emphasis on phonics and word identification skills. In discussing different perspectives on learning, the curriculum course instructor, a science educator and an intellectual leader in the program, told the teacher education students that science texts are often based on an “additive” view of learning: they focus on “filling up” students with knowledge, without attention to how students learn or what their misconceptions might be.

Overall, Program A students got the message that textbooks had serious deficiencies. They should not rely on teachers’ guides, but use them only as resources. All of our student informants echoed these views in their interviews with us as the following quotes illustrate:

They said, um, don’t rely so much on the textbook, just go out and do your own things and experiment . . . (Linda)

[I understand] that I should get away from the basal as much as possible . . . (Danielle)

I keep hearing this over and over again—get away from the textbooks, you know, the textbooks are just a tool . . . the actual teaching comes from up here (taps her forehead) from *you*. (Janice)



*Task: Critiquing textbooks.*

Students in Program A did two textbook critiques, in the curriculum course during the first year and in science methods the following year. These assignments reinforced the program's message that textbooks are an inadequate basis for good teaching.

The curriculum course, taught in the second term of the program, focused on how teachers' theories of learning shape the way they plan, use textbooks, and teach. The instructor wanted students to explore alternative theories of learning and their implications for teaching, and to recognize the value of the conceptual change perspective. For the textbook critique, the students were supposed to select a textbook in their primary subject area, examine one section of the teacher's guide, and decide whether the text was appropriate for elementary pupils. The instructor told them to consider two things: 1) the content, in terms of its importance and usefulness to students ("Does the text emphasize less important content at the expense of basic or more important ideas?"); and 2) the text's "comprehensibility" ("Will your students understand the text? What difficulties might they experience?"). The teacher candidates were also supposed to examine the information provided for the teacher, looking to see whether the teacher's guide contained the information about content and students that they would need to do a good job of teaching.

In order to illustrate how students construed this assignment, we discuss the way Danielle, one of our student informants, carried it out. To do this we have used her actual course papers and revisions, including instructor comments, as well as her interviews with us. Danielle examined a second grade science textbook and decided that the "activity-centered instructional approach" was appropriate since "children at this level require concrete operations in problem-manipulation" to learn science skills. She did not comment on the appropriateness or importance of the science content included in the textbook, but especially liked the amount of information provided for the teacher (e.g., lists of required materials, instructions for setting up the equipment, details on advance preparation, suggested dialogue for the teacher to stimulate student interest and initiate the activity). Danielle concluded that this science textbook was "a very valuable tool," and that the individual teacher's own "personality and experience" would guide him or her in using the text effectively "in order for meaningful learning to occur." Danielle's references to the textbook as "tool" and to "meaningful learning" suggest that she was already picking up some of the language and ideas of her program.

Usually a top student, Danielle was shocked when she received a "C" on the textbook critique. In the margins of her paper, the instructor challenged her claims about "children at this level." He

directed her to reconsider the information provided for teachers (“Is there any discussion of possible incorrect student responses?”) and to think about what she would need to know to adapt the textbook effectively.

In order to improve her grade, Danielle revised her textbook critique and turned it in two weeks later. During this time period, the instructor introduced conceptual change learning and Danielle used this perspective to reformulate her evaluation of the text. In particular, she revised her appraisal of the teacher’s guide, suggesting that it should include a section on student misconceptions. She told us that although she had redone the paper, she still didn’t know whether she was “on the right track or not.” Danielle’s revision earned her an “A” and the comment, “You’re right on target!”

This assignment taught Danielle that she had been looking at textbooks in the “wrong” way: that they may not be as good as they appear. In an interview at the end of that term, she reflected on the textbook critique assignment:

The first time I turned it in, I thought it was right, but it wasn’t. And then I did it over again and I learned something I didn’t even want to learn, because I was so firm in my belief that the textbook was good that I didn’t even *want* to know any different.

In science methods a year later, Program A students were again assigned to critique textbooks. This time they were supposed to select a science text at a grade level they were interested in teaching and examine three sections in both the text and the teacher’s guide. The instructor gave them a set of questions as a framework:

1. What are the goals of this textbook in terms of science learning? Is it focused most on scientific skills, correct explanations and facts, or the structure of science?
2. What style of teaching (activity driven, conceptual change, didactic, discovery) is advocated?
3. How well are the activities of the text designed to promote assimilative and accommodative learning?
4. How much of the information that teachers need about content, students, teaching methods, and materials is supplied in the teacher’s guide?

He also asked students to pretend they were teaching in a district where this was the adopted text and to describe how they would use it, taking advantage of its strengths and compensating for its weaknesses.

The instructor told us that the students’ responses revealed some important changes since the first year in their perception of the task, their language, and their thinking about teaching, learning, and text-

book programs. These changes suggested that at least some of the students were beginning to look at textbooks in a pedagogically oriented way (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1986).

Danielle had examined a science textbook the year before in the curriculum course and she decided to reevaluate the same textbook for this assignment. She commented to us,

I wondered if that would be hard for me to look at the same book again, but it really just wasn't the same assignment. I was looking at it from a whole different way this time.

This was apparent in reading her paper. Although Danielle had been enthusiastic about the textbook the year before, she now no longer approved of it and she criticized the teacher's guide for not providing enough direction. She wrote:

The problem . . . is that the teacher's edition does not provide the teacher with any information concerning when the concept should be introduced if the students do not arrive at it on their own, or what questions or clues will elicit the proper response. (Or, for that matter, what the proper response *is!*) Student responses are accepted regardless of their accuracy and these responses are never clarified by the teacher or the materials.

Danielle was skeptical about whether the text would foster student learning "*at all*" because she thought it was set up to "promote assimilative learning rather than conceptual change." The criticisms in her paper were direct:

The set-up of the text makes it very easy to teach—as long as the teacher is not concerned with student learning. If she desires a simple, easy-to-follow guide that explicitly describes each activity in detail and keeps the students busy and under control, then this series is fine. However, if she wants her students to learn anything, some modifications need to occur, or a new textbook chosen.

Danielle earned an "A" on her paper. The instructor was "very pleased" with all the textbook critiques because they showed that students knew "what to look for" and "had the knowledge needed in order to do it."

Comparing Danielle's papers reveals some important ways in which her thinking changed across the year. As a beginning teacher education student, Danielle appreciated the detailed lists and notes in the teacher's guide. Her appraisal of the text was informed largely by ideas she brought with her about how young children learn. By the second year, her ideas about teaching and learning had changed. Looking at the same textbook, she now thought that the teacher's guide lacked crucial information and would be good only if the teacher was most concerned with materials. Danielle had also clearly picked up the language and perspective of conceptual change. She

noted the absence of information for the teacher about scientific concepts, unifying theories, or student preconceptions, remarking that these were "much more important than materials or methods."

Overall, the textbook critique assignments encouraged Program A students to examine textbooks from a conceptual change perspective on *learning*. The task reinforced the program's dominant theme that good teaching means paying attention to student thinking and teaching for meaningful understanding, and underscored the idea that, at best, textbooks can be a resource for teachers. The teacher candidates also developed the strong impression that they should avoid relying on textbook programs in their teaching.

### **Program B: "You Are A Professional Teacher, Deciding For Yourself"**

Program B also conveyed the idea that textbook programs should be avoided, but grounded in an ideology about *teaching* rather than a view of *learning*, as in Program A. Program B projected an image of the good teacher as a "professional" who makes systematic "data-based" decisions and determines for herself why she is doing what she does. "Text-bound teachers" who rely on teachers' guides for what to teach and how to teach it were portrayed as "mere technicians."

#### *Professional teacher planning.*

The emphasis on professional decision making was reflected in a major emphasis on planning skills, introduced in the educational psychology course. The instructor told students that he would show them the steps for making instructional decisions. He taught them formats for writing behavioral objectives, lesson plans, and instructional units.

#### *Textbooks as (optional) "tools" for professional teachers.*

Program B students were explicitly told to avoid following basal readers. In the first reading methods course, the instructor said they should not follow reading textbook programs, but could use them as a resource or "instructional tool" if they wanted to. The second reading methods course taught that basal readers, although undesirable, are often inescapable. Even though new teachers are often required to use a basal program, they should not "get into a lockstep in that basal." The instructor said that basal readers do not provide a total language arts program because they lack variety and she introduced other activities and strategies that could be used "hand in

hand" with the basal (e.g., language experience approach, individualized reading). She did not, however, explicitly teach how to integrate these activities with a basal reading program.

Program B students worked in classrooms where they saw their cooperating teachers use basal textbooks and assign many worksheets. This incongruity provoked some interesting discussion in the reading methods course about the widespread use of dittos and basals in the school where the teacher candidates were placed. One instructor commented that teachers who use a lot of dittos are "too lazy" to plan something better themselves, but did not discuss the policy context within which these teachers were working (i.e., an urban school district with a tightly prescribed curriculum). Several Program B instructors told students that the program wanted to produce teachers who were "different from the average teacher." Sarah, one of our student informants, took this message to heart, commenting that her field teacher "can't help it that she wasn't in this program."

Other Program B methods courses did not deal with textbooks at all. In math methods, the instructor showed students how to teach unusual topics such as probability, and gave them activities for teaching more conventional concepts such as place value. There was no opportunity to examine or work directly with standard math textbook programs. The same was true in the social studies methods course. Our student informants developed the impression that following textbooks and teachers' guides was not "professional" teaching, in reading or in any other subject.

*Task: Planning lessons and units.*

Program B students were required to use the generic skills and planning formats that they encountered in the educational psychology course. The program's emphasis on planning made concrete the notion that good teachers make their own decisions and do not follow teachers' guides. The students' reactions to the planning requirements reveal how they came to think about planning and textbooks.

The educational psychology instructor promised to teach the students a lot of the planning skills they would need to be a good teacher. First he showed the students a formula for writing objectives: identify terminal behaviors, conditions of assessment, and criteria for evaluation. To write a test or behavior for a given goal, he said they must be able to state things behaviorally, "A behavior can be described for any subject even if the one writing them doesn't know the subject." Objectives, he explained, can be written for any kind of knowledge (e.g., skills, facts, principles, concepts). They should be justified in terms of their importance to the learner's future social, vocational, academic, physical, or recreational needs

("Does someone need this in the real world?") and on what students at particular levels can learn (based on Piaget).

Next, the instructor presented detailed formats ("like following a recipe") for writing unit and daily lesson plans. This model of planning, he said, would help the teacher candidates think through what they were doing; "you almost can't screw [it] up." Both the unit and daily lesson formats were reproduced on forms that the teacher candidates had to use throughout their program whenever they wrote lesson plans, including in student teaching. The daily lesson format spelled out each element in detail. For example, in the *introduction* to a lesson, students were told to "list main ideas, expected outcomes, relationship to what pupils already know and can do, motivation aids, and agenda in the order you will say them to students."

Our student informants found the formats very useful in planning minilessons for their field placement classrooms. Cathy said that learning how to write lesson plans was really helpful. At first, she had no idea how to put her ideas down on paper to organize them. Once she had learned to write a lesson plan, "then bingo, my minilessons came just so well because I had something *definite* to look at."

Sarah commented that she had never realized how many decisions a teacher had to make in planning and she recited the litany, using her new vocabulary: setting objectives, determining skills, subskills, prerequisites, advanced organizers, conditions, criteria, and terminal behaviors. She felt that the formats would help her "get together what I'm thinking of, what I'm doing, and write it out" so that she would be organized for each day.

Like many other students in the program, Sarah also developed the idea that her plans had to be original: not "someone else's idea" and not from the textbook. If she tried to use someone else's unit or lesson plan, she explained, she would get "lost" because it wasn't her *own* idea.

As in Program A, students in Program B also critiqued textbooks, but from a distinctly different perspective. In educational psychology, the instructor assigned students to evaluate and revise a lesson from a textbook-based teacher's guide using the decision flow chart form he had prepared. The assignment required students to look for each element of a good lesson plan according to the model they had been taught (i.e., goal, objective, justification, pretest, motivation, mental set, demonstration, practice, and posttest) and add the elements that were missing. The instructor said not to be surprised if they found many of these components missing in teachers' guides.

Betty, one of our focal students, found this assignment especially valuable because, she said, she had never realized the deficiencies of most teachers' guides:

I was really surprised with all the fantastic materials they turn out, the publishing companies, when you really look at a unit, how many things are really

left out, how much a teacher actually has to supply that's not there. It's not written, *in all has to come from you*.

Program B students learned to fill out the planning forms and use technical vocabulary (e.g., advance organizers, terminal behavior). They also formed an impression of the kind of planning that "professional teachers" do. Sarah explained:

Planning is sitting down with a stack of notebook paper (laughs) and I know she [one of the instructors] wants you to look at the big picture first, "What do I want them to know at the end?" Okay, and then you go through and write out all these great lesson plans, the objectives and everything, and everything clearly written, all the daily lesson plans written for everything to teach . . . [The ideas] are supposed to come from your head, from other teachers, from books, so you have to research, a lot of it is books and everything, but a *lot* is from your own head . . . .

### Both Programs: "Good Teachers Don't Follow Textbooks"

Despite their structural and ideological differences, both programs explicitly communicate that textbooks should be used only as a resource, that following a textbook was an undesirable way to teach. Both programs encouraged teacher candidates to make their own decisions about content and instruction. It is interesting, though, how the bases for this message differed. In Program A, the conceptual change view of *learning* provided a rationale for avoiding textbook programs in Program A, while in Program B, the message derived from a view of professional *teaching*. Abandoning their commonsense notions about textbooks, teacher candidates in both programs came to see textbooks in terms of their program's ideology. While both programs urged teacher candidates to examine the content of the textbooks, neither program pursued a critique of the subject matter content. Nor were other critical perspectives explored, such as those focused on bias. Instructors in both programs seemed to assume that the teacher candidates knew their subjects well enough to decide what to teach and how to go about it, and that curricular and instructional decisions were to be individually made and justified. Overall, our student informants developed the strong impression that their personal ideas and knowledge were a better source of content than anything in the textbook or teacher's guide.

### WHAT DID THE TEACHER CANDIDATES DO DURING STUDENT TEACHING?

Even though I was trained to be *leery* of textbooks, I still found myself falling into that rut for a certain amount of time because I had no other alternative . . . . (Danielle)

## Confronting Textbooks in Student Teaching

During student teaching, five out of our six student informants were placed in settings with cooperating teachers who used textbooks as the core of their reading and mathematics teaching. In spite of what they had been taught in their courses, the student teachers in both programs ended up using textbook programs to teach reading, math, science, and social studies. Some student teachers felt pressed to maintain the established classroom practice. Others were simply overwhelmed by the responsibility of teaching for the entire day, and resorted to textbooks as a reasonable way to manage, or at least survive, the demands.

Just following the text presented unexpected problems for the student teachers in both programs. Some discovered that they were unprepared to use textbooks and teachers' guides to teach subject matter. Others followed the teachers' guides rather mechanically, moving through activities without really understanding what they were doing. Not sure how to adapt the textbook material appropriately, their modifications sometimes distorted the point of the lessons. The following vignettes from the student teaching experiences of students in both programs illustrate some of these reactions to textbooks and teachers' guides.

### *Going through the motions.*

Janice found planning and teaching all subjects all day long for her second grade class an overwhelming task. She relied heavily on textbooks and teachers' guides as a way of managing, although she said she felt guilty about doing so.

Janice often treated the suggested dialogues in the reading and math manual as scripts. She tried to "do *everything*" (plan, teach groups, keep track of everything, control the children), but confessed that she didn't think through or understand the lessons very thoroughly. Especially in math, Janice did not always get the point of the lesson she was trying to teach from the teacher's guide. When she said things or asked questions that were not in the teacher's guide, Janice sometimes got confused about the content. Although she managed to keep things moving along, Janice wrote in her journal, "Sometimes I just feel like I am going through some motions and I don't know what it is all about."

### *What do the teachers' guides mean?*

What an experienced kindergarten teacher might regard as sufficiently detailed, Linda, another student teacher, found confusing and insufficient. She had this to say about the math teacher's guide:



“The math lessons—they’re so *short*. It says like “Objective—to get the kids to know about representing length”—okay what’s that supposed to mean? And it says, “You will need these materials”—okay, I’ve got the materials, now what am I supposed to *do* with them? “Procedure—You will, umm, distribute the chains and they will measure their necks and see whose is longer or shorter” or something, you know. “Other suggested activities,” you know, it doesn’t tell you hardly *anything* . . . I’m not sure what they *mean* by all this stuff . . .”

Linda’s problems in understanding the teaching suggestions in the guide stemmed from insufficient knowledge about math, pedagogy, and children, not surprising for a beginner. A more experienced teacher, who understood measurement as a mathematical topic, who knew something about how kindergarteners make sense of it, and who could visualize ways of orchestrating such activities, would probably not find the teaching suggestions mysterious or underdeveloped.

### *Modifying textbook lessons.*

Trying to modify what was in the teachers’ guides turned out to be more complicated than expected. Danielle commented to one of the researchers that, in writing lesson plans for course assignments, she would routinely add a line, “Adapt for the needs of individual students.” That was a sure way to get extra points, she laughed. In student teaching, however, she realized how difficult it really was to “adapt lessons.” She observed, “In our program we were never told how to *use* the basal. We were told a basal isn’t all that great and here’s a lot of *other* things you could do.”

Janice occasionally made modifications right in the middle of her math lessons. When an idea occurred to her that seemed related to the topic at hand, she would go off on a tangent. Janice was proud of herself for doing this, because she thought it made the lesson more interesting and allowed her to put more of *herself* into her textbook teaching. Unfortunately, her lack of mathematical understanding sometimes produced misleading or incorrect digressions. One day, for example, she could not recall how to write a number sentence for “one-fourth of 100 equals 25” and finally settled on:  $\frac{1}{4} \div 100 = 25$  (instead of  $\frac{1}{4} \times 100 = 25$  or  $100 \div 4 = 25$ ).

## Getting Away From Textbooks In Student Teaching

Students in both programs came to believe that good teachers avoid textbooks and develop their own lessons and units. Some students, like Molly, said that they felt most “motivated” when they created their own curriculum, that their teaching was most “meaningful” to students when they did their own thing. Others were pushed by

their university supervisors to create their "own" lessons. The cooperating teachers also praised student teachers when they did something "creative," reinforcing the belief that departing from the textbook was desirable in and of itself. Unfortunately, when student teachers tried to plan outside of textbooks, they often revealed the limits of their own knowledge and experience.

*Getting away from the basal reader: Susan's bookmaking project.*

Around the middle of student teaching, Susan had her fourth and fifth graders make books as a way of motivating them to write stories. Following a procedure she had learned in her children's literature class, Susan spent an entire school day having students cut cardboard, iron material onto the cover, and sew the pages together. Once the books were made, Susan told the students they could write anything they wanted in their books "as long as it has an idea behind it."

While Susan was competent in the technique of bookmaking, she did not know how to structure the writing phase nor did she seem to appreciate the academic possibilities of the project. Students worked on their stories in class and at home. In her comments to students about their work, Susan only noted misspelled words; she did not discuss the students' underlying ideas. When the children were finished writing in their beautiful books, Susan felt the project was over. It did not occur to her to actually read the books, or to have the student authors read one another's books.

*"Make up your 'own' plans."*

Sarah's university program supervisors put pressure on her to do "real planning" during student teaching. By this they meant that she should write her own lesson plans, not follow the book or adopt her cooperating teacher's approaches. One supervisor told Sarah,

If Mrs. Williams [the cooperating teacher] tells you, 'Here's where we are in the book,' I want you to be able to think 'this is subtraction, and this is how I teach subtraction' . . ."

Sarah puzzled,

They always tell us, you know, don't use the textbook, but why *not*? I mean, it's *there*."

She also recognized that doing her "own" plans meant getting inside the subject matter, something she was not always well-prepared

to do. In planning a social studies unit, she reflected, "I want [the children] to understand what a "culture" is, but I am having a hard time understanding it myself . . ." It was not clear how pushing Sarah out of the textbook was supposed to help her learn to teach subject matter.

### Beginning Teaching: Trying to See the "Point of It All"

Whether student teachers used textbooks or departed from the teachers' guides to create their "own" lessons, they often did not understand the content they were teaching and did not seem to get the point of the lesson. In a few instances, however, the teaching suggestions in the teachers' guides seemed to provide a scaffold for student teachers' efforts, helping them understand more about the topic and how it is learned.<sup>4</sup> The guides showed some ways of organizing content for instruction and offered activities and questions that helped these novices know how to proceed. In these instances, the student teachers were able to get a handle on both content and pedagogy by following some of the suggestions and reflecting on what happened.

#### *Sarah: Learning to teach place value.*

Near the beginning of student teaching, Sarah's university supervisor required her to rewrite a textbook-based unit she had written on place value. The supervisor urged her to incorporate bundling sticks and chip trading to which Sarah had been exposed in her math methods class.<sup>5</sup> She told Sarah to focus on "content, not tasks."

This was hard for Sarah, who understood neither place value nor the tasks used to teach it. She observed, "I don't know math that much." Sarah incorporated bundling sticks and chip trading into her unit plan as she had been pressed to do. While this satisfied her supervisor's concern that she do her "own" planning, nothing had changed. Substituting an idea learned in a methods class for pages in a math textbook was neither more her "own" nor more focused on content. Indeed, Sarah found it very difficult to teach anything about place value using these activities. The class became loud and hard to manage and she never really got beyond teaching them how to *do* the chip trading activity. Sarah returned to the math textbook, spending over three weeks teaching place value (just ones, tens, hundreds). For the fifth graders, it was review, but for Sarah it was the first time through. At the beginning of the unit, she saw no reason for students to know that 70 meant "7 tens." "They're never going to *say* it like that," she reasoned. "If it's 74, they're going to say 'seventy-four'—not 'seven tens and four ones.'" After working

through the textbook unit on place value, Sarah felt she was beginning to understand the concept. In an informal interview, she reflected,

I had to really think about what place value *is*. Last week, if you'd asked me what place value was, I don't *know* . . . [But] like today, I thought of that example of 1263 and 2136 on the spot to get them to see about *places* . . .

She found another textbook that she thought gave better explanations of place value and regrouping than the one she had used and she described at length how she would teach place value another time, including where she would start and what questions she would ask. Not only did she seem to understand the concept better, she also had some appreciation of what was complicated about teaching and learning it. This enabled her to appraise another textbook lesson to see how it could help her. The next time, she said, "I'll understand it more and be able to teach it [place value] better, faster than this time . . ."

## A TOUGH ISSUE FOR PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

This analysis reveals a significant dilemma for preservice teacher education, a dilemma created by two separate sets of facts. On the one hand, textbooks are widely criticized for their content, their biases, and their implicit views of teaching and learning. Logically, this suggests that new teachers should not be encouraged to use them. On the other hand, many beginning teachers are hired by school districts where such textbook materials are mandated. This implies that teacher educators should prepare beginning teachers to use textbooks.

It is possible to debate alternative courses of action within this dilemma, weighing the merits and costs of each. Our study, however, introduces a third dimension, one focused on the *teacher as learner* (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). As we discovered, telling prospective teachers not to follow textbooks or teachers' guides, but to be curriculum developers who create their own plans and materials, is not enough. Elementary teacher education students typically lack in-depth knowledge of any subject area. As novice teachers, they also lack knowledge about children and are just starting to develop pedagogical orientations and skills.

Developing one's "own" plans requires a flexible understanding of the content to be learned as well as ideas about how children might be helped to learn it. This is a challenge even for highly experienced and knowledgeable teachers. Linda, overwrought at one point during student teaching, complained,

Why *shouldn't* we follow the textbook? I mean, it is helping me along and the kids are learning the things they need to be learning. I mean, if it *works*, why should you be worried about making up your own plans for every single thing?

When Susan initiated the book making unit with her fourth and fifth graders, she seemed unprepared to connect the activity of making books with ideas about literature or writing. Similarly, when Sarah tried using chip trading as an alternative to the textbook's approach to place value, she did not understand how the concrete materials connected to ideas presented in the text. Lacking in-depth background in either literature or mathematics, the two student teachers were unable to even *see* the content. Both Susan and Sarah, as beginning teachers, were enveloped by the activities at the expense of the content to be learned.

Teaching well even from a highly prescriptive curriculum is also more complicated than many seem to appreciate. Our students had trouble visualizing or understanding the numerous teaching suggestions and follow-up activities listed in the teachers' guides and adapting them to meet the needs of particular students. Linda was baffled by the kindergarten math teacher's guide; overwhelmed, Janice went through "the motions" of teaching reading by following the teacher's guide. Did Linda think about why the curriculum developers chose to have the children measure each other with plastic links as a means of learning about the concept of length? Did Janice wonder why the teacher's guide told her to ask students to predict the endings of the stories they read? When Sarah dismissed the math book's attention to expanded notation ( $74 = 7 \text{ tens} + 4 \text{ ones}$ ), she did so because she did not see the connection to an understanding of numbers. Using materials thoughtfully requires an understanding of the meaning and possible consequences of the way they are designed and what they include.

### Developing Sensible Goals for Preservice Teacher Education

Teacher educators must confront the dilemma about textbooks and learning to teach; sensible goals must combine desirable aims with a realistic perspective on what is appropriate for beginning teachers. We conclude by suggesting some areas for future discussion.

#### *Learning to justify choices.*

Whether they use textbooks or not, novice teachers need help in seeing that decisions about what to teach to which students have important consequences (Goodlad, 1984; Scheffler, 1958). Without direct instruction in these matters, such choices may be based merely on individual preferences (Cusick, 1983; Buchmann, 1986),

commonsense views of what is meaningful or "fun" (Dewey, 1938/1977; Floden & Buchmann, 1984), or stereotyped notions of what particular students "need" or "can" learn (Anyon, 1981; Brophy, 1983).

A surprising finding in our study was that neither program dealt with the policy dimension of curricular decision making. Many of the students were placed in classrooms where district policy mandated the use of particular textbook series and where curriculum was controlled through objectives and standardized testing. Still, the teacher education programs conveyed the impression that teachers should be autonomous professionals who make their own curricular decisions.

How can novices begin to develop standards for justifying their choices? What bases are appropriate for beginning teachers and which are better developed later in a teacher's career?

#### *Acquiring subject matter knowledge.*

Teachers need to understand what they are teaching, whether they use textbooks or not. The teacher educators in Programs A and B seemed to assume that the teacher candidates knew their subjects better than they actually did. What is a reasonable expectation for the subject matter expertise of an elementary teacher? How and where should prospective teachers acquire that knowledge? We were surprised at the lack of emphasis on subject matter in both programs. Is this an appropriate responsibility for teacher education? Unfortunately, prospective teachers rarely acquire in their liberal arts courses the kinds of subject matter understanding needed for teaching. Will they develop it as they teach? Should this be left to chance?

#### *Developing curricular independence.*

Can teacher education teach prospective teachers to use textbooks without making that the ultimate goal? Because teacher preparation is only a beginning, teacher educators should prepare teachers to go on learning from their teaching experience. Teachers' guides may provide a helpful scaffold for learning to think pedagogically about particular content, considering the relationship between what the teacher and students are doing and what students are supposed to be learning. This kind of thinking about ends and means is not the same as following a teacher's guide like a script. Perhaps beginning teachers can be oriented toward learning *from* teacher's guides and other curriculum materials in a way that allows them to move toward building their own units of study, units that are responsible to subject matter goals and responsive to students.

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2. The authors acknowledge Margret Buchmann, Beth Lawrence, and Karen Noordhoff Hagstrom for their valuable comments on drafts of this article, and for their assistance with data analysis.
3. Previous drafts of this article were presented at the 1986 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April 1986), and the International Study Association on Teacher Thinking (Leuven, Belgium, October 1986). An earlier version of this article also appears in R. Halkes & C. Clark (in press), *Teacher thinking and professional action*.
4. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of "instructional scaffolding" has interesting possibilities for thinking about how to help novices learn to teach. Instructional scaffolding is a process in which a novice's performance is supported in a way that enables him or her to participate in the entire task. Usually this support is provided by another, more expert, person, who initially takes more of the responsibility for completing the task(s). Gradually the beginner takes over an increasing share of the tasks until he/she is able to perform independently. Rogoff (1982) asserts that a novice learns the skills involved in an activity through exposure to the tools and procedures others have developed" (p. 160). In learning to teach, we suggest, curricular materials may be able to function in this way. See Griffin & Cole (1984), Vygotsky (1979), and Wood (1980) for further discussion of instructional scaffolding in children's learning. Ball and Noordhoff (1984) discuss the applications of this concept to teacher education.
5. Bundling sticks and chip trading are activities that are used to help young children learn fundamental concepts of place value and numeration.

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