

WHO SAID WHAT TO WHOM, HOW AND WHY? MEDIA COVERAGE OF
TEACHER PREPARATION, 2001-2002

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Since the mid-1990s teacher education has been the subject of increased scrutiny in federal and state policy arenas. In general, political debate about the quality of teacher preparation during this time may be categorized as either promoting teacher professionalization through support of increased rigorous preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2000) or the use of deregulation to increase the pool of high quality teacher candidates available to schools (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000). Decisions by the federal government to "fix" teacher education have been documented and according to Earley (2001) reflect distrust of the traditional teacher preparation process and a championing of alternative training options. However, the role of the media in influencing the teacher education policy agenda has received little examination. Kingdon (1995) has explored the broader role of the media in policy agenda setting, and Molnar (2001), as well as Hass, Molnar, & Serrano (2001) have considered the interplay between the media and education research in policy development, yet how teacher preparation is portrayed in the media has not been systematically studied. This research begins to fill that void.

According to Lasswell, (Berger, 2000), communication researchers should ask the following five questions: Who? Says what? In which channel? To whom? With what effect? These questions parallel Berger's five-point framework, which is broken into artist (originator), artwork (type of communication), medium (method of

communication), audience, and society; as well as Jakobson's model of sender, message, contact, receiver, and meaning. This study adopts a similar framework, modified as follows:

Question Application to the Study

Who?	Which paper?
Says what?	What is being said about teacher preparation?
In which channel?	News, editorial, or commentary?
To whom?	Is the audience national, regional, or local?
With what effect/meaning?	What is the "effect" of the messages? Can they be grouped by the tone of coverage, that is, are there positive, negative, or neutral trends to the articles by paper, region, or author?

Methodology

This study examined articles in local, state, regional, and national print media from August 1, 2001 to July 31, 2002. Attention was given to the type and content of articles on teacher preparation, as well as the sources cited within the articles (are teacher educators, or outside "experts" consulted). From this initial examination, articles with teacher preparation as their primary focus were further analyzed to determine if the article falls into one of the "polarized" categories highlighted above, or if the article is more genuinely "news" (neutral reporting of a story). If the story appeared polarized, an analysis of the positions identified, as well as the expert sources cited, was conducted.

Data Sources

Using Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, the full text of stories in 337 newspapers and wire services nation-wide were searched for stories containing the key words "teacher training" and "teacher preparation." The term "teacher education" was excluded from the search parameters because it resulted in too many extraneous search returns. The result was a total of 2,797 articles, many of which did not have teacher education as a primary or even secondary focus. We narrowed the number of articles to 551 by further limiting the search to articles with the one or the other of the key phrases in the headline or lead paragraph. Concerned that this smaller number of articles may have eliminated stories dedicated to teacher education, we compared results of the broader search with the more targeted search in the mid-west region and found that articles of interest had not been excluded.

Data collection on this project paralleled the school year—from August through July—and for this presentation, was limited to articles found between, August 1, 2001 - July 30, 2002. The articles generated from this search were logged into a database and coded for date, source, region, type of article, and syndication. Once logged into the system, they were read independently by the studies co-authors to evaluate their relevance as related to teacher preparation, then using a standardize scoring rubric created for this project, evaluated the content, tone, and format. An additional reader was available to help further analyze any articles that generated extreme variance in interpretations. The scoring rubric was designed using material from media monitoring organizations (Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting and the Media Research Center)

combined with findings from scholarly literature on analyzing news and other written documents. A copy of the scoring document used in this analysis is Appendix A.*

Data Analysis

Of the 551 articles ultimately analyzed, 90 contained the keywords “teacher preparation,” and 463 contained the key words “teacher training” (two articles used both phrases). “Teacher preparation” articles were much more likely to focus on university-based preservice programs, while “teacher training” generally referred to inservice training. Of the 90 articles referencing teacher preparation, 72 articles referenced preservice university based teacher preparation, three related to the preparation of substitute teachers, five dealt with teacher preparation time or space for lesson planning, two referred to the concept of preparation more broadly (preservice and inservice), six related to alternate routes (university or other), and two were miscellaneous references.

Teacher preparation articles primarily referred to university based preservice preparation, however, teacher training was much less defined. Frequently “teacher training” referred to professional development opportunities generally, with little differentiation between provider types (university, districts, or private groups) development structures (in school, district-wide, external coursework, one-shots, etc.), or content descriptors. In fact, for many articles, teacher training was left undefined, noting that funds were cut, or that training was one component that helped a school improve.

* While the scoring rubric was developed and tested prior to the large scale analysis, it proved too constraining for usage during the full data analysis and was ultimately simplified to focus on newspaper, type and focus of article, keyword and date of publication, sources cited, and general article content, however it serves as a useful reference for defining our initial perspective on this issue. Once articles were identified and coded, the content analysis was conducted by each author, and results were compared for final evaluation.

In some instances, specific newspapers used only one of the terms. For example, the Washington Post printed 16 articles using the key words “teacher training” during the study period, but no articles using the keywords teacher preparation. Within the 16 articles, teacher training was used broadly in seven articles, specific to preservice preparation in two articles, and in reference to inservice activities in the other seven articles.

Findings

Large newspapers in metropolitan areas, and specialty newspapers that focused on policy issues, tended to be more critical of teacher education than small, local or state papers.

Preliminary data analysis, conducted on the larger sample of 447 articles from the midwest, suggested that large papers with a national circulation more often report critically on teacher preparation issues than local papers which tend to focus on individual human interest stories and events highlighting activities by local individuals or schools. The analysis of a sub-sample of the midwest articles and sub-samples of articles from the southeast, western, and northeast regions yielded similar findings. That is, in all parts of the country articles from national media tended to be more polarized around teacher preparation issues than local press, which are more apt to report events without adding national policy implications and analysis. Additionally, local papers seem to have a more positive view of teachers and their preparation than do national news sources, which may not be surprising given the tendency for people to more positively evaluate local schools in comparison to schools nationally (Rose & Gallup, 2001). Two examples stand out. An article in the policy-focused California Journal (published by StateNet, a

legislative tracking service) highlighted alternate routes into teaching in California, and used as sources the market-oriented Reason Public Policy Institute, and the National Center for Education Information (a private group that supports alternative certification programs). The only education officials quoted in the report were the marketing director for CalState Teach and a district official involved with another alternate route program. As another example, a 1462 word article in the *Washington Post* in June 2002 carried the headline “Non-English Speakers Neglected, Weast Says; New Report Faults Teacher Training.” The article reports on a study of Montgomery County Maryland schools indicating insufficient attention is being given to the learning needs of children who are not English first speakers. Lack of initial preparation to work with these populations and professional development for county teachers were identified as shortcomings. Although Montgomery is one of the largest counties in Maryland, there was no reference to this report in the state or local Maryland papers.

Articles on teacher education were, for the most part, positive.

The timeframe for this study included the first reporting by colleges and universities of their Title II, teacher licensure pass rates required by the U.S. Department of Education. We speculated that local, state, and national press would use publication of Title II data to criticize institutions that did not have high pass rates. Although the press reported low institutional pass rates in approximately 10 percent of the states, the local papers were surprisingly gentle in doing so and offered spokespersons for teacher education ample opportunity to respond. In 60% of the articles on Title II report cards, deans were interviewed, while the other articles included spokespersons for the state,

such as the Title II coordinator or the state superintendent. In articles with a statewide focus, deans from multiple campuses were often interviewed, as well as university presidents and spokespersons from the state departments.

Of the 90 articles falling under the “teacher preparation” key word, 49 were judged to be of sufficient detail for content analysis. Within this group, 33 articles were evaluated as presenting a view that was balanced, 11 articles offered a view supportive of university centered programs, and only five articles were categorized as presenting a negative view point. Deans or university officials were referenced in 30 of the 49 articles devoted to teacher preparation. When looking at articles related to alternate route programs (N= 7), four presented balanced views, while three presented pro-alternate route perspectives. Even in these three articles, however, alternate route programs were presented within the context of supplementing, and not supplanting, university based preparation. Letters to the editor and editorial articles were also balanced (N=5), with one editorial supporting the importance of preservice preparation and another presenting a balanced range of views, and three letters offering divergent perspectives: one positive, one negative, and one balanced.

There were fewer stories on teacher education than we expected.

Data from the sub-samples analyzed through Lexis-Nexis resulted in 551 articles with the terms teacher preparation or teacher training, but few actually were articles about how teachers are prepared. The sample included obituaries; articles about teacher training overseas; school calendars; comments by candidates for school boards and other elected offices; and notification of information sessions for individuals interested in substitute

teaching, alternative routes to licensure, and teaching in parochial schools. Of the articles that were not directly about teacher education, roughly a third of the stories fell into one of four categories. As depicted in Table 1, 14 percent of all articles were actually about budget cuts and teacher training (meaning professional development) was listed as one of many activities that might be curtailed. Eleven percent of the articles reported that a school district, state, or institution of higher education received a grant or award from the federal government or other funder. The numbers for this category are slightly higher in the west because of extensive coverage of a substantial grant to California State University Northridge. The northeast also had a larger percentage of stories on grants, many referencing the Carnegie Foundation, which is based in New York City. A small, but noticeable number of articles reported recognitions or awards for educators (obituaries are included in the articles reviewed but not in this category). It also was of interest that in cases where a K-12 school was being recognized for increases in student achievement, professional development for teachers was often cited as a contributing reason.

Table 1
 DISTRIBUTION OF NEWS ARTICLES NOT FOCUSED ON TEACHER
 EDUCATION BY REGION AND TOPIC

	Midwest	Southeast	West	Northeast	Totals
	n = 77	n = 192	n = 172	n = 110	N = 551
Budget Cuts	17%	13.5%	13%	16%	14%
Grants	2.4 %	9%	17%	11%	11%
Recognition	2.5%	1.5%	1%	4.5%	2%

PD Helpful	4%	2.6%	3%	1%	2.5%
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It is worth noting that fewer articles were published in the middle part of the data collection period, than toward the beginning and end of the period. Whether this was due to the school calendar (as we hypothesized when we set up the study), or due to a shift in news coverage due to the events of September 11, cannot be determined.

Conclusion

Although news coverage in-and-of-itself cannot guarantee that an issue actually makes it to the national policy agenda, Kingdon (1995) does note that the media may influence policy makers in three important ways:

- As a communicator of ideas and issues within the policy community
- By magnifying movements that have started elsewhere
- Through influencing public opinion

By evaluating media coverage of teacher preparation, trends in coverage and policy can be traced and analyzed to help determine what information the public and policy makers are presented with. Educators have long been criticized for a failure to engage policy makers and the press. Careful study of how these issues are handled in the press will give educators important insights into how best to help policymakers and the press cover teacher preparation issues.

One of the unexpected findings in this project is the separation between policymakers and the general public (as reflected in news reports) with regard to university based preservice preparation. News articles on teacher preparation generally accepted the premise that teachers should be well trained in both content knowledge and pedagogy. When alternative route programs were mentioned, it was typically in the context of alleviating a shortage, rather than improving teaching. While policymakers and activists at the national level frequently cast the debate as between the differing perspectives of increased regulation (as supported by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards) or deregulation (as represented by the Fordham Foundation and American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence), the issues, as represented in the newspapers, is much more nuanced.

More research related to this dichotomy could prove useful. Certainly the terms we used could have affected our findings. By definition, "teacher preparation" implies a need for teachers to be prepared. The lack of a useful "buzz word" for supporters of minimal regulation may have prevented us from identifying those articles, however; it seems just as likely that the deregulation movement is finding it difficult to establish an identity for itself. Both sides of the teacher quality debate (at the national level) accept that some preparation is needed, and this general acceptance may be the reason that most of the articles also assumed that teachers should be formally trained.

The nebulous use of “teacher training” is also worth continued examination. In many instances, the phrase was used as a catchall word that ultimately became meaningless because of its nonspecificity. If educators want to emphasize to policymakers and the general public the importance of on-going training, better identifiers and more specific use of the phrase could add impact to the information. Even adding, “school-based,” “classroom-focused,” “subject-matter oriented,” or “university centered” descriptors to “teacher training” could help better define the impact and importance of “teacher training.” Additionally, advocates of the different types of teacher training might wish to evaluate the methods they use to describe their work so that it is differentiated from the other forms of preparation, training, and development.

This study has also raised questions related to the actual reporting of education issues. There appears to be a subtle and tantalizing association between one or two reporters and somewhat more negative articles about teacher education. It may be worthwhile to look at the totality of certain reporter’s work, in their current and previous positions to determine if they are predisposed to write about teacher education in a particular way. In most newsrooms an editor, not the reporter writes the headline for the story. Since most readers scan the headlines in the paper but few read the entire story, it would also be of interest to identify the amount of time the headline actually reflects the body of the story, as well as the general tone of the headlines.

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Appendix A: Teacher Education News Rubric

Article number: _____ Date: _____ Source: _____

<i>Focus:</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Syndicated</i>	<i>Type</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Midwest	<input type="checkbox"/> AP	<input type="checkbox"/> News
<input type="checkbox"/> Regional	<input type="checkbox"/> North East	<input type="checkbox"/> UP	<input type="checkbox"/> Editorial
<input type="checkbox"/> State	<input type="checkbox"/> South East	<input type="checkbox"/> Cox	<input type="checkbox"/> Op/ed
<input type="checkbox"/> Local	<input type="checkbox"/> Western	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Letter

<i>Concept / key word</i>	<i>Quantitative measure</i>	<i>Qualitative measure</i>
Keyword Teacher training Teacher preparation	Count occurrences	How was the term used: <input type="checkbox"/> Described In-service training <input type="checkbox"/> Described Pre-service training
Sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teacher educator</i> – Dean Faculty Other • <i>Administrator</i> – Principal Superintendent School Board Department of Education Other • <i>Think-tank/Organization</i> • <i>Parent</i> • <i>Un-attributed expert</i> 	Count occurrences	Include names, affiliations, and descriptors for national figures.
Evaluative statements Positive <hr/> Negative	Count occurrences <hr/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Notable Quote
View points – <i>Preservice</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalism Pedagogical training Experiential preparation Certification University based • De-professionalism Minimizes pedagogy Supports alternate routes School or district based Emphasizes testing <i>Inservice</i> University based District based Private provider Partnership	Are these concepts presented? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Is the concept supported (S), criticized (C), or presented neutrally (N)? <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> N
Context Is the article solely about teacher education or training?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If “No”, what is the article about?

