



Teachers For a New Era Project At the University of Connecticut

Fall, 2006 Bulletin

A Message from the Director:



Welcome to the first *TNE at UConn Bulletin*. Whether you are a student, educator, parent and/or a concerned citizen, we believe that you will find this *Bulletin* informative. As the Teachers for a New Era (TNE) Project at UConn enters our fourth year, we eagerly look forward to facing the challenges that come with aspiring to achieve great things: Preparing the best teachers possible, as measured by the learning and achievement of the students.

In this issue of the *Bulletin*, you will meet two of our exceptional TNE Faculty Fellows and learn something about two of our major initiatives this year: Educational Expansion and Tapped-In.

Educational Expansion is a 3-year study of teacher characteristics and pupil learning as TNE works in partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education to accomplish two goals. First, the development of statistical models for pupil learning growth across grades. Second, the establishment of a state-wide database system linking teacher and pupil data for educational policy decisions.

Tapped-In is an on-line support system for beginning teachers from the Neag School of Education at UConn. Tapped-In provides web resources for all teachers and for a select group, on-line mentoring during their first two years of teaching with nationally recognized teachers. The goal is to provide the scaffolding and assistance beginning teachers need to be successful early in their teaching careers. We are currently scheduling pod casts of interviews with educational leaders focused on topics for beginning teachers and their mentors to be available on the Tapped-In website by December 2006.

As you can see, we have many things to share with you about TNE. We hope that you enjoy this inaugural edition of the *Bulletin* and we encourage suggestions and comments. Please visit us at www.tne.uconn.edu for more information about the exciting people and projects at TNE.

Scott Brown, Ph. D.
Professor, Educational Psychology
TNE Project Director

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A Plan for longitudinal pupil assessment program has been developed

The introduction of a teacher candidate self-assessment survey

A review of Neag School of Education and College of Liberal Arts and Studies course offerings has been completed to compare that prospective teachers are most likely to enroll

Case method workshop—designed to strengthen the teaching skill of faculty—and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences colloquia have been developed and delivered to the university community

Collegial relationships have been built between College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Neag School of Education to the extent that at least one Neag School of Education course is now being taught by College of Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty

Initial University approval has been received for a dual major in secondary education

A diversity studies minor has been approved and introduced

Induction pilot programs have been held with local school districts, and data from these have been used to create a plan for full-scale induction program

A central TNE database has been built to maintain current information on students, alumni, pupils, and teachers, as well as information on assessments administered by the TNE program

You have a very impressive Vita, including a doctoral degree in Adult Education, two grant awards, several publications, and three years teaching in a high school. What have you been most proud of in your career prior to coming to UConn?

“I think that it would be my work for the Florida Holocaust Museum. That assignment was very fulfilling personally because I was able to work with individuals who were extremely dedicated to the work that they were doing. They really saw the value in working with teachers and being able to share such an important part of history. Both our US history as well as World History with teachers across the state. In particular I was really proud of the curriculum and the training that I did with teachers because it not only impacted

Florida teachers, but the curriculum is provided nationally to teachers. It’s rewarding knowing that it is going out and making a difference in US schools. On a personal level, I am proud to be a mom. I think that really focused me in my own work, because I tend to be a life-long student. My daughter really grounded me and made me focus on my own aspirations and pointed me in the direction of my new career path.”



“If we give teachers the right tools, we can help retain them.”

What do you believe is the most important issue facing K-12 teachers in today’s classrooms?

“That’s a difficult question. As a former classroom teacher, I know that I had things I struggled with on a couple of different levels. One is that [teachers] have to find their own identity and their own sense of value and work because they tend to get bashed down a little bit - or a lot - by so many different factors. They get bullied by politicians and institutions that really don’t have any knowledge of education. They get bullied by parents, who have good intentions, but there is one teacher in a classroom for twenty students. They are just outnumbered. I think it is important to give teachers tools so that they can develop their own self efficacy, their own self determination to be successful. I know, personally, that’s where I fell a little short. I didn’t have the confidence in the classroom to be persistent and to rise above the issues that were coming out of things that didn’t have anything to do with education. So I think that’s one struggle that teachers face. I think the other thing that teachers face is the ability to maintain their own professional practice. Giving teachers the opportunity to grow and strengthen as teachers, outside of say, a master’s degree or and advanced degree. There are chances that we can present or offer teachers to help them

improve their pedagogical practices, their content knowledge, their own personal practices around their profession to really aid them in becoming better teachers. But to do that we've got to talk to the teachers and find out what it is they really want. As a school of education as a whole and as an Adult Educator I need to find ways to help them accomplish their goals and to become better teachers."

As you know there is a shortage of teachers in the United States. What do you think needs to change to increase the number of teachers?

"Let's see...where do we start? I think it does go back to that valuing of teachers. I think there has got to be a cultural shift in this country to see the value of teachers and to pay them what they're worth and to treat them as professionals, to treat them as you would a doctor or a lawyer or any other professional. With some sense of respect and respect for their knowledge. I think valuing teachers and recognizing their worth is going to help change that. I also think that we could make some changes in higher education in the preparation of teachers that will help to impact the issue of retention. I think if we give teachers the right tools, we can help retain them- which doesn't mean we'd need to recruit new ones as much. We can grow the [teachers] that are already there. I think the teacher shortage doesn't come into play as much with a shortage of people coming in, I think it has to do with people leaving. So we need to give them the skills and resources to stay in the classroom and be successful."

As the newest Teachers for a New Era Fellow, what do you hope to gain from involvement with the project?

"I'm very excited about it! I'm excited because of the relationship with Arts and Sciences, coming in with my past life as an English teacher. That is embedded in me. The love of literature, the love of humanities. It's nice to have those kinds of partnerships. It's also a great opportunity for me as a researcher because I can actually conduct research that has applications. Conducting more things like action research - participatory research - where I'm not the sole knowledge creator, or assessor of the data. It's really a partnership between myself and the teachers to determine what the problem is, to design research questions to address it, and then gather and data together. That is an exciting opportunity. TNE provides the situation and context to do that in; they have partnerships with schools and they have partnerships with teachers. There is a real opportunity for more productive research, not just scholarly research that just sits in a journal. It is research that has application and has the potential to improve things. Plus, its an opportunity to bring in Adult Learning theory. That hasn't, so far, been explored in a lot of the TNE Schools- not just here, but elsewhere. Adult Learning Theory, I think it's a

good learning theory, period. Bringing that to the forefront, I could share that with my colleagues who aren't familiar with my field and maybe influence others who work, say, in Curriculum and Instruction or Arts and Sciences, or in different areas that haven't necessarily explored it before. I think it's a two way street; I'm going to learn from them, they're going to learn from me."

Introducing

Robin Grenier

Department of Educational Leadership

As TNE at UConn's Newest Fellow

How do you feel that TNE will impact your career?

"One thing I'm very excited about is a project I'm hoping to bring about through my fellowship. It focuses on capturing the mental models of teachers. Mental models basically guide your perceptions, decisions, and behaviors. It's how you think about things. It's very implicit. It is not something you necessarily articulate. What I'm hoping to do, is collect the mental models of teachers about their expectation and their presumptions about their relationships with student teachers. I'd like to find out, basically, what teachers who work with student teachers think is going to happen in this process. What are their goals, what are their intentions, what do they see as the purpose of the relationship. Then, I'd like to turn around and capture the same from the student teachers. What do they perceive as their role in the relationship, what is their goal, what do they think they are going to get out of the whole thing? My guess is there might be some disconnect between the two. If I'm able to capture those, and make them explicit- then I can help create better relationships that are more successful for the cooperating teachers, as well as the student teachers. I think they could both benefit from the relationship, if they know what to expect out of the relationship. I think that we may be assuming too much in our role in preparation and connecting these two individuals and we need to be clear about what everyone is getting into. Once we know what everyone is expecting, then we can make it better. That is one of the first steps I see in my fellowship; to create an opportunity to sit down with these individuals, collect the information, collect their understanding. Then to sort through it and say, 'okay, what do cooperating teachers think is going to come out of this whole thing, what do student teachers think is going to come out of this whole thing'? How can we make them see - not necessarily eye to eye - but at least find common goals, and come out with a common expectation so that a successful relationship can occur? Hopefully, too, a long lasting relationship that goes beyond graduation and they can turn to the cooperating teacher as a mentor or a coach down the road."

TNE is Driven by Three Design Principles:

- A** Decisions driven by evidence
- Drawing upon research
 - The role of pupil learning

- B** Engagements with Arts & Sciences
- Subject matter understanding
 - General and Liberal Arts education

- C** Teaching as an academically taught clinical profession
- Pedagogy
 - Schools as clinics
 - Teachers on faculty appointment
 - Residency (induction)
 - Preparation of candidates for professional growth

*I*ssues to be addressed jointly by faculties in *Education and Arts & Sciences:*

- Pedagogical content knowledge
- Literacy/ numeracy skills
- Elementary and middle school education
- Technology designed to enhance learning
- Cultural considerations in teaching and learning
- Recruitment of under—represented groups into teaching
- Opportunities for late deciders in teacher preparation programs

Carnegie Corporation of New York

TEACHERS FOR A NEW ERA

with additional support from the Annenberg and Ford foundations

TNE Beginning Teachers Conference

Held on: October 21, 2006

Over 50 first and second year teachers had the opportunity to engage in interactive sessions with field professionals and reconnect with their Neag colleagues.

Topics included:

- "All Kinds of Minds: Addressing Learning Differences"
- "At-Home Allies: Preparing for Parent Conferences & Communication"
- "Straight Talk about Diversity in the Classroom"
- "Classroom Management: A New Bag of Tricks"

Tapped-In

Tapped-In is the online workplace of an international community of education professionals. TNE at UConn has purchased a virtual floor in the virtual TNE Building to support our beginning teachers.

The Induction Committee has taken on the responsibility of managing this floor. Through the technology available with Tapped-In, support is provided to new teachers not only in Connecticut, but all beginning teacher with internet access.

The site features chat rooms for members, threaded discussions, daily hosted events, a monthly newsletter, online meeting capabilities, and audio pod casts from field specialists regarding issues most prominent to new teachers.

www.tappedin.org

Educational Expansion

The Assessment Committee, in partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education, is working with several school districts in Connecticut to gather teacher and pupil data to establish a statewide teacher and pupil database.

This project will help to address research questions related to teacher characteristics and pupil learning. It will directly impact the course curriculum and experiences of students in teacher preparation programs.

Kudos to Dr. Mark Boyer!

Dr. Boyer has been honored for his leadership in the GlobalEd Project with the UConn Outreach 2006 Award for research-Based Public Service and Engagement. Dr. Boyer serves as the chair of the TNE Curriculum Design Committee and Professor of Political Science. The GlobalEd project conducts on-line simulations of international negotiations with over 800 middle and high school students across the country each year.

For more information on the GlobalEd Project please see: www.globaled.uconn.edu.



Fall 2006 TNE at UConn Activities

To learn more about TNE, visit us online: www.tne.uconn.edu

Throughout your academic and professional career, you have studied and worked in various locations in the United States and Europe. What brought you to the University of Connecticut?

“When I saw the job description for my current position I

A conversation with

Manuela Wagner

Department of Modern and Classical Languages

TNE Fellow

was very interested in the interdisciplinary nature of the job. I enjoy working with colleagues from different departments here at the University of Connecticut. I also taught at different levels including in a public school system in Massachusetts. Articulation of programs is an important issue and it can only be achieved if colleagues from all levels of the educational system collaborate. My job provides the opportunity for me to do that.”

In what ways has your involvement with TNE affected your career?

“TNE has affected me in many ways. The most important goal of TNE, i.e. to improve teacher quality and student outcomes, obviously is an important goal to pursue. I feel lucky and honored to be part of this endeavor. I also learned that in many ways TNE has provided the opportunity for me to connect with colleagues at the university level and also in school systems. This allows me to play a humble role in the development of activities that support the TNE agenda. I believe that many of these initiatives designed to support the TNE agenda also positively impact the curriculum at the university generally.

TNE has also influenced my research. My colleague, Professor Eduardo Urios-Aparisi, and I were awarded a grant for our classroom research in World Language Acquisition with which we were able to investigate the role of humor in German and Spanish classes at the middle school and university level. We also were put in contact with colleagues who were able to help us in the research design which has been very helpful. Finally, I had the opportunity to co-teach a course with Prof. Terry Osborn. Co-teaching this course and working with Neag School of Education pre-service teachers proved to be an outstanding experience which has shaped my way of thinking about World Language Education.”

One of your interests has been in Case Methods Teaching. Here at UConn, you have helped to organize a Case Methods Teaching Workshop, in part sponsored by TNE. Could you explain Case Methods Teaching and its importance?

“The case method is a discussion-based and inherently student-centered method. Students are presented with a case which most of the times is based on facts. Students then in-

vestigate what happened in this case, who the stake holders were, what a solution could be if there is a problem, how the stake holders could behave in order for the outcomes to be optimal, and the like. Since students have to solve problems student involvement is at a very high level. Because the ma-

terial is mostly authentic students have the opportunity to be faced with a real-life situation and make decisions while still being in a safe environment in which their decision cannot have any dangerous consequences. Finally, because students interact actively with the case material they learn a

lot from each other by being exposed to various different opinions on the same material. I got interested in the Case Method when I took a semester long seminar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education with educators from different institutions where we learned how to teach with this discussion-based method. When I came to UConn, I found out that Professor Mark Boyer in Political Sciences has been teaching with this method for a long time and that has a Pew Fellowship. We made it one of our goals of a TNE committee with members from various departments at the university (CLAS and Neag School of Education) to promote the Case Method.”

You hold the honor of being the first College of Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty member to teach a Neag School of Education Course. What does this mean to you?

“Teaching the methodology course (first through co-teaching with Prof. Osborn and now through teaching it alone) has been a truly exceptional experience for me. I find that I can apply my various interests in research and teaching in this course while at the same time learning from the interaction with Neag faculty and students. I feel better connected to various levels of World Languages teaching and research. It also provides me with the opportunity and the necessity to take the many different aspects of world language teaching into account. This year I also invited the students in the Neag School of Education Language Teaching Methodology Course to the graduate seminar in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages. This is a further attempt to create a platform for collaboration. Together with my colleague, Professor Urios-Aparisi, I now give workshops for in-service teachers. This is a further step toward better articulation of our programs



“Working with Neag School of Education pre-service teachers proved to be an outstanding experience which has shaped my way of thinking about World Languages Education.”

at all levels and of creating the opportunity to learn from each other. I have tremendous respect for educators and administrators at all levels of our educational system and find that I have learned very much from opportunities such as these.”

Being a non-American, you have a unique perspective of education in this country. In your opinion, what are some strengths and weaknesses of the American educational system?

“This is a difficult question and I am afraid of stereotyping when trying to categorize my thoughts. Moreover, many of the strengths could be weaknesses at the same time and vice-versa. We know that America has some of the very best schools while at the same time struggling with schools that yield less than desirable results. When I grew up in Austria, almost all the schools were public schools and even though there were differences in schools they were probably not as big compared to here. However, the educational system in Austria and in many other parts of Europe is changing so that might not be true anymore. One strength of the American system in my opinion is that it is very flexible. Ideally everyone should have the opportunity to receive college education. Indeed the number of college graduates seems to be higher in America than in other countries if I am informed correctly. Of course, there are surveys showing that the density of college graduates is much higher in certain parts of the country than in others. In Austria (again when I grew up and this is slowly changing as well) one had to decide fairly early whether one wanted to go college or not. There are different types of schools that prepare you for the various jobs career options. Changing “educational careers” at any point is more difficult than it seems to be here. Finally, another aspect I enjoy here is the flexibility in Higher Education. As an assistant professor here I would say that I generally have more responsibility and autonomy than I would have in many European settings. I also like the fact that it seems less hierarchical to me.”

Other TNE Institutions:

Bank Street College of Education
New York City, NY

Boston College
Boston, MA

California State University, Northridge
Northridge, CA

Florida A & M University
Tallahassee, FL

Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI

Stanford University
Stanford, CA

University of Aberdeen—Scottish TNE
Aberdeen, UK

University of Texas, El Paso
El Paso, TX

University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA

University of Washington
Seattle, WA

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Milwaukee, WI



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**“A great
education
begins with
great
teachers.”**

-Vartan Gregorian



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