

EDU 820  
1<sup>st</sup> ASSIGNMENT  
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*“Effective teaching is not routine, students are not passive, and questions of practice are not simple, predictable, or standardized. Consequently, instructional decisions cannot be formulated on high then packaged and handed down to teachers.”*

Darling-Hammond, 1997

One of the major aspects of better schools is better teachers. Research suggest that teachers’ understanding, their way of teaching and their classroom practices have roles in students’ understanding (e.g. Brickhouse, 1990, Darling-Hammond, 2006). Besides, we live in an interconnected world where there is a wide diversity in students’ knowledge, skills and culture in the classrooms. Therefore, it is crucial to prepare knowledgeable and skillful teachers who can meet the challenges of today's demanding classrooms.

In the Powerful Teacher Education book, Darling-Hammond (2006) stated that better teacher preparation starts with strong teacher education programs. In this book, Darling-Hammond (2006) aimed at describing how good teacher education program looks like in practice. Mixed method, multiple case study design was used for data collection. Seven teacher education programs and their graduates were purposefully selected to represent effective teacher preparation. The selected teacher education programs are; Alverno College, Bank Street College, Trinity University, University of California, Berkeley, University of Southern Maine, University of Virginia, and Wheelock College.

The programs were investigated in terms of how they prepare teachers to teach the content successfully to diverse learners, how they prepare teachers to take part in improving the quality of education, and how they deal with the challenges of diverse students, resources, policies, and organizational features. Darling-Hammond (2006) explained the strategies, goals, content, and

processes of these highly successful teacher education programs in order to reveal how they do it, and what their graduates accomplish as a result. Data collection took a year from each program and various methods used to collect data, such as reviewing program documents, surveys, course observations, interviews and focus groups with program participants and program graduates. Data analyses revealed the similarities among these seven teacher preparation programs and helped to draw a picture of good teacher education program, what their graduates can do and how they are different from other graduates, and what is needed to provide quality in teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

This book is a valuable source for teacher educators and researchers who are interested in teacher preparation. It systematically presents the importance of teacher education and the challenges; the examples of successful programs and the evidences of their success; the organizations of these programs in terms of curriculum, assessment and clinical experiences; the strategies they use to deal with diverse learners and promote equity in classrooms; and finally, the institutional and policy related challenges that influence the teacher education programs. I found this book very helpful and a great resource because it reveals, “the extent and quality of teacher education matter for teachers’ effectiveness and add significant value to the general knowledge and skills that teachers with a strong subject matter background bring to the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 20).

In the following paragraphs, I would like to focus on two main themes and two subthemes that I believe important in teacher education. One of the main themes that I want to reflect on is “what teachers need to learn” and the other one is “how teachers need to learn” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 79). Figure 1 presents the visual representation of the main themes and the subthemes in teacher education programs that I will discuss in detail.

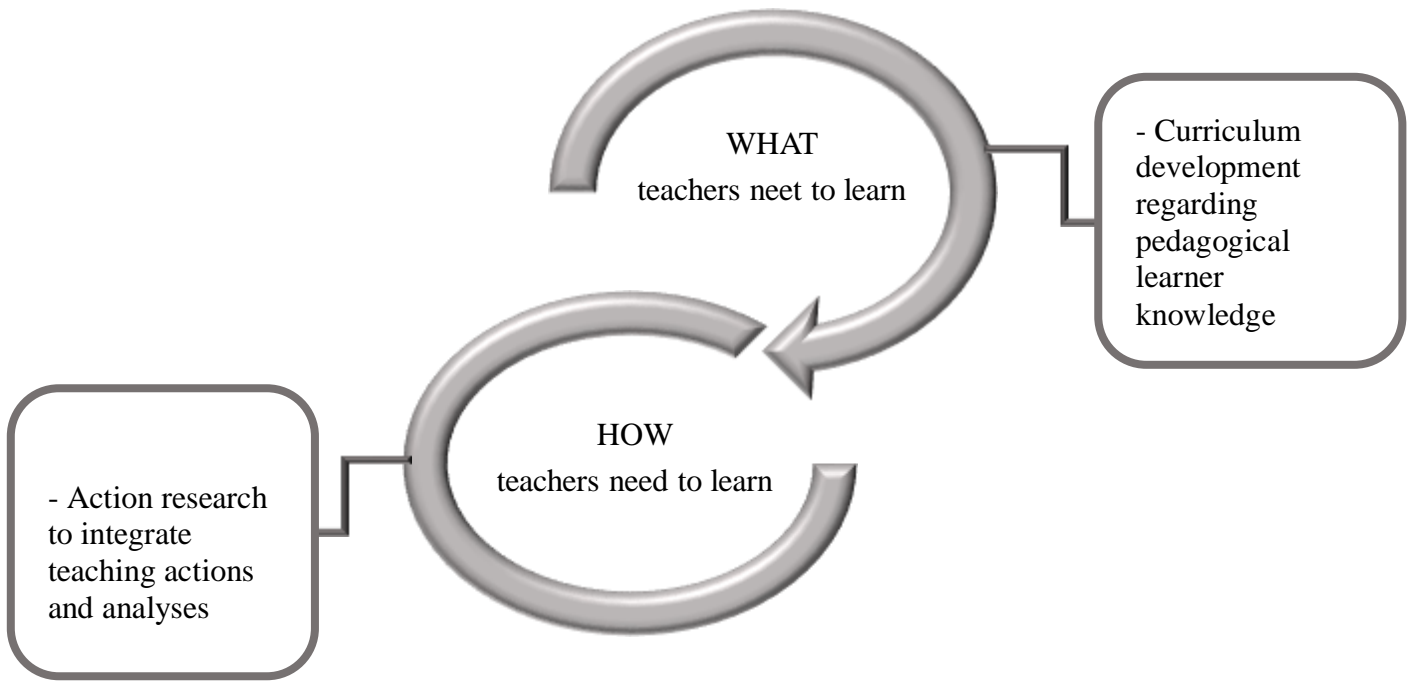


Figure 1. Main themes and subthemes in teacher education programs

As shown in Figure 1, what teachers need to learn is the first aspect in explaining the successful teacher education programs, which have a comprehensive and logical plan of what teachers need to learn (as exemplified in the book). There are several common aspects for the content of successful preparation in teacher education programs such as: understanding learning theories; content knowledge; curriculum development; understanding learners and learning; student development and their motivation; learning how to use this information in instructional design and curricular goals (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Although each aspect is holistically crucial, I will reflect on the curriculum development enterprise, which needs to be developed in teacher education programs to promote deeper learning among students.

The second aspect of the successful teacher education programs are how teachers need to learn (see Figure 1). Various strategies are used in powerful teacher education programs such as: extensive and subject field coursework; clinical experiences; assessment and feedback; teaching portfolio; action research; and case study (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Each strategy is vital in exemplary programs as these are “the processes that allow teachers to develop useful knowledge that can be enacted in ways that respond to the complexity of the classroom” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 80). However, I will reflect on the action research practices in teacher education programs that helps to integrate teaching actions and analyses.

### *Curriculum Development*

“Curriculum guides, texts, and tests help the teacher respond to a subset of local and state expectations; however, by their very nature they cannot dictate a curriculum for a particular class. Because what is taught must connect to student readiness and interests as well as to community contexts, even topics that are routinely taught or presented in texts require curricular thinking and development (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 95).

Despite the fact that curriculum guide and teaching resources are provided, teachers still need to consider prior knowledge, skills and dispositions of the students to develop an effective plan and efficient implementation. Therefore, it is important to engage teachers in curriculum development and even start in teacher preparation to impose prospective teachers to curricular thinking and development.

Most of the teachers, when they finish teacher preparation program, are lack of curricular planning ability, planning and designing an instruction that considers the needs of the students, curricular goals and objectives. Although teacher education programs give importance to pedagogical content knowledge, there is generally an absence of including prospective teachers in

the integration of “pedagogical learner knowledge” and curricular needs (as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 85).

One good example given in the book is from Trinity University. The teacher preparation program in Trinity University gives importance to “develop a curricular perspective” and “develop the habit of curricular thinking” in prospective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 207). Prospective teachers at Trinity University are required to take two courses about curriculum development before starting their internship in schools. This provides them an opportunity to analyze the integration of learner development into contextual considerations, and then observe and evaluate the practical implementations of curriculum designs. As a result, “principals see Trinity graduates as quite able to integrate their strong knowledge of content with strategies for reaching learners” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 214).

I believe that the concept of *curricular thinking*, which was mentioned in the book is an important aspect in teacher education because when the prospective teachers have an experience on the design, development, and the implementation processes of the curriculum, they would have a holistic perspective on teaching.

### *Action Research*

Early studies on teacher education were conducted by researchers outside of the field that reflected the authors’ points of view, instead of conducted by researchers as teacher educators that presented the perspective of the person who directly involved in the research (Zeichner, 1999). When teachers and teacher educators started to conduct research on their teaching experiences, action research gained importance in research about teacher education programs. Zeichner (1999) mentioned the need for the voices of teachers in research to have

first-hand information about teacher education programs or teacher education classrooms. Therefore, action research was found to fill the gap between the theory and the practice on research by teachers. Besides, Darling-Hammond (2006) stated that “engaging in action research helped teachers learn to reason from evidence and connect profession-wide knowledge to problems of practice in their schools or classrooms, while also developing the skills of observation and inquiry” (p. 147).

Action research, as a research methodology, has two main purposes (1) to improve the teacher educators’ teaching experiences for the development of their students’ learning and (2) to search for an increased understanding of educational programs so that they can directly involve in the knowledge base of teaching and learning process (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Moreover, it is a powerful model to teacher candidates as action research provides a reflective and “constructivist developmental practice” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 242) and “require(s) candidates to use their knowledge to produce teaching actions and analyses” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 113).

One successful example that has been mentioned in the book is the Bank Street students’ independent studies that are in publishable quality. These studies may take many forms as “a classic research study, development of original professional materials for classroom use, an educational policy study” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 147). Independent studies present the teachers’ subjective experience as a researcher and combining this reflexive story with theoretical frameworks of wider phenomena. Therefore, these studies are collected in Bank Street library for future reference. I believe this is a powerful strategy to promote deeper understanding in teaching theory, practice and a dynamic blend of systematic research.

In the last decade, not only action research writings, but also ethnographic and auto-ethnographic writing practices gained importance in educational research field. I, personally, had

a chance to involve in an auto-ethnographic study that investigates the effects of using scientific practices by prospective science teachers (Saribas & Ceyhan, 2015). It helped me to bring action and reflection, theory and practice together.

All in all, Darling-Hammond (2006), with her book on Powerful Teacher Education, revealed the holistic goals, strategies to achieve the goals, the content (*what teachers need to learn*) and the processes (*how teachers need to learn*) by providing concrete examples from seven successful teacher education programs. I believe this book provides a strong insight to teacher educators, teachers and prospective teachers to improve the teaching profession by supporting with concrete examples.

## References

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