

# **It Takes 2 to Produce a Quality Teacher: A Groovy Student and a Harmonizing Professor**

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## **It Takes 2 to Produce a Quality Teacher: A Groovy Student and a Harmonizing Professor**

### **Abstract:**

Of all the possible combinations to produce quality teachers, will the real twosome please stand up? In 2002 the U.S. invested \$192 billion (about 50% of the total education budget) in teacher pay and benefits (Rice, 2003). While it is general consensus that the teacher is the most important factor in student achievement, there is little useful information to ensure the preparation, hiring, or promotion of **quality** teachers. Here, two crucial parties are identified as key in the preparation of quality teachers. The presentation is based on a review of the literature -- interspersed with popular vernacular, as well as an individual effort at implementing promising practices to prepare quality teacher educators. Education takes on new meaning and perspective when students get back the groove that they first had when they envisioned teaching as a profession and the professor helps by harmonizing facets of the learning experience to make for a meaningful and rewarding adventure. The preliminary results suggest the twosome are gaining ground in producing a more quality teacher (enhanced professional attributes) that schools so desperately need to educate our children -- America's most valuable resource.

Education is "the wind beneath" the American society. The value of education was illuminated by the founding fathers of this country. Thomas Jefferson best described the importance of education in his renown statement "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be" (*QuoteDB*, 2005). To achieve the quality of life that is envisioned, education has constantly been an item on the American agenda. School reform and educational improvement are at the heart of what Americans do.

America does more than just talk; it invests megabucks in public education. While students are the major focus of concern, teachers are a mainstay in the enterprise. In 2002, the U.S. invested \$192 billion in teacher pay and benefits. More than 50% of all dollars allocated by the government for education is paid in salaries for teachers. Yet there is little research to guide decision as whom to hire, retain, and promote (Rice, 2003). However, the general consensus is that under good teachers, students get a good education; under poor teachers, students get a poor education. The difference between the two makes a world of difference. America cannot afford to trust its most valuable asset -- its students, to the tutelage of poor teachers. Doing so would be to run the risk of needlessly suffering from medical conditions, financial woes, and a quality of life not befitting a highly advanced nation.

What do teachers do that make their presence so important in the educational system? They shape minds and change lives. Teachers make the way, show the way, monitor the

progress, and place a stamp of approval on the finished product -- school graduates. Good teachers are invaluable and irreplaceable.

## **Purpose**

Careful thought was given to the very bare sources needed to prepare educational personnel, in light of existing conditions. The quest was to ascertain the most crucial combination of sources to produce quality teachers and chart a course of action for its attainment. The real twosome “to stand up” were the student educator and the college professor; they are viewed as key in the preparation of quality teachers. This presentation provides a functional framework for the student and faculty, a review of the related literature, and a detailed description of an individual effort at implementing promising practices to prepare quality teacher educators. The expectation is that information and tentative results provided in this adventure will in some way further thinking and effort at producing effective teachers to staff our schools.

## **The Student/Professor Framework**

**The groovy student.** Why do people want to teach and when is it decided? One of the main reasons given for wanting to teach is to make a difference in the lives of children. A student’s desire to become a teacher might go back a long way or it could be a recent discovery. He or she may have had a good grade teacher worth emulating; teaching may run in the family’s blood; it may be simply a love for children; it may be attractive because it is viewed as the profession that serves as the foundation for all professions; it may go on and on.

When interest in teaching is first realized, excitement is often associated with it. The person looks forward to entering the profession. When they arrive at the university they are ready to work for change, to make the world a better place, to do good work, and their passion and energy are electric (Selwyn, 2007). Unfortunately, along the schooling path, it is not uncommon for many prospective teachers to lose some of their zeal (or groove) for teaching; even to the point that many would-be-teachers become disenchanted and seek other professions or those that continue the pursuit give less than that 110% effort needed for adequate teacher preparation. Why does this happen? It may be that “the trees interfere with seeing the forest” -- having teachers that don’t inspire them to teach, curricula that don’t seem purposeful, or an overall college experience that doesn’t seem very relevant.

Now here is a new twist to the matter. If a person has or ever had a burning desire to teach, can that flame be made to GLOW again? Very likely, when the right two things come together -- a groovy student and a harmonizing professor. It may happen as it did in the movie “Stella got her groove back.” Stella is a fortysomething single mother of a pre-teen son and a power-packed professional who is no longer in possession of her “groove.” But she longs to get it back. It happens that Stella takes a trip to Jamaica and enjoys the sun, the breeze, the weather, the sand, and of course, the company of a very young man. Stella got back her groove. She says “It’s a rhythm, a stride, a feeling of being on cruise control, the knowledge of being in control;” and “When you recapture that groove, you feel good; things start falling into place” (McMillan,

1996).

The charge here is to enable teacher candidates to get their groove back or simply get groovy. They should become self-determined and let CARE (discussed later in detail) guide them in becoming the teacher that they have the potential to become.

**The harmonizing professor.** Words have been thrown around to describe the desired professor. They have included facilitator, guide, etc. Here, the description provided is harmonizer. The professor who harmonizes does more than lecture, make assignments, supervise activities, and test. The harmonizing professor makes teaching relevant, authentic, and lively. University students modify their attitudes based on college role models. Students' attitudes about the subject can be positively impacted by the professor (Gebhard, 2006). Learning is made smooth and transitional.

One of the most important, yet changing elements in the real teaching and learning process is the professor. No two semesters should be the same for what is learned in one semester leads to change and improvement in the next semester. Particular attributes of the harmonizing professor are that he/she:

- models the kinds of understanding and wisdom that students should seek to develop (Faculty teaching/learning institute at Saginaw Valley State University, n.d.)
- motivates high academic engagement and competence,
- fosters a positive, reinforcing, cooperative environment, and
- makes connections across curricula -- uses skills they are learning elsewhere (*The Effective Teacher*, n.d.)

In harmonizing instruction, sometimes the professor may appear in the valley rallying the candidates to put forth their best efforts in class activities; other times the professor may appear at the top of the mountain celebrating the successes that have been achieved. The University of Nebraska at Lincoln: Academy of Distinguished Teachers (n.d.) says research and teaching missions are thoughtfully harmonized. With respect to undergraduate education, harmonizing research and teaching missions requires careful thought. But many of the skills that are essential to research are central to undergraduate learning; evidence-based inquiry, consideration of alternative views, critical thinking, appreciation of the impermanence of established knowledge, tolerance of complexity, clear definitions of concepts, and the examination of assumptions are attributes of thoughtful scholarship for students at every level of higher education.

**The student and the professor.** In the act of teaching and learning, the candidates bring a lot to the table; but just among them, the learning will not be in full perspective. The professor

can deliver a lot of knowledge, but if the candidates are not in a receptive mode, the information will fall of deaf ears. It takes groovy students and a harmonizing professor to produce quality teachers.

## **Two Types of “Q” Teachers**

**Q1 -- Qualified teachers.** From review of related literature it was observed that the concept “good” teacher is used extensively, but its meaning varies tremendously among its users. Educators and policy makers have attempted to clarify the meaning through a standards-based approach. If a person meets the established standards, he/she is certified as a “highly qualified” teacher, categorically referred to in this paper as a Q1 teacher. NCLB defines highly qualified mostly in terms of content (Selwyn, 2007). The requirements for meeting the definition of highly qualified are: having earned at least a bachelor’s degree, demonstrates content knowledge in each core content area he/she teaches, and not having any waivers of requirement for full state certification (South Carolina Department of Education, n.d.).

Universities and colleges have gone to great length to identify the “right” set of competencies that will enable a person to become a qualified teacher. The standards established have all but been heralded as a “fool proof” way to ensure that our schools are staffed with good teachers. Unfortunately, there remain astronomical problems, among which are too many Johnnies that still cannot read and drop out of school, low teacher morale and high turnover rates, and public lack of confidence in the schools. Research findings are mixed as to whether teacher academic abilities translate to achievement in the classroom (Selwyn, 2007). In essence, qualified teachers are not necessarily high “quality” teachers. The latter, quality teachers, is categorically referred to as Q2 teachers.

**Q2 -- Quality teachers.** It is the Q2 teacher -- “quality teacher” -- on which this paper focuses. Certainly, the pioneers of the standards movement have brought teacher preparation a long way. Nothing can substitute for prerequisite competencies that a person must have to be successful in the classroom. The person must have the knowledge, teaching skills, and practical experiences to get to first base in teaching. Unfortunately, traditional competencies have not assured enough “home runs” in teaching. Qualified teachers are the cake, quality teachers are cake with icing on it.

Chief among the distinguishing characteristics of quality teachers is enthusiasm. Influential teachers feel very passionately about their subjects and are able to generate a contagious energy about them (Gebhard, 2006).

Evidence of a quality teacher in the making can be noted. Successful college students: (1) do homework, (2) attend every class, and (3) participate in teamwork (Fox Valley Technical College - Knowledge that works, n.d.). The examination of a candidate’s performance while matriculating in college and the observation of his/her behaviors and characteristics reveal a lot about the quality of teacher that is in the making. In this paper, key points of investigation and development are subsumed in the acronym -- CARE (Commitment, Achievement,

Responsiveness, and Enthusiasm).

### **A Particular Endeavor to Produce Quality Teachers**

If teachers are so important in the education of our students, how are they best prepared? As the title of this paper states, it requires two to produce a quality teacher. At this point you may pause in reading and guest the twosome (notwithstanding the introductory references). One may think that it takes simply a man and a woman; another may say it takes two devoted-to-education parents; still another may say it takes the village and school; etc. However, here the author has asked that the groovy student and harmonizing professor stand up as the “real” twosome to produce the quality teachers so desperately needed in American schools. (Descriptions of the two were provided earlier in this paper).

**Program description.** The Historically Black University at which this exploration was launched has a long tradition of preparing personnel for the teaching profession. It is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Its graduates have gone on to staff various positions in schools and agencies throughout the state and the nation. Formal and informal survey data have shown that many are successful in their chosen positions. Included among the university’s graduates are former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige and legendary football player the late Walter Payton.

Recent observations revealed that the past is not necessarily prologue for the future. Possible slippage was on the horizon. The lay of the land appeared to be changing. Some teacher education majors were passing coursework but struggling with Praxis tests, even to a point that a number was giving up on the tests and pursuing nonteaching majors. Regardless to major, many of the students appeared short on zeal and enthusiasm for the teaching profession. Some felt a lack of support from the faculty in guiding them through the program. One student exclaimed that “they (the faculty) don’t care about us.” On the other side, some faculty didn’t seem to think very highly of the students. They exclaimed that their class attendance was erratic, their writing skills were poor, and that they weren’t truly concerned about their education.

**Problem.** What would it take to make students CARE in a university environment? That was the question. It appeared clear that students needed to attend class, successfully complete assignments, participate in practica, and to feel good about the college experience. One professor took on the responsibility of trying to bring about a change in his classes.

**Related literature.** Many strategies are provided to help students be successful in college. They encompass such things as class attendance, time management, and learning approaches (*Student Planner*, 2007-2008). The behaviors and competencies for preparation of a quality teacher are beginning to emerge. Included are the following:

- transform knowledge into effective student understanding,

- have positive regard for all students,
- establish high but not unreasonable standards,
- work to enhance students' own motivation and capacity to learn,
- use light-touches and humor to create a sense of community, and
- seek continual improvements in present and future performance (Faculty teaching/learning institute at Saginaw Valley State University, n.d.).

According to Rice (2003), teacher quality is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. The author gives five categories to reflect teacher quality: teacher experience, teacher preparation programs and degrees, teacher certification, teacher coursework, and teachers' own test scores. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) frames the quality of college education into five benchmark categories: level of academic challenge; active and collaborative learning; level of student/faculty interaction; enriching educational practices; and supportive campus environment (Wild, 2005). The effectiveness of a program was perceived in part from the answer that students give to the question: Would they choose that university if they had it to do all over again?

Quality teaching may be approached by viewing it as consisting of two conceptually separate parts -- good teaching and effective teaching. Good teaching occurs when the standards of the field are upheld. It is normative and made up of at least three components: logical acts of teaching (defining, demonstrating, modeling, explaining, correcting, etc.) the psychological acts of teaching (caring, motivating, encouraging, rewarding, punishing, planning, evaluating, etc); and the moral acts of teaching (showing honesty, courage, tolerance, compassion, respect, fairness, etc.). Effective teaching is about reaching achievement goals. It is about students learning what they are supposed to in a particular class. A high-quality teacher shows evidence of both good and effective teaching (Berliner, 2005). We should not confuse a highly qualified taker of tests about teaching with a highly qualified classroom teacher. To assess what we really want will require highly discerning observers who spend their time watching teachers teach (Berliner, 2005).

Good teaching is a complex interaction of a wide range of teacher characteristics, abilities, dispositions, knowledge of subject fields, experience, and pedagogical knowledge. These factors interact with particular school cultures, particular sets of educational goals, and particular children to produce effective teaching (Andrew, Cobb, & Giampietro, 2005).

**Procedures (A plan to prepare teachers who CARE).** The University was doing all of the standard things that accredited teacher education programs are expected to do. Programs of study were properly approved, competent faculty were assigned to teach, course syllabi were developed, field experiences were incorporated, grading criteria were provided, and a class attendance policy was distributed. All of the standards for excellence were in place, yet there

was not a lot of excitement about the challenge at hand. It came to mind that the situation was similar to what occurred in the movie – “Stella got her groove back.” The students just didn’t seem to have their groove. As it took a man to help Stella get her groove back, it would take a professor to help students get their groove back. Not just any professor, but a “harmonizing” professor.

The courses in which the procedures were applied were from the department of special education. Students enrolled in the courses had majors in various teacher education programs. The instructor was a tenured professor who professed an abiding love for both the subject and the students.

Through an exploratory process over time, it occurred that the teaching objective should be to prepare teachers who CARE (who demonstrate Commitment, Achievement, Responsiveness, and Enthusiasm in the training program). But before CARE was fully conceptualized, some forerunners were put in place. First, it was thought that students must come to class. To accomplish this goal the professor liberally expressed as to how their presence was valued and needed, gave frequent class assessments, and often connected subject content to matters with which they were familiar. Students needed to purchase, read, and use the textbook. To ensure that these things would happen, frequent reference was made to specific pages and illustrations and open-book tests were given for most chapters. Students needed to attempt and successfully complete all course assignments. To facilitate this quest the professor would explain the course requirements and due dates for assignments on day 1, monitor all submissions, provide instant feedback and any needed individual advisement, and make mention in class of salient points included in their completed assignments. Students needed to put their learning into practice. To make the activity an experience to remember and a profitable one, the professor sought appropriate field-based placements, and collaborated and interacted with the students on site. Last, but not least, the students needed to “feel” the overall experience of preparing to teach. To help enable this attainment the professor aimed at raising the interpersonal skills bar, referred to them as teacher education “candidates,” and emphasized that there was a special place awaiting each in a school setting to put into use all their learning and love for students.

More specific procedures and strategies employed in the effort to prepare quality teachers were as follows:

- Class starts on day and goes the full scheduled period.
- Let students introduce themselves, give their major, where they are from, and specify something that they like. (The professor may know someone from that city and ask the student if they know the person or make another statement of common interest. Also, he may make mental note of what the student likes and appropriately make reference to it at points throughout the course).
- Give the students a title that inspires respect, dignity, and great expectation. Let them

know that they are no longer considered students, they are **teacher education candidates**.

- Call each student by name; the one that they prefer. (The honorific becomes, e.g., “Candidate” Mary).
- Candidates are “their brother’s keeper.” (If one student is absent, inquire of others as to what is happening).
- Emphasize that there are times for strict independent performance, but collaborative effort is the cornerstone for modern education.
- Have a variety of course assignments and solicit students’ best effort on each.
- Give immediate feedback and be quick to recognize, reward, and reinforce successful achievement.
- Make known that the professor’s success is measured by the candidates’ success -- even the so-called least of them.
- See each candidate as the “little engine that can” become a most excellent educator.
- Accentuate that college learning is dynamic and at any given point in a lesson, any candidate can “score a touchdown.” (As was said of the late Walter Payton anytime he got hand on the football).
- Celebrate the victory in the classroom, across campus, everywhere! (Never forgoing an opportunity to tell someone concerned how well the candidates are performing in the program).

**Results.** As the teacher preparation process took shape, it became evident that the effort had promise for facilitating the production of teachers who CARE. Consequently, data could be gathered and analyzed to determine the success of teacher candidates in each area. For Commitment, the determining variables would be class attendance and possession of the textbook; for Achievement, the assessable measures would be assignment submissions and final grade proficiency; for Responsiveness, the assessable factors would be clinical experience/option and class presentation/research paper/option performance; and for Enthusiasm, data variables would be noted provocative statements in oral/written reports and looks on their faces (pictures taken, etc.). Data for the areas (CARE) would be gathered throughout the duration of the particular course.

What happens when a groovy student and a harmonizing professor come together? It might be safe to say that you get a CARE teacher education candidate. As reflected in Table 1,

the results for students in a SPED 311 - Survey of Exceptional Children and Youth in the Schools course taught during a summer session were very impressive in several areas. For textbook possession and multi-media presentation completion, the rate of accomplishment for each was 100%. Candidates also did well on all course requirements completion (99.4%), class attendance (94.1%), and clinical experience/option completion (93.3%). A modest performance was registered for final grade proficiency (84.8%).

Table 2 contains the results for SPED 500 - Survey of Exceptional Children and Youth course that was also taught during a summer session. The data are even more impressive; however, this was a graduate course. For textbook possession, multi-media presentation, research, and all course requirements completion the rate of accomplishment for each was 100%. Candidates also did very well on class attendance (96.9%). The average performance reached the low "A" range for final grade proficiency (90.1%).

Other qualitative results that appeared evident were:

- Self-esteem was immensely enhanced.
- Students actually put forth extensive effort to achieve academically.
- Attendance became par for the course.
- Sociability, team work, and collegiality took center stage.
- The poem "If" became more of a living reality for the students.

Table 1  
Performance of Students on Course Criteria  
SPED 311; Summer 2007

**Criteria**

<b>Class attendance</b> (Incl excused absentees)	N students x N class sessions	Total attendances	Attendance rate
	15(18) = 270	254	94.1%
<b>Textbook possession</b>	N of students	N with textbook	Percent with book
	15	15	100.0
<b>Clinical exp/opt completion</b>	N of students	N completing	Percent of students
	15	14	93.3
<b>Multi-media completion</b>	N of students	N completing	Percent of students
	15	15	100.0
<b>All course requirements comp</b>	N of students x N req	Total N completed	Completion rate
	15(12) = 180	179	99.4%
<b>Final grade proficiency</b>	N stud's x possible pt's	Grade points earned	Proficiency rate
	15(1244) = 18660	15837	84.8%
<b>-Criteria average percent</b>			Ave. percent
			95.3

**Notes:** (1) Students are not counted absent until they first attend class; (2) Excused absentees are not counted as absent.

Table 2  
Performance of Students on Course Criteria  
SPED 500; Summer 2007

**Criteria**

<b>Class attendance</b> (Incl excused absentees)	N students x N class sessions	Total attendances	Attendance rate
	13(15) = 195	189	96.9%
<b>Textbook possession</b>	N of students	N with textbook	Percent with book
	13	13	100.0
<b>Multi-media completion</b>	N of students	N completing	Percent of students
	13	13	100.0
<b>Research</b>	N of students	N completing	Percent of students
	13	13	100.0
<b>All course requirements comp</b>	N of students x N req	Total N completed	Completion rate
	13(11) = 143	143	100.0%
<b>Final grade proficiency</b>	N stud's x possible pt's	Grade points earned	Proficiency rate
	13(1130) = 14690	13242	90.1%
<b>-Criteria average percent</b>			Ave. percent
			97.8

**Notes:** (1) Students are not counted absent until they first attend class; (2) Excused absentees are not counted as absent; (3) One student withdrew in week 2, no data are included on her.

**Summary and Implications**

One of the few things that most Americans can perhaps agree on is that it is important for our children and youth to obtain a very good education; so much so that tremendous resources are allocated to achieve it. Another point of agreement is that teachers play a major role in the educational process. What presents a challenge is producing effective teachers to staff our schools.

To produce good teachers, teacher education programs are emphasizing the preparation

of “qualified” personnel. However, it has been shown that qualified teachers are not necessarily quality teachers. This paper denotes the former as Q1 teachers and the latter as Q2 teachers. There is no argument that all teachers should first be qualified -- they should meet the standards established as essential competencies for entering the profession. What the paper concentrates most on is the Q2 teacher. Much of the Q1 part is manifested by cognitive development and the ability to demonstrate the same. The Q2 part goes on to emphasize personal/affective development and the ability to interact effectively with various constituents in the learning environment.

In an endeavor to produce quality teachers, one university has focused on two dimensions considered essential in the process -- a groovy student and a harmonizing professor. First and foremost, a groovy student must be a competent student. Second, a groovy student is one who exemplifies special affective qualities that are manifested both personally and interpersonally. A harmonizing professor is likewise first knowledgeable of the discipline and secondly one who interacts strategically and extensively with students in the learning process. He/she makes learning alive and authentic in the classroom.

Education takes on new meaning and perspective when students get back the groove that they first had when they envisioned teaching as a profession, and the professor helps by harmonizing facets of the learning experience to make for a meaningful and rewarding adventure. The preliminary results, as reported in two courses, suggest the twosome are gaining ground in producing a more quality teacher (enhanced professional attributes) that schools so desperately need to educate our children – America’s most valuable resource.

It is not disputed that it takes a village to prepare a teacher, but the two major players in the process are the student and the professor. A professor will best know that he/she is on the road to producing quality teachers when the teacher education candidates CARE (demonstrate Commitment, Achievement, Responsiveness, and Enthusiasm).

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