

**Teaching and Leading for Human Flourishing:
Creating a Liberal Arts Framework for
Teacher Preparation**

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Abstract

To satisfy the ongoing demands of external communities, education faculty at liberal arts colleges often make curricular and instructional compromises within their programs which can adversely affect the developmental goals of liberal education. This article highlights several of the complex tensions faculty members face in offering their candidates a program that equips them for professional practice yet still explores the larger scope of what it means to be fully human. It describes a framework for liberal arts teacher preparation as well as the process by which it was developed and the benefits that have resulted from this process.

***Keywords:* liberal arts, teacher preparation, conceptual framework**

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Education faculty members at liberal arts colleges inhabit three complex and dynamic communities. They first reside in the traditional academy, where faculty members teach courses, advise students, design and revise curriculum, engage in research, and serve through committee work and other forms of institutional assistance. In fulfilling these roles, they meet the same expectations as all other members of the academy.

Additionally, teacher preparation programs require faculty to engage continuously with the P–12 school community. This realm extends beyond the neighborhood surrounding a college campus to include rural, suburban, urban and many times international locations in order to prepare candidates for the diverse learners they will teach. For this reason education faculty members network to develop partnerships with district administrators. Teacher educators foster relationships with principals and department chairs, who provide placements, and teachers, who mentor candidates during clinical experiences. These P–12 relationships often connect education programs with other community partners as well, such as relief agencies, park districts, churches, boys and girls clubs, and libraries.

Finally, teacher preparation involves complex interaction with the policy community of local, state and federal regulatory agencies and frequently national accreditation bodies. These relationships require education faculty members to design their curriculum and structure their protocols to meet professional standards, state school codes, licensure examination formats, and federal compliance regulations. This interface occurs not only with one's own state agency but also with other state boards of education in order to advocate for graduates who seek certification in those regions. Faculty members also participate in the regulatory community through serving in state and national professional associations in order to improve the field and shape policies affecting accreditation in the future.

Tension Between the Three Communities

Even if all three of these communities shared identical aims and

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purposes, completing the numerous tasks required of liberal arts teacher educators could still be considered ambitious work. But while the goals of these distinct communities at times intersect, more often they diverge or even conflict with one another. For example, the traditional purpose of liberal arts education has been to explore what it means to be fully human and to develop critical and creative thinking in the process of this interdisciplinary exploration. Professional and P–12 standards, whether from a state or national accrediting body, do not reflect this scholarly journey but only its results (CCSSO, 2011; CAEP, 2013). Meeting standards requires documented evidence of what teacher candidates and their P–12 students are able to *do*. This emphasis on performance only increases after entry into the profession. Teachers' evaluations today in most states are combinations of directly observed instructional practices and student performance on standardized assessments. Products are valued more than the reflective, developmental process through which they unfold.

Because liberal arts education occurs within an academic context of preparation for life, it is primarily engaged in developing intellectual and moral virtues rather than vocational preparation. This goal appears to make the concept of undergraduate liberal arts teacher preparation an oxymoron. However, rather than view this incoherence as an impediment to their work, faculty in the Department of Education at my liberal arts college see our mission as building on the strongest base professional educators can acquire. We firmly believe that the best prepared teachers are those with a liberal arts foundation. The interdisciplinary thinking developed from this form of education prepares graduates to reflect on their own practice and view their curricular and instructional goals through the broader lens of this tradition.

As a department chair in a liberal arts teacher preparation program, I am grateful for faculty members who integrate this tradition within our foundations, methods and clinical courses. But while my department reconciles and values the merger of liberal arts and professional education, this perspective is not prevalent outside my institution. The clash between philosophies of the regulatory

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community and our department became apparent when completing a matrix on my own state's most recent set of professional teaching standards (ISBE, 2010). Of the 159 knowledge and performance indicators that candidates must demonstrate to receive their license, only two touched on areas covered in philosophy of education, our capstone course.

Another example of these conflicts is found in feedback we have received from our P–12 partners. Some teachers who serve as mentors during early field experiences comment that they would like to have our candidates for longer periods of time each week so that they could work with more students. Principals frequently ask for our candidates to provide tutoring before and after school or during the lunch hour. Reading specialists ask for all day assistance during district-wide testing weeks. This need becomes more pronounced after every wave of district-wide staff reductions. Although we try to accommodate our partners and realize our students would benefit from these additional experiences, P–12 school staff members, at times, seem unaware that our students are enrolled in 17 semester hours of classes besides their practicum and attend them during the same time period as the typical P–12 school day.

Condensing the liberal arts content into a different format for education students to provide greater flexibility for serving P–12 schools has a cost. Compacting or reformatting the liberal arts core for education majors increases financial costs for small institutions, but more importantly, it isolates education students from rich, interdisciplinary discussion with their non-education college peers. It establishes one track for education majors and a different one for every other student, making transfers in and out of the education major after the freshman year expensive for students as well.

Similarly, professional organizations and accrediting bodies have called for an increased emphasis on clinical experiences (NCATE, 2010), which is not an unreasonable goal until you see its effect on a rigorous liberal arts course of study. At a recent meeting between university leaders and my state's Board of Education chair, one liberal arts college president made an impassioned plea against teacher education reforms that work against the goals of

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liberal education. He praised his own education faculty members' skill in implementing the large volume of recent state-imposed curricular changes without reducing their college's liberal arts core. But he wondered aloud how much longer liberal arts teacher preparation could exist if this state-driven pace continued. He had thoughtfully prefaced these remarks by stating that while the liberal arts are not the only way to prepare professional educators, they provide an excellent foundation for a career in P-12 schools. His proof was the fact that both the state's current teacher and principal of the year happened to be alumni of his liberal arts institution.

These examples highlight the tension created by well-intentioned but competing demands of the three communities. Liberal arts education faculty must find the delicate balance between educating their candidates, serving their school communities, and satisfying accreditation criteria to provide their candidates with a high quality professional preparation yet still offer them an education for life. If education faculty do not recognize or address these tensions, the liberal arts core of teacher preparation will erode. And if liberal arts education faculty members do not advocate for this form of teacher preparation in all three communities, how can they expect it to be valued outside of their own departments?

Developing a Model of Liberal Arts Teacher Preparation

As was articulated so eloquently by the Wheaton College president, my department colleagues and I are similarly strong advocates for liberal arts teacher preparation. Because we are a faith-based liberal arts institution, we believe strongly in exploring what it means to be human beings who have been created and redeemed by God. In addition to providing disciplinary expertise through an education major and a content area major (secondary) or liberal arts concentration (elementary), we seek to develop this understanding through a 70-semester hour general education program of study. This broad background fosters interdisciplinary connections and provides the conduit for critical and creative thinking as well as the moral development needed by P-12 educators throughout their careers.

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Our belief in the value of the liberal arts caused us to reexamine our own program's conceptual framework to determine if it truly reflected this value or if it focused more on external initiatives. Our prior conceptual theme, "Preparing Teachers as Agents of Change," while similarly established on a liberal arts foundation, appeared to reflect more on educational reform issues than liberal arts outcomes. Providing a quality education to those who historically have had limited opportunities to learn is a noble and worthy social justice goal. But we questioned whether getting every child to a designated achievement level was consistent with that of liberal arts education which encompasses so much more than merely meeting standards. Liberal education aspires to promote human flourishing; it explores what it means to be fully human in order to experience a more enriched life. This requires a shift in focus from getting all learners to the same ending point to one of getting each of them to actualize their potential, even for the student whose starting point exceeds the standard. Our challenge was to articulate a vision of teacher preparation that balanced our responsibilities to accrediting bodies and the P-12 school community with our commitment to liberal education.

From this discussion we embarked on a three-year journey of readings, retreats, brainstorming, drafting and revising. Although we recognized the various strengths of "Preparing Teachers as Agents of Change," we arrived at a new conceptual vision, "Teaching and Leading for Human Flourishing," because it more fully represented our work as liberal arts teacher educators. We then listed the various ways in which our graduates would embody this vision and clustered these roles and outcomes into the categories of knowledge, skills and dispositions. These, in turn, were incorporated into a document that articulated our philosophy, its integration into our various programs of study and clinical experiences, and the ways in which we assessed our student's proficiency in each of these categories.

We solicited feedback on this narrative from arts and sciences faculty, P-12 administrative and teaching partners, and recent alumni. We also sought feedback on the document's strengths and

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weaknesses from our senior students. Finally, we received input from our senior college administrators and Board of Trustees before sending it to our state Board of Education for endorsement. As an institution in a CAEP partnership state, we were required to have a state approved conceptual framework for each of our programs to meet accreditation standards. This process took a significant amount of time but resulted in all stakeholders having a sense of ownership in the document.

Articulating the Concept of Human Flourishing

The idea of educating for human flourishing has ancient roots. Although its presence is found in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible, its connection to the contemporary academy is seen in the works of Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The concept is found throughout Christian theology in recognizing that all individuals are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26, 27) and therefore have inherent value as well as the capacity to learn and grow.

Human flourishing is the ethical and purposeful realization of human attributes, in mind, body and spirit, which fits a person, as Milton said, "to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices of public and private life" (Milton, 1644, p.3). We see this concept translated into the work of our education graduates as instilling and developing the knowledge, skills, and intellectual and moral virtues which help to actualize this potential within their students. In order to teach for human flourishing, our candidates need a broad background in the liberal arts, expertise in the subject matter, knowledge of the ways in which children and adolescents learn best, knowledge of the optimal conditions to achieve the *education good*, and the skills, virtues and dispositions worthy of the profession.

Although a teacher education program based on the concept of human flourishing would receive support from the academy, the challenges in adopting this framework were apparent when we attempted to operationalize the concept. Human flourishing needed to be understood, observed, and assessed in the two communities

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outside the academy. We asked ourselves the following questions: What are the signs that our teacher candidates actually meet this goal of teaching and leading for human flourishing? What does human flourishing look like in the P–12 classroom? How does this lofty aspiration intersect with the 159 state professional teaching standards' indicators which must be met for state licensure?

As a department, we determined that teaching and leading for human flourishing require three distinct professional and dispositional components: embodying justice, making ethical and reasoned decisions, and, because we are a faith-based education department, acting in a Christ-like manner. Although these components were similar to those in our earlier framework, we determined to articulate more fully their close connection to the liberal arts.

Embodying justice

In society justice serves as a critical conduit to foster the social, cultural, political, economic and moral conditions that will improve the individual and society as a whole (Keller, 2010). Within the P–12 classroom, justice is equally essential for human flourishing (Adler, 1982; Dewey, 1938; Hansen, 2007; Lockerbie, 2005). Teachers who embody justice in their classrooms recognize and address the various contexts which surround individual students' needs for learning (Tomlinson, 2005). They work to ensure that each student has the optimal opportunity to learn regardless of his or her economic level, ethnicity, linguistic or cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, academic ability, or experiential level (ISBE, 2010). Additionally, they hold a long-range perspective of developing their students' interdisciplinary knowledge, care for the physical environment, life skills, and civic engagement in order to equip them to participate fully in post-secondary education, careers and community life (Spears & Loomis, 2009).

Teacher candidates who embody justice view students' competencies and capacities in a holistic manner; they seek to know their students as persons and recognize that many of their talents may exist outside of core academic areas. These educators then use this

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knowledge to develop their students' academic and social goals. Just teachers create a safe learning environment in order to enhance social relationships and engage students through mutual respect and cooperation. They hold all learners to high expectations but provide the necessary support for all of them to succeed.

Just teacher candidates offer a rich and rigorous curriculum to their students, offering a depth of understanding within their own discipline and demonstrating its connection to other content areas. They use evidence-based instructional approaches that reflect the research on diverse learners, demonstrating cultural competence in the curricular and pedagogical choices they make (Moughamian, Rivera & Francis, 2009; Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). Finally, they build strong relationships with students, parents and guardians, realizing that positive relationships are both instrumental to and the outcome of good teaching.

Making ethical and reasoned decisions

The second component of teaching and leading for human flourishing relates to the numerous decisions educators make on a daily basis. A liberal education allows our candidates to grow as thinkers and problem solvers so that they can address the holistic learning needs of their students through these decisions (Holmes, 2007; Palmer, 1998). This is accomplished through a decision-making process that is not based on a limited number of prescribed choices but is based in sound reasoning (*euboulia*—deliberating well) and practical wisdom (*phronesis*—prudence, and *metis*—savvy), and considers a body of evidence, clinical experience, exemplary research, and relational understandings (Spears & Loomis, 2009).

The practice of teacher candidates who make ethical and reasoned decisions should lead to certain desirable outcomes, such as independent student learning that results from developmentally appropriate learning activities (Berger, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). These decisions must address both the breadth and depth of the curriculum, focusing on the central concepts of a discipline and its connection to other content areas (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Ethical and reasoned decisions emanate, in part, from robust

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assessment data which guide and enhance the instructional process (Afferblach, 2007).

This type of decision-making also involves the ability to make connections with life outside of the classroom through a rich variety of resources, including community members and appropriate technologies (Marzano, Pickering, & Heflebower, 2011; Noddings, 2007). This component should also focus on increasing students' literacy skills in and through all areas of the curriculum since they are essential to independent learning (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2010). Finally, ethical and reasoned decision-making should involve both local and global contexts in order to prepare students for life in an interconnected world (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Acting in a Christ-like manner

The third and final component of teaching and leading for human flourishing at our institution involves dispositions of moral virtues, which have a long tradition in liberal arts education (Holmes, A.F., 1991; Lewis, 2001) and hold a historic place in teacher preparation (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). Because our program is grounded in Christian principles, we identify this aspect as acting in a Christ-like manner. We believe that Christ is our ultimate model of justice, love, and service. His example in scripture also reminds us that teaching requires humility and respect for the dignity of everyone.

Translating these qualities into a secular, educational context required us to describe and structure these qualities in terms of professional categories. The first of these categories is professionalism, in which candidates demonstrate professional and ethical conduct with supervisors, students, colleagues, and the community (Danielson, 2007). Examples of appropriate conduct include promptness, perseverance, proper confidentiality, and honesty. The second category is collaboration, where candidates foster relationships that enhance the teaching and learning experience (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Examples of collaborative

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dispositions include being courteous, astute, and impartial, and a willingness to engage in open dialogue to accomplish goals as part of a larger group.

The third category is scholarship, in which candidates demonstrate a commitment to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, intellectual curiosity and moral development (Boyer, 1997). Examples of a scholarly manner include enthusiasm, humility, and courage in the pursuit of learning. The fourth category, problem-solving, holds the expectations that candidates adjust successfully to new circumstances, are flexible in nature, and persist through adversity (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006; Wiggins and McTighe, 2005). Examples of problem-solving include the ability to be reflective, insightful, and positive when receiving constructive feedback.

The fifth category is initiative, where candidates actively demonstrate the ability to foster extensions in learning and teaching (Palmer, 1998). Qualities emanating from this category include self-direction, creativity and confidence. The final category is leadership, where candidates demonstrate effective communication skills, thinking skills and creative expression (Glickman, 2002; Reeves, 2006). This area includes practices that reflect intellectual and emotional engagement with colleagues and issues. It requires respect for all people while providing opportunities to hear, consider, and discuss ideas and varying viewpoints.

Conclusions

We have realized several benefits from the process of re-conceptualizing our teacher preparation framework. First, it has engaged and re-engaged department faculty members, particularly those who joined the department after the last revision of our former framework. Their contribution to the new document has helped them understand and invest more fully in the relationship between the liberal arts and teacher education.

Seeking feedback from arts and sciences faculty has improved our understanding of current issues in the disciplines and enabled content professors to see their critical role in teacher formation. This reciprocity has not only forged a stronger partnership within

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the college, it has also created a more cohesive program of study for our students. Our department's conceptual framework revision has served as an example for the entire college as it moves toward enhancing the liberal arts general education program for students in all majors.

Secondly, the process has strengthened our relationship with P-12 partners because it has helped them perceive how the liberal arts form our candidates and has demonstrated that we understand, in part, the complexity of the work they do. Feedback from principals, teachers and superintendents was overwhelmingly positive, with several individuals stating they wished they had the same learning opportunities we offer our students. But their critique also contributed significantly. On an early draft, they asked us to emphasize the relational aspect of teaching even more than we had articulated. Their contribution to the document helped all of us value the partnerships between our two communities.

Thirdly, this process has enabled our state and national accreditation bodies to see that liberal arts teacher education, despite its cost in time and resources, continues to be a viable and vital alternative to fast-track, apprenticeship types of preparation programs. They have seen how the liberal arts develop the very intellectual, social and moral skills required to foster 21st century learning. Rather than viewing the liberal arts model as obsolete, program reviewers have seen how it develops the capacity for critical analysis and creative thinking needed to meet our state's recently adopted P-12 curricular outcomes (CCSSO, 2011; ISBE, 2010; CAEP, 2013).

Feedback from alumni and current students helped us see the need to articulate more clearly how the liberal arts develop the professional roles of a teacher, as they were reluctant to have us set aside the model they had experienced in our program. In contrast to our first drafts of human flourishing, they saw being an "agent of change" as far more empowering and defining of their mission. They pointed out our need to translate the intellectual work of the college classroom into the language which describes the intellectual work they accomplish as professional educators. In addition

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to helping us link the overarching values of liberal education with specific teaching skills, our graduates' and seniors' contributions in this process helped us perceive the marked influence of a conceptual framework on professional development. Their reluctance to have us set aside "their" framework showed us the power of an organizing theme on teacher development.

Although the process of defining human flourishing in the P–12 context required three years and involved many stakeholders, the result was not only a clear vision of a time-honored but contemporary means of teacher preparation, but the method by which it was achieved also strengthened the relationships between all three educational communities. I would similarly encourage all liberal arts college teacher education programs, whether faith-based or otherwise, to promote the liberal arts as an essential means for preparing the next generation of professional educators. In this era of mandated college and career readiness standards, such as Common Core State Standards, the intellectual and academic skills required for student mastery of P–12 literacy and math standards mirror those achieved through a liberal arts education. These include such tasks as analyzing and synthesizing multiple texts in a history class or constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others in algebra (CCSSO, 2011). Additionally the analytical, reflective, and articulation skills required of the edTPA and other similar teacher performance assessments are similarly developed through liberal arts study.

Liberal arts education faculty will continue to face challenges in finding the delicate balance between educating their candidates, serving their school communities, and satisfying accreditation bodies. But by communicating the important role of the liberal arts in teacher formation, we can help these diverse groups more fully understand their relationship to creating teachers committed to human flourishing. Rather than regarding liberal arts education as independent of teacher preparation, they will come to see it as an indispensable means to achieve it.

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