Artisans, Architects, and Apprentices: Valuing the Craft of Teacher Education

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As teacher education faculty, we are both artisans and architects. As artisans, it is not only our products that enrich us; it is the art of the craft itself that shapes our work. An artisan is valued for the creative endeavor, and not solely the masterpiece. In turn, we ask that our apprentices consider the role of inspiration and motivation as being integral in their teacher preparation experiences. We are also architects, building the content and pedagogical foundations with which these apprentices will enter the field. Unlike artisans who are regarded for the process of their work, architects tend to be evaluated solely for the completed product. Communities and PK-12 schools will always assess us in our role as architects, much more so than as artisans, but the integration of the two provides a more telling picture of how our discipline truly operates.

In the field of teacher preparation, we find ourselves measuring success through outcomes of what our candidates and completers are able to do. What assessments have they passed? What tools are in their curricular and pedagogical arsenal? How successful are they in their fieldwork, in terms of engaging students and using assessment to guide instructional practice? How do their PK-12 students perform on standardized and curriculum-based measures? While the emphasis on what these novices can *do* is certainly an important piece in establishing "what works," it is important to also consider how these novices *think*.

In contemplating the heart of teacher education, I am not convinced that we must evaluate our programs and curricula solely on the *products* of learning; we must also

reflect on the critical importance of the *process* of learning. How are we, as teacher educators, elevating the importance of the profession of teaching such that we hold reverence for the necessary ability of our pre-service teachers to think critically, analyze effectively, reflect continuously, and engage as ethical and purposeful practitioners? These measures of success are more challenging to evaluate, and in terms of our accrediting agencies, are seemingly unimportant in measuring the quality of a teacher preparation program.

While we can provide the mass quantities of outcome data needed for our external evaluators, "what works" in teacher education is preparing candidates through liberal arts experiences, rich coursework in social foundations of education, emphasizing inquiry-based methodology, and ensuring supporting culminating fieldwork. Through these approaches, our programs equip students to enter the vocation as critical and creative thinkers, engaging their talent and passion through reflection and ethical practice.

Though accreditation standards and demands of outside groups strive to determine if a teacher education program is preparing candidates adequately, these standards can seem dismissive of the direct role of the process of learning and how we prepare teachers who are *thinkers* and *reflectors*. The evidence we provide to these bodies, though rich in demonstrating quality outcomes, is solely focused on product and performance (CAEP, 2013; CCSSO, 2011). Through evaluating, and in most cases quantifying, observable behaviors and tangible outcomes of the novice and his or her students, we are most certainly able to directly measure many aspects of teacher effectiveness.

There is no argument that a teacher should be evaluated on his or her ability to

apply best practices to successfully impact learning of diverse students (CAEP, 2013). Our programs can, and certainly should, emphasize the critical importance of content knowledge and pedagogical expertise. Additionally, we equip our students with the tools to know how to measure the learning progress of all learners, to ensure that their practices are effective. It is imperative that we continue to focus on outcome-based measures to evaluate "what works," but not to the exclusion of less tangible measures that are deeply embedded in the process of training and developing quality teachers. Evaluating and acknowledging the *journey* of the preparation experience is arguably just as important in the shaping of a quality teacher (Lederhouse, 2014). Just as teacher educators are artisans as well as architects, it is our hope that these apprentices leaving our programs will value the journey that they have traveled and the craft that they are ever-refining in their development as novice teachers.

A Core Curriculum in the Liberal Arts is Integral in Teacher Preparation

While many teacher preparation programs are housed within liberal arts institutions, there is often a perceived disconnect between the true purpose of a liberal arts education and the fundamental goals of a vocational training program. Perhaps this would hold some truth if teacher education was viewed solely as an employment training endeavor, though I would certainly argue that our work is much broader and deeper as we prepare effective practitioners for the field. Beyer, Feinberg, Pagano, & Whitson (1989) note that viewing our role in teacher education as simply *training*, as opposed to *education*, "reflects the view that teachers are only technicians or managers rather than morally engaged people" (p. 131).

Dismissing teacher preparation as auxiliary to the mission of a liberal arts

institution is ignorant in its assumptions that our programs are simply exiting students with a product- and delivery-based approach to teaching and learning, to the exclusion of honoring the framework of the liberal arts as a critical foundation. To the contrary, liberal arts institutions have an opportunity to embrace their education departments, honoring the integration of pedagogy with the underlying philosophies of the overall mission. In liberal arts colleges, the importance of breadth and depth is emphasized, with the intent to develop students into creative, active learners who question, reflect, and analyze their discipline and the learning experiences themselves (Epstein, 2007). Certainly these are desirable skills for the novice teacher entering the field.

Clearly, a program need not utilize the liberal arts as its primary foundation for educator preparation, but it seems contrary to the vocation to undermine the values inherent in a liberal arts background. If liberal education centers on the notion of preparing individuals to experience an enriched life through developing skills and values that honor independent critical thinking, leadership, social justice, and integration of those skills through actions, surely such an education is best suited to align with our discipline. In reference to those who may question the connection, Lederhouse (2014) notes that "rather than regarding liberal arts education as independent of teacher preparation, they will come to see it as an indispensable means to achieve it" (p. 13).

As it relates to preparing elementary school teachers specifically, many institutions, including my own, offer a broad liberal arts major targeted at providing the candidates with a course of study that not only aligns with licensure requirements, but also demonstrates value for the liberal arts as a critical foundation.

Through extensive coursework in core content areas, including literature, history, mathematics, sciences, arts and humanities, teacher education students participate in an enriching curriculum that equips them for their profession while exploring these other disciplines in the context of humanity, social justice, and critical thinking. Roose (2013) notes that since each subject has its own vocabulary, philosophy, and underlying assumptions, pre-service teachers become enriched in how they might approach teaching and learning through these different disciplinary lenses.

So, how do we measure the value of a liberal arts education in the preparation of a novice teacher? This remains a concept difficult to measure, though with creative planning, a program can devise tools and activities that allow the candidate to synthesize pedagogy and practice within the context of scholarship and inquiry in the liberal arts. At Mary Baldwin College, our faculty members have worked collaboratively over time to develop and implement a culminating exercise for our teacher education students that targets this exact objective. We have chosen to approach this through the requirement of a *reflective synthesis* paper. This comprehensive student assessment provides the candidate with the opportunity to demonstrate, in written form, his or her integrated analysis of three key components of the teacher preparation experience: research and scholarship, fieldwork, and coursework. Through this assignment, evaluators are able to glean each student's ability to reflect on the role that content and pedagogical coursework (in the context of a liberal arts focus) have played in the student teaching experience, and how the body of professional literature in turn, supports these revelations. This culminating experience also allows our faculty to examine each student's understanding of applying inquiry-based methodologies, and the student's underlying approach to

critically examining social and foundational issues of educational practice.

A Substantive Exploration of Social Foundations of Education Must be Emphasized

As the demographics within our schools shift, we find ourselves faced with an escalating need to prepare teachers who are fully confident and competent to serve all varieties of learners. Through a multitude of courses and learning experiences, teacher educators can strive to effectively address pedagogy and content through a lens that is not only interdisciplinary, but that also considers education within a broader context. For many of our teacher education students, their first exposure to the field during their collegiate years will be in a course that addresses social, political, and philosophical foundations of education. While often a student's first course related to the vocation of teaching, I do find myself uncomfortable with the notion that these courses can be referred to as introductory or primary. I worry that designating courses in social foundations as introductory can undermine their importance as critical in the preparation of teachers.

While designated often as 100-level courses (at the undergraduate level), courses in educational foundations are paramount and critical to the development of quality teachers. Hartlep, Porfilio, Otto, and O'Brien (2015) argue that this core coursework encourages students to recognize social and political injustices and decisions that should be questioned, and to acknowledge that culture, policy, and tradition have a direct impact on teachers, learners, families, and communities as a whole. With a focus on social justice and equity among students, the field of Social Foundations asserts that until educators, legislators, and communities collaborate to ensure fair and equitable education, excellence cannot be achieved (Fenstermacher, 2007).

Though the Commonwealth of Virginia has held steadfast to its requirement that teacher education candidates complete coursework in foundations, it seems that other states are questioning the imposition of such a course as taking up valuable time that could better be spent focusing solely on pedagogy (Harlep et al, 2015). As some teacher education programs find themselves in a push to expedite the credentialing process and eliminate the excess "fluff" from preparation programs, coursework in foundations seems to be the first to be considered for removal from the curriculum (Friedrich, 2014). This marginalization of the importance of social foundations in preparing quality teachers reinforces the notion that teachers are increasingly being trained as technicians rather than thinkers.

I distinctly remember my own experience as a collegiate learner in a social foundations education course. My expectations were few; I anticipated that I might learn a little regarding how educational practice had changed over time in this country, and that I might learn a little about legislation and policy that shaped the practice of teaching. My peers who had taken it in the semesters that preceded me did not regard the course as rigorous, and my approach was that this class was simply a hoop I needed to jump through to get closer to student teaching. I did not expect my experience in a course on social foundations to be truly transformational in shaping my life as a teacher and as a life-long learner.

My own PK-12 student experiences were particularly unique. As a child of American diplomats stationed abroad, most of my schooling was in English-speaking international schools, the exception being my high school years in a parochial school outside of Washington DC. Until I entered my foundations of education course my second semester sophomore year, I was completely naïve to the inequity in our

nation's public schools. When given the challenge of reflecting on my own ideas and attitudes toward race, gender, poverty, and privilege, I came to understand the harm of deficit-based notions of the experiences and circumstances of others. As Hartlep et al (2015) argue, these courses connect teacher education students to the experiences beyond classroom walls that shape the learning of children, while pushing candidates to reflect on their moral and ethical duty to appropriately address diverse students in a challenging context. This was certainly my own experience.

Dismissing courses in social foundations as solely an introduction to the field is in direct contrast to the deep and rich purpose that a well-constructed foundations course can serve in preparing thoughtful, reflective, empathetic teachers who strive to be ethical and caring practitioners in a world where each learner does not enter the classroom with an equal, or even equitable, experience. I do not propose that foundational coursework be moved to later in the curriculum. Rather, it is important that these courses hold esteemed value in their departments, and that faculty teaching other pedagogical coursework along the way embed similar considerations and criticisms within their instructional framework. In teaching methods coursework, for example, instructors should focus on teaching research-based instructional practices while also questioning the idea that certain methods or strategies will work under all circumstances with all learners. Our candidates should think critically of strategies, even those for which there is empirical evidence. Only through questioning and analytic thought can an effective teacher make instructional decisions that may be most appropriate for the learners and situation at hand.

Modeling and Teaching Inquiry-Based Practices is Essential

In my practice as a teacher, administrator, and teacher educator, I continually

circle back to inquiry-based teaching as a preferred model for pedagogical practice. Since inquiry-based instructional methods provide students with richer opportunities for owning the learning process in a unique way, we allow learners of all varieties to make-sense of their own educational experiences, developing into critical thinkers who can demonstrate conceptual understandings and connect classroom activities to real world applications. Also of critical importance in a learning setting that values inquiry-based practices, is a reflective teacher who values and honors the ability of students to generate and follow-through on experiences, while drawing conclusions with facilitation and guidance (Magee & Flessner, 2012). This confidence in the student as constructor of his or her own learning requires that the teacher shift away from deficit-based notions of student differences, perhaps reflecting on how his or her social foundations coursework encouraged a focus on equitable education and consideration for what individual students bring to the class, as opposed to what they do not bring.

Teaching pre-service teachers to implement an inquiry-focused methodology is not without its challenges. In conversations with practicing teachers, I often hear that the stagnancy of their pacing guides and curriculum makes planning inquiry activities, in any subject matter, challenging. In working with the apprentices about to enter the field, I would like to challenge teacher educators to fill the role of mentor to the apprentice by not only teaching the methodology, but also by modeling it in pedagogical coursework. This notion of "practicing what we preach" is critical in our discipline to obtain buy-in and motivation for implementing these strategies in the classroom.

It is necessary and important to view inquiry learning and teaching as a

continuum and not a fixed target. The amount of autonomy and independence for obtaining mastery given to any particular student can vary to accommodate the learning objective, the student, and resources available (Zion & Mendelovici, 2012). Our methods courses for teacher candidates should walk students through the decision-making process as it relates to choosing lessons most conducive to structured, guided, or open inquiry. In doing so, the teacher educator should shape his or her instructional practices to engage candidates in active learning exercises that utilize each of these points along the inquiry continuum. Through teaching these candidates with examples of inquiry-based practices, we create a learning community that enhances the overall success of the educational process (Zion & Slezak, 2005). Modeling this learning community will, in turn, help to foster collaborative teachers who are more likely to challenge their future students with learning activities and goals that stimulate passion for discovery, ownership of learning, and skills in metacognitive awareness.

While the concept of academic freedom places limits on methodology that might otherwise be required for faculty teaching pedagogical coursework, it is certainly within achievable means for an education department, college, or school, to otherwise choose to adopt an underlying philosophy or vision that places value on inquiry teaching and learning practices. Instructors who commit to this approach demonstrate the ability to openly and critically reflect, and appear to be very intentional in the planning and delivery of guided instructional experiences that enhance the learning of students (Vajoczki, Watt, & Vine, 2011). Would we not want this to be the very model that we set for pre-service teachers?

There is certainly no doubt that successful P-12 inquiry classrooms require

effective behavior management practices, a community of trust, and high (yet differentiated) expectations on the part of both the teacher and the learners themselves (Quigley, Marshall, Deaton, Cook, & Padilla, 2011). Some of these skills will develop with experience and practice, but without explicit instruction and modeling, novices do not receive the guidance they need to flourish in establishing learning communities that are conducive to rich inquiry opportunities. We want the teachers that exit our programs to have an observable disposition toward reflection, inquiry, and analysis (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Fieldwork Matters

There is little doubt that higher education learning experiences of pre-service teachers make up only a portion of the critical, overall, teacher education experience. As teacher preparation programs, we all rely on our PK-12 partners to host these candidates for fieldwork experiences throughout their journey. Though our accrediting body (CAEP, 2013) requires evidence of partnership and collaboration in obtaining these mentoring placements, and in training the hosts appropriately, we are often left at the whim of school divisions to simply find a teacher who is willing to take on a novice for up to a semester. Fortunately, many of these cooperating teachers are energized and renewed by the opportunity and serve as highly effective mentors and outstanding models for our students; occasionally, however, there are unfortunate exceptions.

Does a less-than-ideal fieldwork placement hamper the ability of a novice to develop and thrive and enter the field with a level of confidence we might expect for a first-year teacher? It could, certainly, but that hinges on the resilience of the candidate and his or her ability to reflect on the impact of the experience, positive or

negative, on personal growth, development, and readiness for the vocation. Not all pre-service teachers can do this with minimal support, so these more challenging placements rely heavily on the expertise, guidance, and mentoring (and occasionally intervention) of the college-provided student teaching supervisor.

Careful monitoring of candidates by the college supervisor and cooperating teacher is essential to observe and provide support, as related to skills and dispositions critical to the profession that might not be as apparent to a professor of an education course (Kincaid & Keiser, 2014). The National Council for Teacher Quality (2011) has emphasized the critical nature of teacher education programs focusing on the selection of only exemplary cooperating teachers, suggesting that only teachers who are in the top quartile, based on their students' performance, be given the privilege and responsibility of hosting student teachers. While grounded in principle, we are not realistically at this point given the state of current partnerships and high demand for placements. We are bound to the placement decisions often made by human resource administrators, and occasionally principals, in selecting veterans to host our novices.

I am discouraged when I hear stories of teachers in the field (of high quality or otherwise) requesting to host a student teacher solely because they need recertification points, not because they understand the value of such an important role in the development of a new teacher. We are fortunate that many (sadly, not all) of the teachers who host our students are clinical faculty who have undergone training through a consortium of regional teacher education programs, school divisions, and teacher representatives. Unfortunately, the demand for placements exceeds the capacity of the individuals able to go through this detailed and

comprehensive training. Cooperating teachers are undercompensated, and their role does not hold the prestige that it ought to given its importance.

When it comes to student teaching, I often think that we should be more purposeful (to the extent that we can, given placement limitations we already face) in selecting placements where our teacher education candidates will have opportunities to co-teach or collaborate with another teacher or related service provider. For example, it would be valuable for a student teacher in a fourth grade general education setting to experience co-teaching with a special educator, or collaborating with a specialist in English Language Learners, to meet the unique needs of a particular group of students. Special education candidates would benefit from opportunities to supervise and coordinate paraprofessionals, a responsibility they may be tasked with once "on the job."

During my initial student teaching experience, I was placed with a geography teacher at a school in Newport News, Virginia. On my first day, I was informed that I would be expected to co-teach with a special education teacher. At no time in my pedagogical training had I been taught about co-teaching and I went in with the foolish assumption that this meant I was to have a "helper" in my class. Through an experience with a remarkable co-teaching team, I observed and learned how to truly co-teach with shared responsibility for planning, delivery, and assessment. It was that experience in my teacher education journey that eventually led me to pursue a career in special education, eternally an advocate for collaboration, co-teaching, and instructional partnerships. It was not until my preparation as a special education teacher that I had any formal training at all in co-teaching. Our completers, particularly in general education fields, sometimes report that they wish they had

learned more in their preparation program about working with adults, not only the PK-12 students. High quality, supportive fieldwork may be an area where we can strive to provide candidates with these collaboration opportunities.

The student teaching experience, as the culmination of preparation, allows teacher education programs to delve deeper into the evaluation of a candidate's dispositions, personality traits, and emotions as related to entering this vocation. As gate-builders and gate-keepers, our responsibility is to the field and to the candidate, but it is also to the PK-12 students with whom our novices are placed (Ripski, LoCasale-Crouch, & Decker, 2011). Successful completion of fieldwork, in what is hopefully a nurturing and supportive environment, is the final key that allows new teachers to enter the vocation.

Concluding Thoughts

Preparing a quality teacher is not easy work. While some candidates come to our programs with a disposition that sets them apart as "naturals," there is a distinctly important role for teacher preparation for these students, and also for those who are just beginning to get their feet wet with the idea of wanting to be a teacher. As teacher educators, we are faced with external bodies that demand solely product-based evidence to evaluate our effectiveness, rather than a more global consideration of how our students think, process, and analyze to make decisions. We are occasionally seen by our peers in the liberal arts disciplines as being auxiliary to the primary mission of the institution, as simply a "cash cow" and a technical program for career preparation. We are challenged by efforts to reduce the length of the route to licensure for candidates while improving outcomes, compounded by limited resources. We are critiqued for not sending candidates into the field with

metaphorical crystal balls, magic wands, and fairy dust to be able to instantly captivate their students despite child-specific situations and circumstances that are beyond their control.

The liberal arts are integral in preparing teachers for any and every level and discipline. There is considerable alignment between the goals of preparing any collegian with a liberal arts foundation and in preparing teachers.
Coursework in social, political, and philosophical foundations of education is paramount to encourage pre-service teachers to reflect on their own experiences, and societal issues to approach their vocation with a lens that emphasizes ethical practice and social justice.

Effective teachers are best prepared with a focus on inquiry-based methodology in a collaborative context. We present our candidates with a myriad of best practices and tools for their instructional toolbox, but we also prepare them to engage their PK-12 students in inquiry-based learning.

Supportive and dynamic field placements are critical in the development of candidates who have a richer understanding of how to apply what they have learned and make sound instructional decisions that improve learning for all students. Through a combination of practica and the culminating student teaching experience, our students have an opportunity, under supervision, to implement the instructional practices they have learned about in their coursework with actual PK-12 diverse learners.

What works in teacher education is not new, earth-shattering strategies or reform; it is the necessity of viewing our field as more than a technical preparation program, and advocating that others do the same. We must hold value to the work that we do

in the classroom, through fieldwork, in mentoring or advising, and in collaborating with colleagues. As teacher educators, we have an enormous responsibility to schools, communities, and learners. Through self-study and program analysis, we can each reflect on our own institution's needed areas of growth in improving our efforts to produce quality teachers. While we may refine curricula and standards accordingly, the heart of the matter does not change.

We are artisans, modeling and teaching our craft to our apprentices. We are architects, refining our plans as we go and implementing the sound science of teaching and learning while building and elevating the profession. As artisans and architects, new tools, technologies, research, and experiences influence our products over time, but we remain committed to our discipline. We must regard both our roles as important and valuable in the development of liberally-educated, socially-conscious, inquiry-minded apprentices.

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