



1-2007

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Recommended Citation

Avery,, Patricia G.; Bents,, Mary; and Yussen, Steven (2007) "Teacher Preparation at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities," *Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice*: Vol. 21: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/tl-nirp-journal/vol21/iss2/5>

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Teacher Preparation at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

**Patricia G. Avery, Mary Bents, and Steven Yussen
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Introduction

People who have never ventured to Minnesota generally associate the state with cold weather, Garrison Keillor, and good education. The reality is a bit more nuanced. The winters are undeniably very cold, but the thermometer often registers in the 90s in the summertime. Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion* is a source of much pride among most Minnesotans, though less so with a growing and increasingly vocal right-wing conservative group. And, while the state's young people almost always rank in the top five when the results of standardized tests are reported by state from across the nation, these scores mask one of the largest achievement gaps between white students and students of color anywhere in the country (Education Trust, 2004).

It is in this "Land of 10,000 Lakes" (in reality, closer to 100,000) that over 450 preservice teachers at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities are prepared annually. In this article, we describe the state and institutional educational contexts in which our programs are situated. We provide an overview of our programs and then describe in some detail two challenges we currently face and how we are addressing them.

The State Educational Context

Historically, the education system in the state has enjoyed a strong commitment from the public. Similar to trends across the country, however, funding for public education has eroded. This has been accompanied by an increase in the number of charter schools, a push for greater accountability, and reduced support for the notion of "education for the public good." Higher education, too, has come under greater scrutiny, and a struggle for financial support continues at each

legislative session. Amidst these constraints, the education community has several ways it comes together to work for the improvement of education. A P-16 Council was created in 2003 to set the broad direction for education in Minnesota; it is composed of the heads of the state higher education system (University of Minnesota, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, and the Private College Council) along with the leaders of the major educational organizations, such as: Minnesota Association of School Administrators, Minnesota Association of Elementary School Principals, Minnesota Association of Secondary Principals, Education Minnesota (the state teacher's organization), Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Minnesota Department of Education, and others. The Standards and Rules Committee of the State Board of Teaching is made up of representatives of the various education groups, including teacher preparation institutions, and works on issues that directly relate to teacher licensing. Finally, an "Education Leaders Group" meets regularly with the Commissioner of Education to discuss issues affecting the state. Although disagreements about education policy do arise, they are situated within strong positive, ongoing relationships of mutual respect.

A consistent voice for teacher education in the state is the statewide Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (MACTE). This organization works across institutional types (public and private) to support the high quality teacher preparation in the state. Most recently, MACTE has been instrumental in collecting, organizing, and making accessible on its website data about its member institutions and their programs (<http://mtqm.mnteacher.org>).

The Institutional Context

The University of Minnesota has four campuses—Twin Cities, Duluth, Morris, and Crookston—a collaborative center in Rochester, extension offices, and research and outreach centers throughout the state. It is both the state land-grant university, with a strong tradition of education and public service, and the state's primary research university, with faculty of national and international reputation.

The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities is situated in a seven-county metropolitan area of 5.7 million people. With its enrollment of 51,000 students, the campus is second in the United States only to

Ohio State University in terms of student population. The U of MN offers 161 different bachelor's degrees, 218 master's degrees, 114 doctoral degrees, and 5 professional degrees. As a "Research 1" land grant university, its 2,382 tenure-track faculty are expected to maintain ongoing research agendas and provide service to local and state communities in addition to their teaching responsibilities.

The College of Education and Human Development. The College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) is one of 20 colleges within the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus. With an enrollment of 3,800 students each term, it is the fourth largest of the colleges. Within the CEHD there are six academic departments: Curriculum and Instruction; Educational Policy and Administration; Educational Psychology; Institute of Child Development; School of Kinesiology; and Work, Community, and Family Education. Courses of study are at several levels: baccalaureate, master of education for preservice teachers and inservice professionals, master of arts, specialist, and two types of doctoral programs. In addition, the college offers certificates in particular areas of focus, options for additional licenses, and professional development for a range of education professionals.

Each department has specialty areas ranging from adult education to child psychology, physical activity courses to human resource development. And, while there is a variety of faculty interest areas, all departments are engaged in some way with the teacher preparation programs. There are 21 different initial teacher licensure programs with additional specialty areas in elementary, science, and world languages.

Almost all of our licensure programs are offered at the graduate level. Current undergraduate students and working professionals can apply. We offered our first post-baccalaureate programs in 1987 and by 1992 had converted all of our teacher preparation coursework (except agricultural education and technology education) to the graduate level. Incoming students must have a minimum of 100 hours of work experience in an educational setting with an age group that corresponds to their planned professional field. They also must have work or volunteer experience with students from ethnic or cultural backgrounds different than their own. Typically those accepted have a GPA between 3.0 and 3.5 and an undergraduate major in their content area.

Experience has shown us that students who meet these requirements are more likely to succeed in the classroom and in their careers. According to surveys of our graduates and the school administrators who hire them, students completing our initial licensure programs are reflective practitioners who routinely analyze their own work, monitor their students' progress, and adjust and improve their teaching practices.

Those students accepted into our programs—about two-thirds of those who apply—will face a challenging, graduate-level course of study, one that prepares them to meet Minnesota's Standards for Effective Practice for Beginning Teachers (<http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/arule/8710/2000.html>). They will work closely with faculty whose research sets the national standard in literacy, math and science education, teacher leadership, early childhood education, and other critical areas.

During a 12- to 15-month program, students focus on three core areas:

- **Foundations:** Students explore learning theories, the needs of diverse students, child and adolescent development, assessment tools, using technology for teaching, and the interaction between school and community.
- **Methodology:** Students learn how to teach. Topics include instructional methods, assessment of student learning, and classroom management, each geared to the student's particular content area.
- **Integrated clinical experiences:** Rather than separate campus learning from schoolroom learning, we weave clinical experiences throughout the program. Students progressively increase the amount of time they spend in schools, concluding with a full-time teaching experience during their final semester.

After successful completion of the program, students are recommended for licensure. Many of the credits earned during the licensure program apply toward a Master's in Education degree; most students complete one to four classes after their licensure in order to obtain their degree.

Challenges and Responses

Like every institution, our college constantly grapples with challenges that vary in terms of source (internal, external, or combination), duration, intensity, and potential consequences. The transition from undergraduate to post-baccalaureate teacher licensure programs, for example, required extensive human resources, but the goal was clear, and the process was contained within a specific timeframe. In this section, we will describe two challenges that shape our work and have a significant impact on the decisions we make in our daily lives as teacher educators. The first challenge—facilitating faculty communication and achieving consensus—is endemic to a large institution. The second challenge—preparing preservice teachers for teaching and learning in a diverse, urban environment—is related to broader societal demographic trends. We chose these issues because they are ones that teacher educators in all contexts face; at the same time, they are particularly significant issues in a large university located in an urban environment. Additionally, although the issues may seem distinct, they are interconnected: The degree to which we can enable our students to be successful teachers in diverse, urban schools will likely depend in part on the degree of communication and consensus among our faculty.

Facilitating Communication and Achieving Consensus

One of the primary functions of a university is to foster the development of independent, critical thinking among faculty and students. We steadfastly support this mission and see it as the essence of university life. Why, then, would we want to facilitate communication and *achieve consensus* among faculty? While we want our faculty to reflect a diverse range of perspectives, we also strive to have a shared vision of the purpose of our programs. Indeed, empirical studies indicate that programs that reflect a coherent, integrated conception of teaching and learning have a more powerful impact on their preservice teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

The size and specialization of the faculty in the College of Education and Human Development, however, often present organizational challenges when it comes to communicating and achieving consensus about the goals of our programs beyond mere

platitudes. In this section, we describe the organizational framework that supports our teacher preparation programs and how it is intended to facilitate communication across programs and the community. We also describe the development of our conceptual framework—a document that articulates the purpose of our programs—as one example of how we sought to achieve consensus across programs.

Organizational Framework. When the college shifted to a post-baccalaureate model in 1987, the Council on Teacher Education (CTE) was created to oversee all of the licensure programs to ensure that we were providing a consistent program of study to all of the students. In its early years, much of the Council's work focused on logistical issues associated with transitioning from undergraduate programs to the post-baccalaureate model. Later, the focus became the identification of standards for students who completed our programs. As the state moved to a standards-based model for all licensure areas, the CTE provided the link to plan and determine appropriate content for all licensure students.

Today, there are 32 members on the CTE who meet once a month and a seven-member steering committee that also meets once a month. The Council includes representatives from each licensure program and foundation course as well as student and teacher representatives. The “real work” of the Council often takes place in the four subcommittees: Assessment and Evaluation, Clinical Experiences, Program/Professional Development, and Policy Connections. The Assessment and Evaluation Subcommittee, in its third year of operation, is implementing a plan to systematically evaluate our teacher preparation programs. Prior to this subcommittee's inception, most of the teacher preparation programs developed and administered their own evaluation systems (some fairly elaborate, others of a more ad hoc, anecdotal nature), thus precluding any overall assessment of our programs on a standardized, systematic basis. The goals of the subcommittee, which are partially realized at this time, are to develop a data-driven continuous self-improvement cycle at the program and college levels and to demonstrate and communicate the nature and impact of our programs to external audiences (e.g., the state legislature, potential applicants, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, Minnesota Board of Teaching, and the research community).

The general goal of the Clinical Experiences Subcommittee is to assess and improve clinical experiences in our teacher preparation programs. Toward that end, the committee has developed an online handbook for cooperating teachers, standard instruments for assessing various aspects of the student teaching experience, and workshops for preparing student teacher supervisors. Recently, the subcommittee has been wrestling with developing policies for international student teaching experiences (e.g., What are the criteria for admission to an international student teaching experience? What standards should be used to select appropriate international student teaching experiences for students? What special preparation should the college provide students prior to these experiences?).

The Policy Connections Subcommittee monitors developments in the legislature related to teacher education, meets with legislators as deemed appropriate, keeps the CTE apprised of developments, and calls for member/council action when necessary. The Minnesota legislature takes a strong interest in education; Steve Kelly, a well-respected state senator, recently co-chaired a national commission that was highly critical of No Child Left Behind. In the 2004 and 2005 legislative sessions, a sample of bills that were introduced sought to promote alternative teacher licensure, change the way teachers of science add another science area (e.g., through test only or development of a different type of license), and identify what new and continuing teachers need to know and be able to do in terms of reading in the content area.

The Program/Professional Development Subcommittee was formed in the fall of 2004, and its focus represents a broadening of the Council's interests and concerns. The Council's work has historically been limited to the teacher preparation programs. Two factors have converged to prompt the Council to expand the scope of its work: first, the postbaccalaureate programs at the University are now well established and have a solid reputation in the region; second, the growing complexity of teaching, particularly in urban environments, leads us, as well as many prominent educational researchers, to appreciate the role of teacher induction programs and teachers' need for continual renewal and support throughout their careers. The subcommittee's initial role is to heighten the awareness of council members regarding the phases (or stages) of the professional

development process of educators, to explore teacher educator programs at comparable universities and how their programs address the developmental needs of teachers, and to propose strategies to provide programming to meet the professional development needs of educators at all phases of their development.

Three years ago the CTE developed an advisory board comprised of teachers, principals, superintendents, human resource personnel, legislators, and a representative from Education Minnesota, the state teacher's organization. This advisory board meets twice per year with representatives of the CTE and provides feedback on the programs as well as suggestions for improvements.

Identifying Common Values and Directions. Even if we were a small faculty of 10 or 15, we would likely bring a range of perspectives to our work. Academicians tend to be people who are constantly inquiring into and questioning the world around them. We would, however, likely interact with one another on a regular basis and be familiar with one another's professional and personal lives. In the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota, departments are spread across seven buildings and two campuses (Minneapolis and St. Paul campuses). Occasionally, it happens that two full professors who have been at the University of Minnesota for their entire careers have their first conversation upon appointment to a college committee!

We recently revisited our conceptual framework, the document that describes the rationale for our programs and identifies the values that provide the foundation for the programs. Naturally, we faced formidable obstacles in developing a conceptual framework in which everyone would feel as if they had participated. We decided to use a modified Delphi Approach to facilitate communication and identify areas of consensus across faculty, students, and the Advisory Board. This method involves repeated surveys, throughout which respondents receive information about the group's responses. After an initial round of the survey, for example, participants receive a second survey that includes their previous response to individual items, the group's mean response to individual items, and comments from other participants. Thus, the Delphi Approach facilitates a type of "conversation" aimed toward building consensus.

Through the Delphi Survey, members of our educational community responded to statements about educational trends, assumptions, and actions. A consensus emerged around three themes: inquiry, research, and reflection; diversity; and lifelong learning and professional development. We believe these themes reflect what we as an educational community value and provide direction for our future endeavors. In the next section, we describe how we are addressing one of the themes of the conceptual framework, diversity.

Preparing Teachers for Diverse, Urban Environments

Just as the size of the CEHD presents opportunities and challenges for our programs, so too does the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of our communities. The characters in Garrison Keillor's *Lake Wobegon* convey a monolithic white, Lutheran, Norwegian populace, but a walk through the hallways of Twin Cities schools paints a much more diverse picture. The Twin Cities is home to Hmong and Somali communities that are among the largest in the nation. But similar to demographic profiles throughout the country, the CEHD teacher preparation faculty, as well as our student population, is predominantly white, middle class, and (increasingly) female. What are we doing to prepare our students to work in diverse, urban settings? Our response is multifaceted: We have programs to attract and retain students of color; we have developed pre-admission and curricular experiences that will better prepare all of our students to work in diverse, urban settings; and we are actively recruiting and working to support more faculty of color.

Recruiting and Supporting Students of Color. We are aware of the urgent need for more teachers of color. While almost 40% of the young people in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools are students of color, less than 10% of public school teachers are members of minority groups (Snyder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2004). Gains in the number of students of color admitted to our programs in the College of Education and Human Development have been slow, however. In 2003-2004, 12.2% of our initial licensure post-baccalaureate students were students from minority groups, up from 9.7% in 1999-2000. The college has three key initiatives designed to increase the number of teachers of color in K-12 schools: The Multicultural Teacher Development Project

(MTDP) is designed to support students during their initial licensure program, the Homegrown Teacher Partnership Project (HTPP) identifies and recruits students into the initial licensure programs during their undergraduate program at the University, and the Multicultural Educators Project (MEP) connects high school students of color with our teacher preparation programs.

The Multicultural Teacher Development Project (MTDP) recruits and helps to retain students of color for teacher development programs. It is a scholarship and professional development program specifically for culturally diverse students enrolled in an initial licensure program at the College. MTDP provides students with information about opportunities at the University of Minnesota and in local school districts and helps them navigate their degree programs and the transition to their first professional positions.

Because our preparation programs are primarily at the post-baccalaureate level, we developed structures to identify and support undergraduate students of color who are interested in teaching careers. The Homegrown Teacher Partnership Project (HTPP) offers academic advising, financial assistance, social events, mentoring, professional development workshops, and assistance in finding teaching jobs. HTPP mentors meet monthly with their mentees, who are primarily first-year students at the university. Local school districts support individuals in teacher preparation programs and then ask the new teachers to teach in their districts.

We have learned that we must actively identify and recruit students of color during their high school years. The Multicultural Educators Program (MEP) is a collaboration between local accredited teacher preparation programs and public school districts in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. MEP is a scholarship program for students of culturally diverse backgrounds recruited to licensure programs at colleges and universities. MEP is designed to increase the diversity of licensed teaching professionals in Minnesota by linking students with a school district to support them through their initial licensure/teacher preparation program.

The college's diversity programs provide financial support, a sense of community, and the tools to negotiate university life where participants will often find themselves the lone student of color in a

classroom or social group. We firmly believe that greater ethnic and cultural diversity within the preservice teacher enrollment enhances the educational experience for all students as well as all faculty.

Pre-Admission and Curricular Experiences. Our efforts to prepare our students for working in diverse settings begin prior to their admission to the program—at the application stage. Applicants to our programs are rated on five criteria, one of which is their prior work with young people from ethnic and cultural backgrounds different from their own. This criterion is given the same weight as the other criteria: grade point average, goal statement, prior coursework, and work or volunteer experience in the schools with the age groups with which the prospective applicant wishes to work. These criteria are shared with potential applicants, thus conveying to them our value of and commitment to diversity. This is an example of what Mary Kennedy (1998) calls “enrollment influence”—the fact that a given program tends to attract those students who are predisposed to the program’s goals and substance. In this sense, our programs recruit to the teaching profession those students who reflect particular orientations and values with regard to teaching.

The curricular experiences we offer to students are increasingly more attentive to issues related to teaching in diverse settings. For example, in addition to a course in human relations, over half of our post-baccalaureate students now complete a course on working with English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in the mainstream classroom. Within specific courses, there is a greater emphasis on students developing an understanding of the social, political, and cultural context in which they teach. Whereas this was always a focus of the “School and Society” course in the foundations area, today there is a shift within methods courses from the traditional “teaching strategies and techniques” to situating student learning in a social and cultural context. For example, in the social studies methods courses, preservice teachers learn about how young people bring their own culturally-shaped interpretations of history into the classroom and how teachers can build upon these interpretations for all of their students. In English methods courses, preservice teachers examine ways in which students’ cultural backgrounds and attitudes shape their responses to literature and reading interests. Social studies and English student teachers’ lesson

plans and instruction must reflect their understanding of how culture influences young people's orientation toward and interpretation of content.

Recruiting and Supporting Faculty of Color. We know that faculty must play a very important part in our efforts to prepare our teachers for diverse urban environments. Preservice teachers of color must not only work with faculty who are sensitive to diverse contexts, but also see faculty who are themselves persons of color. It is just as critical that our white students and faculty work with faculty of color. Similar to our efforts to recruit students of color, however, the results of our efforts to recruit and retain faculty of color have been disappointing. Of our 123 tenure-track faculty, only 9.7% are persons of color; that percentage has remained fairly stable the past five years. The college's Diversity Committee has as one of its goals the recruitment of faculty of color. Toward that end they are preparing a video to provide information to departments as they launch new faculty searches. In addition, the College and the University central administrators have committed resources to work with departments to assist with programs such as "Recruiting and Retaining Faculty of Color," a universitywide project to assist departments.

We believe that by employing multiple strategies in critical areas—the recruitment of students and faculty of color, the focus on diversity as part of our admissions criteria, and the emphasis on cultural contexts and perspectives in our curriculum—our students will be better prepared to teach in diverse, urban environments. Today there is a consensus among our faculty that a central part of our mission is to provide leadership for honoring the diversity of our communities and learners. That consensus will need to be continually renewed and redefined each year as the faculty changes. Our dialogue will continue with new voices and perspectives. Our challenges, and our commitment to addressing these challenges, will continue as well.

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