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Who Will Teach the Teachers?

Collaboration between Liberal Arts and Education in Teacher Training at BSC

by William C. Levin

If you want to teach at the college level today, you must have an earned doctorate. Departments want expertise in their teachers. Have you mastered the core material in your discipline? Do you understand its methods of study, and have you conducted research of your own

This model has led to some sad classroom situations. From the point of view of the student, a teacher who has world class expertise in the subject he or she is teaching, but who has no skills in teaching, may as well be entirely uneducated. I have heard students say of a



that demonstrates both expertise in some special area of inquiry and promise for future research? In short, do you have advanced knowledge that you can offer to the students at, for example, Bridgewater State College?

Anyone who has completed a doctorate can tell you war stories about the program that had to be completed to earn a Ph.D. I've heard plenty and told my share. But among all the stories I've heard of requirements for mastery of foreign languages, area exams and dissertation proposals and defenses, none has included a story about the courses on how to teach. That is because doctoral programs rarely include such courses, and when they do they are only a tiny fraction of one's graduate education. It is assumed that once you have earned a doctorate, your expertise in your subject will be enough to make you a college or university teacher.

teacher that "He's brilliant. He must be because I don't understand a thing he's saying in class." I've had the same reaction to a lecture in which I can't grasp what is being said. At least that is how I react when I'm in a generous mood. When I'm not I just assume the speaker can't teach. So, the brilliant expert who can't teach would be a waste in the classroom.

Of course, the opposite condition is no improvement. Consider the faculty member who is a gifted and dedicated teacher, but who has no competence in the subject of the class. There might be great rapport established with the students, and even a wonderful sense of work and collaboration in the learning process. However, the classroom result would be just as bad as the previous situation. Nothing would be learned.

Bridgewater State started as a teacher training institution more than 150 years ago, and is the single largest educator of school teachers in the Commonwealth. Here we are acutely aware that the challenge of turning out good teachers raises the same issues for the Kindergarten through 12th grade as it does for college teaching. The effective teacher must have competence in both their subject area and in the teaching of the material. For this to happen the college's Liberal Arts and Education schools must collaborate in the training of school teachers.

You might think such collaboration would result automatically from the fact that students who want to be

ences between the ways that their disciplines approach issues, and that make working together in teacher training more difficult. As a result, they have been working to increase the quality of the collaboration between their schools in the training of teachers by the college.

In numerous meetings and workshops they have made it clear that while faculty members in the Liberal Arts typically are absorbed by whatever subject they may study and teach, faculty members in the Education School are normally driven by the challenges of enabling students to learn. We should want it to be this way. However, in the training of teachers it is possible for the balance of the two to be upset, and for the two voices to



licensed to teach in Massachusetts must study in both areas. Those training to teach in Kindergarten through the sixth grade must complete double majors in elementary education and a liberal arts subject. Those wishing to teach at the middle or high school levels must major in a liberal arts subject and complete an education minor. In addition, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts requires that those wishing to teach in the state pass the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL) which includes both tests of their communication and literacy skills and subject tests such as in math, biology or English. But, as the deans of these schools at Bridgewater agree, the faculty members in education and the liberal arts have not always collaborated easily in the training of teachers. Anna Bradfield, Dean of the School of Education and Allied Studies, and Howard London, Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences agree that there are some long standing differ-

ences between the ways that their disciplines approach issues, and that make working together in teacher training more difficult. As a result, they have been working to increase the quality of the collaboration between their schools in the training of teachers by the college.

For example, John Kucich of the English Department, a former middle and high school teacher who earned his Ph.D. in English from Tufts University, lists among his academic interests both 19th century American Literature and the Teaching of English. Dr. Kucich teaches a course on "Strategies for Teaching English in the High School" in which he says he attempts to "address the enormously complicated task of teaching English in a secondary school classroom." In his own teaching he came to see the importance of knowing how to teach to students who were so different from one another in how they learned. He believes that if the English majors in his strategies courses are to become good teachers, they should bring a great deal to their

classrooms. So, a teacher in training must not only be able to understand a poem they will one day teach to others, but must love the literature. This is a critical fuel that motivates the teaching. And lastly, the teacher must have the skills and experience to be able to transmit both the knowledge and the love of the subject to a wide range of students who vary greatly in their levels of motivation, previous training, skills and styles of learning. He is constantly reminded of the fact that teachers need flexibility and imagination to teach well, but that these qualities are not possible without real mastery of the material they are teaching. This balance of teaching technique and content mastery reminds Dr. Kucich of the way a musician cannot hope to improvise and interpret a composition without the hard won mastery of the instrument.

Jeff Williams, a faculty member in the Physics Department, who with John Jahoda of the Biology Department several years

ago was awarded a grant to develop a model teaching strategies course at Bridgewater, now teaches a course on "Teaching Strategies in Integrated Science." Like John Kucich, he also supervises student teachers at their school placements. He says he teaches the course because he was concerned that his physics majors who wanted to teach often told him that they didn't think they were prepared to bring their physics knowledge to the task of teaching in high school. He also saw for himself that a student could have strong courses in both education methods and in a content area like physics, and still not be able to "bring the two together." So Dr. Williams' goal in his strategies course is to give students the experience they need to synthesize content and teaching methods.

For Lynn Yeamans, Chair of Secondary Education and Professional Programs at the college, the ability of a teacher to organize 25 students ranging from the youngest of "ankle biters" to high school seniors is critical to bringing any sort of skills or content knowledge to them. Dr. Yeamans works with faculty members from the Arts and Sciences School who teach strategies courses within the education program, including John Kucich, Jeff Williams, Lucy Fortunato

in History and Heidi Burgil in Math. These are the culminating courses before a student begins his or her field placement as a student teacher. Dr. Yeamans recognizes that the strategies of teaching in any content area require skill in a range of areas, such as sequencing for lesson planning, classroom leadership and organization

and the creation of active learning experiences among others. She acknowledges that there is tension built into the differing emphases on content versus teaching method. After all, people choose their vocations based on what they believe matters most. However, she is one of the people on the campus who takes seriously the task of balancing and integrating the two areas in the training of teachers at Bridgewater.

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