

Teaching Our Teachers:
Practical Suggestions to Improve the Quality of Learning in
Bemidji State University's Department of Professional Education

Honors Thesis

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Education is one of the most important fields one can enter into as a lifelong career. Teaching our nation's youth, who will someday govern this country, is of the utmost importance. However, educating those who will teach in our public schools is even more important. Without good teachers, public school students cannot be expected to meet the high standards that are being set for them. Therefore, teacher educators in public and private colleges and universities throughout our country become primarily responsible for the quality of education today's youth will receive. As Richard Arends states, "The initial preparation of teachers and other school personnel is and will remain the arena in which universities can make their most important long-range contribution to human resource development. It is also the domain in which universities have the strongest obligation. Other organizations and structures simply do not exist to do this work" (ASCD Yearbook 123).

Bemidji State University's Department of Professional Education four-year undergraduate program served me acceptably well. However, despite the hours of work that have gone into creating BSU's teacher education program, I feel that there are still some shortcomings in the program. Using current research to support my claims, here I offer suggestions for improving the quality of teacher education at Bemidji State University.

Set admissions standards for the Department of Professional Education.

Currently, the "standard" for entering the department is having taken (or at least registered and paid for) the Pre-Professional Skills Test (or PPST). However, passing scores on this test only indicate minimum requirements in reading, writing, and math skills. In his article titled "Changes in Teacher Education: Looking to the Future," Gary A. Griffin states, "...Few teacher education programs require candidates to submit writing samples and even fewer require an interview as part of the application process" (Griffin 7). If Bemidji State's Department of Professional Education set such admissions standards, there could possibly be fewer students leaving the program, as only those seriously thinking of pursuing a career in education would complete a rigorous application process.

According to Dr. Marleen Pugach of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Department of Curriculum and Instruction, the UWM has a two-course preprofessional block of classes that students must take before they are admitted to the professional education program there. These courses include a foundations of education course and another titled "Introduction to Teaching" (Pugach). Such a block might be considered at BSU, either in addition to or in lieu of admission interviews. Such courses would be extremely helpful for those not sure about pursuing such a major and career. With Bemidji State's banded tuition rate, three or four credits would not financially burden most students, and could serve as an overview of Professional Education courses, institution and state requirements for graduation and licensure, and answer preliminary questions about a career in education for those uncertain about such a choice.

Add another *Educational Psychology* course for more in-depth study of content.

Much of the later learning that takes place in the Professional Education core is built upon the foundational knowledge of the *Educational Psychology* course. Much time should be taken to cover each and every concept in this course to ensure full understanding and appreciation of how such concepts will be utilized in further education courses and in our own classrooms in the future.

Anita Woolfolk Hoy, in her article discussing educational psychology in teacher education, states that "Current standards for teacher certifications and licensure and suggestions for reform in teacher education assume that teachers will have a deep and generative understanding of learning, development, motivation, and individual differences."

Woolfolk Hoy also makes note of Ishler, Edens and Berry's 1996 text that cites:

To teach for understanding, teachers should have an appreciation for and deep understanding of human motivation, multiple intelligences, and diverse modes of performance. Such a view should ultimately require that teachers have rigorous grounding in the following:

- *Cognitive psychology, so that they understand how people learn.
- *Developmental psychology, so that they understand when children are ready to learn particular things in particular ways.
- *Learning theory and pedagogy, so that they can teach in developmentally and cognitively appropriate ways.
- *Professional ethics, so that they can manage schools' competing agendas in ways that keep the best interests of students at the forefront of their actions.

In addition, eight INTASC standards can be linked to information that should be covered in a preservice teachers' education regarding educational psychology (Woolfolk Hoy). With so many imperative topics to include, the study of educational psychology should not be limited to what can be covered in a three-credit course. It should be expanded so that preservice teachers fully understand the implications of their actions.

Require all students to take *Study of the Learner with Special Needs*.

With the first implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975 and subsequent amendments thereafter, practically every teacher in every public school in America will have a student with special needs in his or her classroom at one time or another. Approaches to implementing the Least Restrictive Environment for students with special needs "have resulted in increasing numbers of students spending an increasing amount of time in regular education classes" (Kleinhammer-Tramill). Kleinhammer-Tramill also cites from the U.S. Department of Education that "75% of the more than 5.5 million 6-through 21-year-olds with disabilities served under IDEA in 1997-98 were educated in regular classrooms...for at least a portion of the school day....[the next year's report] indicates that 47.4% of students with disabilities spent at least 80% or more of the school day in regular education classrooms during the 1998 through 1999 school year."

Teachers should be familiar with the most common exceptionalities found in today's student population. However, according to a study conducted by the Department of Education and reported by the National Education Association, "fewer than one-third of beginning teachers received any preservice preparation on collaborating with special education teachers" (Ralabate). The NEA's article also states that one of the first things new

teachers should do is meet with special education staff persons in their schools to see how to best meet the needs of their students with disabilities.

Nancy Turner asserts that "the new, more direct role of the general education teacher has demanded an increased understanding of various types of disabilities, types of appropriate curricular and instructional modifications, and interactions with the students with disabilities in the classroom....Teacher education programs are in a position to ensure that preservice teachers acquire the knowledge, dispositions, and performances required to succeed in educating students with disabilities before they get to the classroom." Turner quotes NCATE in agreeing that "professional education programs should prepare all school personnel to contribute to the education of exceptional learners." Two professional education programs that are preparing their preservice teachers to work with students with disabilities are Saint Mary's College at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Turner).

Saint Mary's College has implemented a course for preservice teachers called "Educating Exceptional Learners in Middle School, Junior High, and Secondary Classrooms." This course includes a field component entitled "Campus Friends." Once a week, young adult students with disabilities from the young adult services program at a local public school come to the college campus to work with the preservice teachers on social skills in a structured learning environment. This program has been successful on two fronts: the students with disabilities experience learning and involvement with age-appropriate peers. College students become more comfortable dealing with students with disabilities, as they are immersed in an inclusion setting similar to one they could be teaching in the future,

and they come to understand the importance of transitioning for secondary students with disabilities as they age out, so to speak, of IDEA's services (Turner).

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee teacher education program has chosen outcomes for their general education graduates in regards to learners with special needs.

These outcomes are:

- 1) Be committed to teaching the full range of learners with disabilities
- 2) Have an understanding of disability that demystifies it and goes beyond the label to appreciate more fully "What's going on with a learner"
- 3) Be reasonably prepared to anticipate high-priority needs and effectively teach and make routine accommodations for students with IEPs [Individualized Education Programs]
- 4) Be prepared to work within an inclusive classroom and a collaborative teaching structure
- 5) Demonstrate awareness of the political, social, and historical context of special education.... (Ford, Pugach, and Otis-Wilborn)

UWM students are also expected to graduate with knowledge of the IEP process and how important it is that they participate on IEP teams as general educators. The program also intends for students to leave with an understanding that:

- a) It is extremely worthwhile to invest time upfront analyzing why a behavior is occurring
- b) The problem solving that follows is best done with active participation of the parent, student and other key staff...
- c) Acceptable, externally driven strategies that work are available...
- d) The ultimate goal is to work toward more natural and internally rewarding strategies...(Ford, Pugach, and Otis-Wilborn)

Classroom management, designing classrooms for optimum learning, and adapting for students with special needs are very important topics, none of which should take a backseat to any other. *Study of the Learner with Special Needs* could share with *Adaptation*

and Management the importance of adjusting classrooms for the benefit of all students. With such an intense focus on learners with special needs in *Study of the Learner with Special Needs*, the *Adaptation and Management: Designing the Learning Environment* course has more time to focus on classroom management.

Classroom management and discipline problems are high-ranking among teachers' concerns: "...Lack of discipline has been cited as one of the top problems...usually ranking first or second" since 1969 in annual Gallup polls of public attitudes toward schools (O'Neil). An increasing number of students displaying unacceptable behavior, acting disrespectful toward authority and being generally harder to discipline are all noted as recent trends. A staffer at the National Education Association's Teacher Quality Department says "Preservice teachers simply don't get enough classroom management training before they go into the classroom" (O'Neil). Additionally, research published by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory found that "only about half of all classroom time is used for instruction—discipline problems occupy most of the other half" (O'Neil). With more preservice instruction on classroom management and dealing with discipline issues, teachers would be able to use more classroom time to teach effectively.

Distribute general *Standards of Effective Practice* information to students at the beginning of each course.

I have found that, upon entering and later leaving more than one professional education course, I did not know what information the State of Minnesota expected me to take from the class for progression towards teacher licensure. Bemidji State University's *Standards of Effective Practice* document specifically lays out which state standards are met

in BSU's professional education courses. I believe that the occasion is rare when a professional education student actually sees these standards. It would be extremely helpful for students to obtain this information as part of each class syllabus, and keep it accessible throughout each course and review it at the end of every semester.

When the information from the ending term is fresh in our minds, we can look back on the semester and gauge whether the information was covered in the manner in which the *Standards* said that it should have been. At this time, students can sign the *Standards of Effective Practice* forms that are deemed so important for student teaching.

In their article "The Purpose of a Syllabus," Parkes and Harris discuss the syllabus as a permanent record. It should cover what was taught in a course as accountability and documentation. "For courses that are linked to accreditation, certification, or licensure, it may also be helpful to have course objectives linked to professional standards. A reference to these standards—which could be in the form of a hyperlink for an Internet-available syllabus—could be provided" (Parkes and Harris).

Syllabi can also be used as learning tools. Learning-centered syllabi focus on the students and what they need to be effective learners. Students can follow such a syllabus to evaluate and monitor their performance in a course, plan and monitor their own learning, and compare their performance to those objectives laid out by the instructor. A learning-centered syllabus can also give guidance to students about the learning to be done in a class. A list of related web sites can be of assistance to students having difficulty with a specific topic.

(Parkes and Harris)

A syllabus can also be used to "provide pieces of context about the course content for students so that they are able to see where the course fits in with other courses they have

taken or will take.... The syllabus can help address the ‘why do we have to learn this’ question by providing information about where the skills and knowledge gained in the course will be relevant to their future careers” (Parkes and Harris).

Specify classroom technologies and benchmarks for their competencies.

“According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 20% of the 2.5 million teachers currently working in our public schools feel comfortable using the technologies available to them” (Bucci). Studies show that much of technology instruction is related to the teaching of technology instead of teaching with technology to enrich curriculum. Nevertheless, institutions should teach teachers how to use technology to support multiple content curriculums (Bucci).

Standard Four of the *Standards of Effective Practice*, “Instructional Strategies,” lists as objective “L” the “use [of] educational technology to broaden student knowledge about technology, to deliver instruction to students at different levels and paces, and to stimulate advanced levels of learning” (McCartney).

Classroom technologies can be as simple as an overhead projector, filmstrip projector, or TV/DVD/VCR. They can also be as complex as LCD projectors with VCR/DVD/laptop computer connections, laptop computers or personal digital assistants (such as Palm Pilots) for every student, digital still and video cameras, Smart Boards (for use with an LCD projector) and interactive television classrooms. What technologies should students in Bemidji State’s education program know? Which should we be proficient in when we graduate? How will these competencies be tested? The world of technology is fast-paced and changing every day. Bemidji State’s students need to be aware of this, and

expect to use different forms of technology in their own classrooms as teachers. Bemidji State University offers much in the way of advanced technology, and opportunities for learning this technology should not be limited to word processing documents on dated personal computers.

A study conducted at Eastern Connecticut State University concluded that students who were introduced to educational technology media, but did not use it in a practical setting, did not leave the class any more prepared to use technology as a teaching tool than when they entered (Stoloff).

Quoted from a 1995 report from the Office of Technology Assessment, Ismat Abdal-Haqq gives five characterizations of model programs using technology in preservice teacher education. These proposals are: requiring a course for preservice teachers, teaching them how to use instructional technologies; exposing these preservice teachers to technology-rich K-12 classrooms; supportive leadership from their school, college, or department of education; collegial support for change; and close interaction between the department of education and the local schools.

An idea that Bemidji State might want to explore is that of the technology teaching lab. Such a lab's purpose would be to "provide preservice teachers...opportunities and assistance in creating and using technology-enhanced lessons for their field placements (Bucci). Labs are openly structured for discovery and experience. Technologies available to students in the lab include laptop computer & projector sets, flex cams, digital microscopes, graphing calculator sets, canned software sets, digital cameras and digital video cameras (Bucci). If such a course were offered at BSU, all preservice teachers would have at least a basic understanding of how to use technology in their classrooms, what technologies are

available for work in their subject areas, and how these technologies can enhance student learning. The Bucci report concludes that "given time, technology, assistance, and experience, students can and will create technology-enhanced lessons."

At the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, the philosophy regarding technology in the classroom is this: "...technology is integral to teacher preparation. If you look at technology as something separate, it's never going to be used" (Lischert). Students at Curry take a basic technology course, which covers programs such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint. Evaluating educational websites is also a part of this basic course. Students then progress to a course on educational technology where they "develop technology-based lessons in their respective content areas" (Lischert). In the content area methods classes at Curry, professors use technology and model effective teaching strategies. "Some professors also require preservice teachers to incorporate technology-based lessons into their student teaching or other field experiences" (Lischert). The program encourages preservice teachers to use technology to enhance learning and discourages the use of technology to simply attract students' attention.

Through Ed-U-Tech, a PT3 (Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to use Technology) implementation grant at the University of Minnesota, a study was conducted to assess the use of technology by preservice teachers. The work of the Ed-U-Tech project led to creation of one-and-a-half credit courses on technology. The instructor worked with each of the thirteen licensure areas addressed by Ed-U-Tech to specifically design the courses for preservice teachers' initial licensure program (Dexter and Riedel).

According to the Oregon Technology in Education Council (OTEC), some individuals have suggested that uniform standards be developed for use throughout that

state's teacher education programs in the area of educational technology. (Students who don't meet the admission standards could be admitted on a conditional basis, the condition being that they "remediate their deficiencies" (OTEC web site).) An approach suggested is the use of the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for K-12 students. For example, the standard for full admission to the teacher education program could be the NETS standard for completing grade 12, as the NETS for teachers specifies.

It would be difficult to write standards for technology that has not yet been introduced. However, technology standards should be reviewed at least on a yearly basis to see which aspects should be covered in certain classes, and to what degree they should be learned. Should students be merely aware of a technology? Should they be able to explain it to a colleague? As a classroom teacher, should I be able to use it with some assistance? Or should I be proficient enough that I can use the technology without assistance, introduce it to my students, and have them practiced in it within a certain time period? These are all questions that need to be taken into consideration. The technology we currently have isn't going to disappear soon, nor is it going to stay exactly the same. We need to be aware of what is currently in use in public schools of all sizes and financial backgrounds, and also be attentive to new technologies as they appear in our schools in the future.

Offer opportunities for secondary education students to work with local teachers in their field.

"...Though a great deal of learning in school begins as school knowledge, it is not much use for anything...until it becomes part of the learner's action knowledge" (Barnes, 80).

Up until student teaching, I had only been in one other high school classroom, one other opportunity to gain “action knowledge,” as part of my college education. I felt extremely unprepared, as far as classroom experience goes, to be teaching high school students. In various classes, we are told to prepare lesson plans, units, even bulletin boards for use in a classroom setting. We never find out, however, how those procedures and devices would work in a “real” classroom.

Experiences from Resta, Askins and Huling indicate many advantages for placing preservice students in field-based blocks earlier rather than later in teacher education programs. Some of these advantages are:

- a) Authentic context: field based students have opportunities to write, teach, and reflect upon their work with real students and teachers in authentic, dynamic and interactive situations.
- b) A rich learning environment: Teaching contexts, materials and strategies can be closely examined during field-based experiences, much more than would occur during traditional college courses. In addition to the college students tutoring high schoolers, the high school students come to the university classrooms to present their views on qualities of effective teachers. Additionally, real classroom instructional materials, along with library resources and educational technology media, can be examined and evaluated during a field experience.
- c) Enhanced transition from student to teacher: “Students are not only better prepared but more comfortable about their teaching roles.” Active involvement in field experiences for a full semester before student teaching helped these university students “make a transition from student to teacher more easily than is typically the case in traditional on-campus programs.”

- d) Realistic expectations of student teachers' skill levels: Cooperating teachers are able to develop more realistic expectations of the skill levels of student teachers and are more likely to mentor the student teacher if they have experience working with university students before they come into student teaching.

In his work titled "Changes in Teacher Education," Gary A. Griffin states, "A commonly expressed view of teacher education by recently licensed teachers is that they learned little in their college and university courses but came to understand teaching more thoroughly and helpfully during their student teaching and their first years of practice. This perceived dominance of practice over theory, in terms of influence of teacher education programs, is widespread but has received little disciplined attention from those who plan, implement, and assess the effects of opportunities to learn to teach" (Griffin 13). The University of Science and Arts in Oklahoma has recognized the importance of field experiences. Students in the professional education programs are required to take two Directed Field Experiences courses. Students spend a minimum of 45 hours in classrooms with certified teachers during these two courses, prior to student teaching.

Resta, Askins and Huling have positive views of early field experiences:

"Field based teacher preparation allows candidates to gain considerably more experience working with real students in real schools, which is a better preparation for teaching. In addition, teacher education students are better able to connect theory to practice when they have the opportunity to see theory applied in the classroom."

"Field-based faculty members consistently report that many strengths and deficiencies are revealed in the field that would go undetected in a traditional course delivered on the university campus. The argument can even be made that because secondary

teacher preparation programs include substantially less pedagogical coursework than elementary programs, it is even more critical that this work be field based.”

High school teachers “provide comfortable and exciting, yet safe, opportunities for the preservice teachers to observe and participate in instructional activities. Teachers demonstrate instructional and management strategies and mediate the teaching context for preservice students.”

The nonprofit organization Public Agenda released a report that stated, “colleges spend too much time on education theory and do not focus enough on practical experience” (“Campus Connections”). Tina Nicpan, an Illinois State University student, sought to address this issue when she formed a partnership between the Illinois Student Education Association and the state’s retired teacher association. Students and retirees paired up in teams, where they worked together on a weekly basis through various communication methods: phone, e-mail, and face-to-face interactions. The pairs remain together until the student graduates from college (“Campus Connections”). And at Christopher Newport University in Virginia, local K-12 teachers are invited to campus twice a semester to lead professional development workshops for current and future teachers (“Campus Connections”). For preservice secondary teachers, current high school teachers can “add instant credibility and valuable insights to university class presentations, and more importantly, model teaching and classroom management strategies in authentic contexts” (Resta, Askins and Huling).

Working with students and teachers in our subject area would curb a lot of wondering that goes on before we step into student teaching. We would be able to observe lessons,

ordinary classroom procedures, and student reactions. We would also build a network of colleagues in our field that could prove vital resources as we begin our teaching careers.

In addition to field experiences for preservice teachers, teacher education faculty can benefit from their own field experiences. According to Phelps and Ryan in their article discussing the importance of theory and practice for teacher educators, professors need to have a refreshed understanding of what it's like to be a student teacher or new teacher: "Teacher educators can better respond to the needs of pre-service teachers by working directly with the public school students they will teach. The public school classroom provides a laboratory where teacher educators can apply the principles and practices of their teacher preparation programs, and can update their experiential bases." Professors committed to this mingling of theory and practice, or praxis, don't teach concepts artificially. Instead, they can integrate theory with their own recent teaching practices. Teacher educators in Great Britain, for instance, must demonstrate recent, relevant teaching experience. The work "'humanizes' teacher educators and can help make teacher preparation programs more realistic by dealing with the challenges faced daily by classroom teachers" (Phelps and Ryan). Students remark that these "real" classroom experiences make teacher educators more credible teachers. Phelps and Ryan's article wraps up by stating "Traditional teacher preparation programs neither encourage nor model praxis—instructors as reflective practitioners. Until teacher educators engage in praxis, however risky, prospective and practicing teachers will not change how they teach nor how they think about teaching."

Require an all-inclusive electronic portfolio as a provision for graduation.

A number of professors in the Department of Professional Education focus on portfolio work in their classes, such as the portfolio project mentioned in the Standards of Effective Practice, Standard One, Assessment Activity E, under the class title heading Pedagogy: Planning for Instruction (McCartney). This specific portfolio includes, among many other topics, work on "major areas of research on teaching and of resources available for professional development" (McCartney, Standard Nine, Objective D); and using "professional literature, colleagues, and other resources to support development as both a student and a teacher" (McCartney, Standard Nine, Objective I).

I was never required to compile a professional portfolio such as the one described throughout the standards for *Pedagogy: Planning for Instruction*. A requirement for an electronic portfolio on compact disk is also stated in the Process of Assessing Attainment of the *Standards of Effective Practice*. Such a portfolio would have helped me organize lesson and unit plans, assessments, evaluations, and other pertinent information into a form I could present to prospective employers, as well as use later in my own teaching.

In an article from *The Teacher Educator*, Jody Britten and colleagues state "digital portfolios in teacher education provide opportunities to conceptualize learning and growth over time" (Britten, Mullen and Stuve). Many institutions are moving toward performance-based assessment for licensure; this means, for many schools, colleges and departments of education, that assessment will be accomplished through a student-produced portfolio. Wilson, Wright and Stallworth make the observation that a digital portfolio is a "multifaceted means of assessment. Not only is the content assessed, but the use of technology is assessed

as well.” Britten, Mullen and Stuve make a similar statement, that a digital portfolio integrates educational technology into the schooling of preservice teachers.

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills can be demonstrated through the use of an electronic portfolio, which serves as a method of authentic and performance-based assessment. Students also are compelled to take control over their learning through the creation of electronic portfolios. Degrees of control over the learning process and over the process of becoming a professional teacher also emerge during work on such a project. Technology skills are taught within a relevant context, “... offering the preservice teacher a more potent tool for job hunting....” (Wilson, Wright and Stallworth).

Britten and colleagues also state that “Portfolios are supported by principles such as providing a new perspective on learning, documenting developmental progress, and self-evaluation or reflection. Portfolios have been identified as one performance assessment instrument available to preservice teachers for demonstrating and documenting their individual understanding and abilities related to multiple proficiencies....Historically portfolios have been used as the culminating project that demonstrates student competency in expected skills, knowledge, and experience....The attention to ‘learning over time’ demonstrates a need for a portfolio to be a continually developing work, produced before and during the student teaching experience.”

Additionally, a study by Gatlin and Jacob concludes that “all students made gains in their knowledge and understanding of how to use technology into K-12 classrooms as a resource as well as an aid to student learning” through the creation of digital portfolios.

Encourage participation in professional teaching organizations.

According to Mary Ray Sunderland of Education Minnesota, Bemidji State Professional Education students currently pay \$20 for membership in the state teacher's union. Thirteen of those dollars go toward state membership, while the remaining \$7 goes back to the campus chapter. Local dues are to be used for individual campus projects. One student chapter used their local dues to promote the national Read Across America event in March, reading to students in nearby elementary schools. Another student chapter raised funds to buy books for a school in Africa. It is the choice of the chapter how local dues are spent each year (Sunderland).

The only benefit of Education Minnesota membership I gained as a student was the liability insurance offered so students can carry out practica and student teaching experiences in public schools. Sunderland says that there are many other benefits of active campus membership. Officers of student chapters can attend twice-yearly leadership conferences. Various workshops are scheduled for all Minnesota student members throughout the school year. Student members are able to access members-only sections of the Education Minnesota web site, and some benefits of the National Education Association are available to student members as well (Sunderland). Through these benefits and workshops, professional education students would have a comfortable, no-pressure introduction to the state teacher's union, gain professional insight, and be able to make an informed decision whether or not to be an active member of the union when they are employed by a Minnesota school district.

For example, the National Council of Teachers of English has a special student membership rate. For an annual membership fee of twenty dollars, students receive benefits

including access to NCTE's web site (including members-only pages) and discounts of up to 50% on NCTE professional journals.

The National Council of Teachers of English is devoted to improving the teaching and learning of English and the language arts at all levels of education. Since 1911, NCTE has provided a forum for the profession, an array of opportunities for teachers to continue their professional growth throughout their careers, and a framework for cooperation to deal with issues that affect the teaching of English. (NCTE web site)

Implement surveys for preservice teachers after they have completed their entire Professional Education program.

No such survey or gathering of information currently exists at Bemidji State. Surveys are conducted numerous times during a student's on-campus experience, but the learning that takes place during student teaching and beyond is never examined. To be an effective teacher education program, there must be program assessment such as that recommended by Resta, Askins and Huling: an ongoing follow-up study to identify strengths and weaknesses as perceived by student teachers. "Other information can be obtained from cooperating teachers, university supervisors, random exit interviews, and employers of first-year teachers.... One use of this information is that it can assist in determining whether a teacher preparation program has a reasonable balance between theory and practical application to the real world of teaching." After all, "Learning to teach takes place over the long haul...." (Phelps and Ryan). It doesn't end because a student completed their on-campus studies. Student teaching, the first years in the classroom, and professional opportunities to advance one's knowledge of teaching can enhance and refresh a teacher's outlook on their career.

Suggestions have now been made to add courses to a program limited to a number of credits it can require. However, the importance of each course offered by the Department of Professional Education cannot be overlooked. Bemidji State University might want to take a look at five-year undergraduate programs offered by other universities nationwide, such as the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia (Lischert). Through a five-year undergraduate program, Bemidji State would be able to offer a more comprehensive curriculum, integrate classroom learning with field experiences, and even recruit more individuals to the program who are dedicated to improving the quality of public education.

Bemidji State University, having first opened its doors as a teacher's college, is known nationwide, if not worldwide, for its teacher education program. With such a reputation, the Department of Professional Education should always be watching out for itself, and more importantly, for its students, the teachers of tomorrow's America. Radical changes may not always be necessary, but all suggestions should be carefully considered: "Within the university, the beginning of reform must come with deans and a critical mass of their faculties in departments or schools of education issuing a commitment that they will orient their research and training toward the schools and the interests of teachers" (ASCD Yearbook, 135). Bemidji State University cannot let any imperfections of its colleges or departments damage its reputation as a highly regarded learning institution; especially not the department on which it was founded. Professional Education is the foundation of our future; let Bemidji State University recognize this and continue to improve itself for years to come.

Afterword: Personal Impressions and Suggestions for Further Consideration

Separate PreK-6 and Secondary majors in core education courses.

As the curriculum currently stands, all education majors commingle in the core classes. I feel that all students, and even some professors, could benefit from separating these two groups of students. I think it would be beneficial for those professors who taught previously in the elementary grades to oversee elementary majors in these courses, and similarly, those professors who taught previously in the secondary grades to oversee secondary majors.

We are going into similar, yet entirely different environments. Planning for classroom adaptation for special needs students, classroom instruction, and classroom management differ greatly among grade levels. This separation would not only give the professors the opportunity to tailor each class for their elementary or secondary education students, but would also encourage camaraderie among the students who would potentially be in more than one core education class together.

The only classes that I could foresee continuing in the current manner are *Human Relations in Education*, *The Professional Teacher*, *Standards of Effective Practice*, and *Health and Drugs in Society*.

Implement workshops or other knowledge-gaining opportunities for students to learn about their major-specific Minnesota graduation standards.

Standard Four, Objective A of the *Standards of Effective Practice* reads "Understand Minnesota's graduation standards and how to implement them" (McCartney). In addition,

Standard 8, Objective A states as an objective "Be able to assess student performance toward achievement of the Minnesota graduation standards under Chapter 3501" (McCartney).

Standard 4A is specifically listed in five courses: *Educational Psychology*, *Pedagogy: Planning for Instruction, Adaptation and Management: Designing the Learning Environment*, *The Professional Teacher*, and *Standards of Effective Practice* (formerly *Assessment and Management*), and is supposed to be touched upon in two additional courses; 8A is listed in four courses. Throughout my core education classes, only twice did I become familiar with any of Minnesota's graduation standards: once in my *Pedagogy: Planning for Instruction* course when a large group of students undertook writing a unit to meet standards in three different learning areas; the second instance occurred during my student teaching when I completed a standards unit with eleventh-graders.

More opportunities need to be offered for preservice teachers to familiarize themselves with these very important standards; not only as a cohesive unit that all public school students will have to complete, but also those specific standards that we will have to cover in our particular subject areas. Bringing in teachers who have completed successful units (as stated under Standard Eight, Assessment Activity A; McCartney); staff members from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning; and even school administrators who can explain what the standards mean to their schools would all be valuable resources for preservice teachers.

Suggest majors courses (beyond core education courses) that might be taken concurrently.

For instance, in the Communication Arts and Literature elementary and secondary programs, *Reading in the Intermediate Grades* and *Literature for Young Adults* are two

classes that complement each other, and would benefit students if they were to be taken during the same semester. Resources used for one class, such as lists of books appropriate for middle and high school students, could be useful in the other. Suggestions could be made by students and professors in all teacher education areas to ensure the best possible combinations for each group of students.

Modify *The Professional Teacher*.

This course is, theoretically, the one that will finalize our student-teaching plans and prepare us for the classroom environment. However, preparing 100-plus students for student teaching in one room for one hour per week seems inefficient at best. More than one important concept in *The Professional Teacher* is to be assessed through "participation in class discussion" or "participation in group activity" (McCartney). In a class of over 100 students, we never had the opportunity to work in groups or participate in class discussion of any length; the professor did most discussion while students scrambled to write down the important information being disseminated.

Perhaps students could be divided by grade level into two groups; pre-K and elementary majors in one section, secondary majors in another. This would put the two sections at roughly fifty students each. Also, only information relevant to elementary and secondary teachers would have to be dispersed to each section, instead of all information being given to all students at one time. Only questions relevant to the specific group of student teachers will be asked; if questions relate to the entire student teaching class, answers can be shared with the other section at the next class meeting. Finally, students will potentially have more "face time" with the instructor; this shouldn't leave students feeling

left in the dark, because they will theoretically have more time to ask questions and discuss difficulties with the instructor.

One other, more drastic option is to reduce the time students spend attending this class. Much of the information given to us is already printed on handouts or recorded on a computer file; a large percentage could be put together into a handbook. Instructions for assignments could be included in the book, along with specific due dates, and students could turn these assignments in to the Clinical Experiences office. The class would meet maybe six times during the semester, where questions could be asked and answered, assignments clarified and/or reviewed, and, finally, student teaching assignments provided.

Some information necessary to meet the required standards for this course (McCartney) was not covered during the semester I took the class. "...[E]mployment and continued professional growth...and interviews are covered." The extent to which these were covered was a handbook we were given from Career Services about job seeking, but still this handbook does not cover critical points such as teacher contract, salary, and benefits and how to introduce discussion of these subjects in a job interview. Continued professional growth was not mentioned or discussed to any extent. Our knowledge of these opportunities was limited to any information we came across on our own, such as in education publications or an occasional posting on a bulletin board.

Understanding "the responsibility for obtaining and maintaining licensure" (McCartney, Standard Nine, Objective L) was not thoroughly discussed. Completing graduation plans is listed as the assessment activity; however, completing college documents gives us no information on gaining, maintaining, or renewing state licensure. Students could,

at the least, be told where to find this information on the Internet or a given a phone number to call with questions.

Set up the majority of student teaching experiences during fall semester each year.

Those individuals who choose to do a full-year internship instead of the normal 12-week student teaching period have many advantages: they go through an entire year usually with the same teacher and group of students, they experience the late summer planning of a year's worth of daily lessons, quarter-long units, and assessments, they participate in parent/teacher conferences, and most importantly, they begin a new school year with their class(es). They are able to form a routine with their students, adapt to the new school year with the students, and are immediately recognized as an instructor. Jumping into the school year in January with my five high school English classes was not only a change for me, but also a huge shock to many of them. They'd already become accustomed to their classroom teacher and her methods of day-to-day instruction. Before she knew I would even be interested in student teaching, the classroom teacher had planned the year's lessons and units. I had to familiarize myself, basically in one week, to the daily goings-on of the classroom, the units, teaching materials, and the entire school building. Because the students had been there for four months without me, I was obviously the new person, and I think subconsciously it made me more nervous, trying to live up to the students' expectations of their English class.

The transition out for student teachers, which would occur in late November, would better suit all involved as well. The classroom teacher would ease into full-time teaching as the student teacher eased out, leaving the students with the knowledge that this individual

would be with them for the rest of the school year. With about five weeks left until the traditional winter break, it leaves the classroom teacher with time to begin and end another unit of study. Student teachers would have an entire semester to build experience while substitute teaching or finding a mid-year teaching opportunity.

Other suggestions listed throughout this document, if taken into practice, could add a semester's worth of classes onto the Professional Education core program. However, this would allow for most student teaching assignments to begin in the fall semester of each year.

Promote communication between student teachers during their experience.

This is our first encounter with the "other side," so to speak, of public school education. Though I was busy during the day and exhausted each night, I would have loved to talk with my peers to find out if they were dealing with some of the same things I was. The camaraderie we built during our on-campus courses seems to dissipate during student teaching, at a time when I felt that I needed some companionship from peers who might have been experiencing some of the same day-to-day challenges that I was.

Bemidji State University's student teachers are spread throughout northern Minnesota, some even traveling to the Twin Cities. With today's technological capabilities, there should be some communication between student teachers and the university in addition to the bi-monthly visits from our University Supervisors. Interactive television meetings, an online message board and/or chat room, and even simply letting student teachers know where each other are placed are all viable options. We are coming across dozens of new ideas each day, and communicating with others in the same situation only seems natural.

My *Standards of Effective Practice* course was one of the first to be arranged online.

We were to write a series of essays relating to student teaching, and e-mail them to the professor. On one hand, it was fast, convenient, and relatively easy. On the other, I feel that we missed out on a lot of interaction with our peers because we weren't readily able to communicate with each other on a regular basis. In previous semesters, the class had been scheduled on a number of weekend dates during the student teaching semester; it is no longer because the Department of Professional Education "found [it] difficult for students who were teaching some distance from Bemidji" (Gritzmacher). Through interactive television, one instructor could communicate with students at multiple sites, show computer images and videos, all with relative ease.

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