

Foreword

In 1988, a Michigan State College of Education task force argued for a rethinking of teacher education around the following:

1. deep understanding of subject matter disciplines and pedagogies that “teach for understanding.”
2. a democratic commitment to the education of everybody’s children--to classrooms and schools that would embrace diversity.
3. helping TE students learn how to establish true learning communities in classrooms and schools.
4. graduates able to participate in the process of remaking the teaching profession, renewing schools, and making a better world.
5. a better integration of theory and practice, field experience and reflection on that experience.

The new program was much influenced by the Holmes Group Report, Tomorrow’s Schools, a document that urged big research universities to reconnect teacher education to schools and classrooms. What resulted is a three year teacher certification program which students enter as juniors, take two years of courses and field work, and then do a one year internship in schools. The internship is not simply a long version of student teaching, but a true year-long developmental apprenticeship--mixing practice and reflection and work with veteran teachers and MSU professors. We call it “guided practice.” Many veteran teachers are now helping us to invent the role of mentor and co-planner, guiding the practice of interns and seniors. The aim of all this work is a brand of teacher education grounded in sound theory, the good example and wisdom of veteran teachers, and thoughtful reflection on experiences in the field.

The MSU teacher certification program is divided into 4 teams of university and school faculty, each with a diverse cohort of prospective teachers. Each team is developing long-term connections with a small cluster of school districts. Each team also places seniors and juniors in schools for particular kinds of field experiences. Within the constraints of a common program, each team is developing an identity of its own and its own geographic base. On all teams, classroom teachers have a big role to play since MSU’s program is based on sustained connections with teachers in the field--a true partnership.

Each year of the program might be said to have a general theme: in the junior year, Team 3 students begin learning to “think and feel like a teacher.” In the senior year students begin learning to “know like a teacher,” integrating subject matter knowledge, curriculum, and pedagogy. In the intern year, students begin learning to “act like a teacher,” putting it all together in supervised practice.

The program has several themes that intertwine and sometimes recur in a spiral fashion. This spiral character is in fact the first theme of the program: we keep returning to certain basic fundamental themes, because they are fundamental, and because teachers keep working on them over a lifetime. Don’t be surprised if you are asked to revisit a theme or a particular text. Another theme is the idea of self-development, and the importance of a teacher’s own personal and intellectual growth over a lifetime of practice. A third theme is child-study--the way that good teachers work at being students of their own students. A fourth theme is learning community--the creation of inclusive settings in which students participate in learning together. A fifth theme, related to the fourth, is our commitment to creating democratic schools in which no child is left behind. We want to prepare teachers who are passionate advocates for social justice and equality. A sixth theme--vital to a program with an emphasis on work in real classrooms--is that people do not learn from experience alone, but from guided reflection on experience. It is this

Careful mix of doing and reflecting on the doing, that is the heart of the matter. The program tries to capitalize on opportunities to blend experience with inquiry and reflection in a series of dialogues with MSU professors and veteran teachers. If we can help our TE students become thoughtful about experience, we will have taken a giant step toward better schools for the next generation of schoolchildren.

Teachers who teach for understanding; who can reach everybody's children; who are thoughtful about linking students and subject matter in a responsive curriculum; who are makers of learning community; and agents of democratic reform--all this is a tall order. We do not claim to have reached the promised land, but we have put in place a promising framework that blends contemporary research, the wisdom of practice, and our own experience with teacher education. Built into the very idea of teacher education with firm roots in the field is the notion that this program will evolve. Many as yet unknown features of this program will emerge from work in schools, the possibilities of which we are just beginning to glimpse. TE students, as well as teachers, will take a hand in reshaping this program as the partnership between MSU and the schools flourishes. Nothing quite so field-based or so experimental--certainly nothing on this scale--exists anywhere else in the country. This is surely part of the reason why MSU continues to be ranked number one in the country in teacher education. We are counting on you to work with us in making the program better.