

Visions and Realities in Preparing College Teachers

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Saint Louis University (SLU) has about 7,000 undergraduate students and 4,000 graduate and professional students. Its Carnegie classification is Doctoral Research University, Extensive. Our Psychology Department has 22 full-time faculty, about 400 undergraduate majors, and 100 graduate students. We have graduate programs in clinical (accredited by the American Psychological Association [APA]), organizational, and experimental psychology. The latter program includes specialties in cognitive neuroscience, developmental, and social psychology.

The Psychology Department is not unique in our approach to preparing graduate students for college teaching. We offer not only a course on the teaching of psychology but also opportunities for experience. During the past 30 years I have suggested other more extensive programs, but these visions have not become reality. I believe that this situation also is not unique—proposals to devote more resources to preparing teachers often do not go very far when research holds first place in the departmental mission. In this chapter I will present my proposals and then discuss why they might not have become reality. I will argue that these factors, which are present in other doctoral programs, are barriers that must be overcome if we are to prepare our graduate students for teaching.

I offered my first Teaching of Psychology course at Carnegie-Mellon in the early 1970s. In the course, reading McKeachie's *Teaching Tips* was combined with discussion for graduate students who taught small sections of the Introductory Psychology course. When I came to SLU in 1974 I offered a course called College Teaching jointly with a member of our Education Department. We included a good bit of the history and philosophy of education. In recent years I settled on this general model for my course and for workshops on teaching:

Philosophy > Objectives > Methods > Learning > Evaluation > Reflection

A philosophy of teaching and learning (explicit or implicit) determines course objectives. These objectives lead to decisions about the most appropriate teaching methods (lecture, discussion, etc.) and ways of assessing student learning. These methods and outcomes should be evaluated based on multiple sources of data. The course, and perhaps even the philosophy, is then modified after reflection. This model guides our reading and discussion in the teaching course.

Before presenting my own visions for what I would like to see doctoral programs do, I must pay homage to the long-standing leaders in the education of college teachers, both of whom influenced my visions. Bill McKeachie has been training teachers at the University of Michigan since 1946, almost 60 years before the publication of this book (McKeachie, 1951). The University of New Hampshire has offered the most extensive program since 1966, led by Victor Benassi (see his chapter in this book) and Peter Fernald (1995).

Visions

I proposed two models for the training of teaching assistants (TAs) that would go beyond a single course. The first was more ambitious and was intended to prepare students more broadly for academic careers. Our Graduate School implemented this program for three years. The second model was more narrowly intended for training teachers in the Psychology Department.

Model I: Preparing for Academic Careers

The major features of this program were:

1. A curriculum that combined our regular doctoral program with extensive supervised teaching experience and training in the service (administrative) aspects of academic life.
2. Building linkages with local and regional colleges, leading to post-doctoral teaching opportunities.

Below is a summary of the proposed Model I curriculum:

First year: Three courses in the student's graduate program, TA apprenticeship with a teaching mentor.

Second year: Two program courses per semester, including Teaching of Psychology, co-teaching with mentor, master's thesis.

Third year: One program course per semester, and two non-psychology electives (e.g., education, public policy); teach one course with mentor supervision; paid practicum in a SLU office.

Fourth year: complete course work and doctoral examinations; assistantship in a SLU office (half-time).

Fifth year: teach one course each semester; dissertation.

Post-doctoral or ABD teaching internship at a local college.

Four students participated in a pilot version of this program. For one year they had teaching and service responsibilities along with their regular doctoral work. Although the students felt that this program was too demanding, they were forced to see how faculty have to balance the demands of teaching with service and scholarly work. We made some progress in building linkages with small colleges in the area, which later did provide ABD teaching for some graduate students.

Model II: Successive Approximations

This approach is similar to the structure that McKeachie (1951) used at Michigan. Students are given increasing responsibility for teaching over 3-4 years. There are four steps:

Teaching assistant (TA). The student works for a faculty member, but has responsibilities beyond the usual clerical support. A major objective is the development of teaching skills by leading discussion groups, delivering mini-lectures, designing activities, and writing examination items.

Apprentice. The student works closely with a faculty mentor in teaching a course, including course design, full responsibility for some classes, and advising students. The mentor provides feedback in regular meetings. The Teaching of Psychology course would be taken before or concurrently with this step.

Section leader. Our large sections of Introductory Psychology gave students the option of participating in small group discussion sections for extra credit. In this step graduate students would design and teach a section. They would meet regularly in a group for discussion and supervision.

Teacher. The student has full responsibility for a class with supervision by a mentor who visits the class and meets with the student teacher to provide feedback.

Realities

Most doctoral programs offer training in research, one or two professional areas, and teaching. The balance among these training responsibilities may vary, but teaching gets one-third of the turf at best, and time devoted to preparing teachers continuously is in competition with time for research and professional training. However, the reality is that, in almost every program, teaching ranks third in the list of priorities. That is not to say that faculty do not care about teaching. Most of my colleagues prepare carefully and get good teacher ratings from their students; some even win awards, and I suspect such is true in other departments.

There are several reasons that teaching winds up in third place. The following list comes from my experience and from my work with other departments around the country. This list is not an indictment of my colleagues at SLU or elsewhere, but represents the reality that dims our visions.

1. The PhD is a research degree and research training is time intensive, including coursework in methods and statistics, supervised research experience, a thesis, and dissertation. The faculty who supervise this training are partially dependent on graduate students for their own academic success. The greatest rewards in this system come from publication in top research journals and grant support, not from teaching.
2. Clinical training also is time intensive and is driven by requirements for accreditation, which do not include any standards for teaching. These requirements

can be used to justify new courses and experiences that make it more difficult for students to include preparation for teaching in their graduate program.

3. As a result of Items 1 and 2, faculty advisors do not actively support programs for training teachers. “Yes, that is a good idea, but you will not get a good research post-doc unless you publish more,” or “you will not get into your favored clinical internship without more clinical experience.” These messages are given even to students whose career goal is to teach in a small college. Some advisors actively oppose graduate student involvement in teaching. In my workshops on teaching, I frequently hear graduate students complain about research supervisors who did not approve their attendance.
4. Most teaching programs usually depend on one person who has volunteered to be the teaching champion and work with students who volunteer to participate, having overcome the resistance of their advisors. The program disappears when the champion goes on sabbatical, takes another job, or retires. It is unusual for a department to hire a new person specifically to fill that role.
5. There is limited administration support beyond the department. Deans and provosts are, of course, promoting the research mission of their institutions. There may be a university teaching center, which administrators will say meets the need for teacher preparation for those who want it. The University of New Hampshire provides an example of what excellent administrative support should be (again, see Victor Benassi’s chapter in this book).
6. At many universities, students pay to prepare themselves to teach when they pay tuition for a course on teaching. The stipend they receive for teaching may be not much more than the tuition, so in a sense they work only for the gain in experience. Most graduate students cannot afford to do that.
7. Teaching assignments often are made arbitrarily and on short notice. Even first-year students may be asked to teach in their first semester in graduate school.

Assignments may be made regardless of prior experience or interest in teaching as a career goal. Students may be given only a week or two to prepare their course with little guidance. These things may be infrequent, but they are not rare. In my view, this practice clearly is unethical, yet we do it.

Recognition of these realities may help groups that are working to improve this situation. The Society for the Teaching of Psychology sponsors workshops around the country and supports other activities. The APA Education Directorate is supporting Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) programs. The American Psychological Society, under a grant from David Myers, has formed a working group on teacher preparation. This impressive array of organizations should be able to have an impact.

However, I think there are two groups that can be the greatest agents for change, although they are not well organized. Students who aspire to careers in teaching should apply to graduate programs that show some promise of providing good preparation. They can find out which programs do that from published materials, and from visiting or calling departments and talking with current students about teaching. APA should expect departments to provide this information in the descriptions submitted to their *Graduate Study in Psychology* (2004). Perhaps more departments will try to attract this group of students.

The other group is composed of colleges and universities that have teaching as their primary mission and who expect the faculty they hire to be prepared to teach. If that is a criterion for hiring, then students from departments that do this well will have an advantage in the academic marketplace.

There are many forces in place that could turn our visions into realities. I hope this book will help to bring those forces together.

References

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