The Case for Broadening Veteran Teachers' Education in the Liberal Arts and How We Can Do It

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Conservative commentators on the quality of our undergraduate curricula have found much to criticize in recent decades. In an essay, "Liberal Education, Then and Now," based on a lecture given in honor of the 200th anniversary of John Stuart Mill's birth, Peter Berkowitz summarizes the thrust of their charges: "The undergraduate curriculum lacks a unifying purpose, intellectual standards have been allowed to deteriorate, undergraduate education is increasingly oriented toward preparing students for jobs, and faculty neglect students in favor of scholarship."

Liberal commentators have also found much to deplore. Derek Bok's most recent book, *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More*, details his major charges:

> Many seniors graduate without being able to write well enough to satisfy their employers. Many cannot reason clearly or perform competently in analyzing complex, nontechnical problems, even though faculties rank critical thinking as the primary goal of a college education. Few undergraduates receiving a degree are able to speak or read a foreign language. Most have never taken a course in quantitative reasoning or acquired the knowledge needed to be a reasonably informed citizen in a democracy. And these are only some of the problems.[1]

In 2005, the U.S. Secretary of Education convened a task force to gather information and make recommendations for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. In its final report in 2006, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education strongly criticized the quality of the education that American students receive in grade school and high school. It deplored a lack of data and accountability measures in higher education. But it did not specify the kind of data that ought to be collected and for what exactly higher education should be held accountable. Nor did it raise questions about the long-term effects of the changes that have taken place in college curricula on one large group of undergraduates—those who become public school teachers.

Indeed, little attention has been paid over the years to the quality of the undergraduate education experienced by students who are simultaneously enrolled in teacher preparation programs, particularly if they majored in education. And when some attention was paid, the advice was mostly ignored. In 1986, the Holmes Group, a coalition of education school deans seeking to reform teacher education, issued a report, "Tomorrow's Teachers," that recommended in effect five-year preparation programs. The report proposed that all future teachers have a strong major in the arts and sciences and an additional year of post-baccalaureate preparation that could lead to a master in education degree. It clearly recognized that undergraduates in teacher preparation programs, especially if they majored in education, could not easily obtain a strong liberal education. Few states, however, followed the Holmes Group's original recommendations, although some began to require an arts and sciences major for all future teachers. Undergraduate teacher preparation programs are still the major source of public school teachers in this country, as noted in a June 2005 report by the American Educational Research Association.

The purpose of this essay is to suggest various ways in which the liberal education of current teachers might be extended through their professional development requirements to compensate for the many deficiencies in their undergraduate education. To help readers better understand the basis for these suggestions, I explain first how several trends in higher education over time have diminished both the quality of undergraduate education and the quality of the pool of undergraduates preparing for a teaching career. I then explain how policies that local school districts formulated for salary schedules and professional development not only failed to compensate for these deficiencies but, in effect, deepened them.

Trends in Higher Education

Until five decades ago, most undergraduates at our colleges and universities, including those intending to be teachers, fulfilled academically relevant and rigorous distribution requirements. In the 1960s, campus revolts against the requirements of a common core of knowledge for all undergraduates (and ultimately against the possibility that one could even exist) resulted in an explosion of electives to fulfill distribution requirements or, in some colleges, in their total elimination altogether. Student demands also led to the proliferation of artificially constructed majors often called area studies, special majors, or concentrations. Few, if any, prominent educators warned against the consequences of these developments for those who would

become the next generation of public school teachers. Nevertheless, allowing all students to select less intellectually rigorous courses and to major in a politically popular but non-discipline-based area of interest could not help but weaken the academic background of those who would go on to teach in our public schools.

The likely consequences of a relatively requirement-free liberal education should have begun to arouse concern when the pool of academically able students planning to become teachers began to decrease. We know that the pool gradually decreased as academically able students, male and female, increasingly chose to pursue serious graduate study in the arts and sciences or other professions rather than teach in a public school.[2] Other reasons may have contributed to this decline. Not only were opportunities to enter a wide variety of professions opening up for ambitious and able women, but it is also possible that socially aware college students were reluctant to teach in an institution that was trashed as oppressive. This trashing was found not only in book after book by such best-selling authors as Jonathan Kozol and other followers of Paulo Freire—the most influential educator of the twentieth century according to college and university educators—but also in the schools of education themselves. Yet, it is hard to find any educator raising questions about the quality of the undergraduate pool from which public school teachers were coming—weaker students receiving a weaker academic education.

Whether prospective teachers majored in an academic discipline, in an area study, or in education itself, the undergraduate education they received was further shortchanged by the low quality of their licensure programs. The requirements of undergraduate licensure programs had increased over the years to address the various social, cultural, and linguistic issues that education faculty saw as necessary for preservice teachers—resulting in a typical training program whose content Arthur Levine described in "Educating School Teachers" (a highly critical report on teacher education released in 2006) as "unruly and chaotic." After visiting or conducting surveys in hundreds of institutions across the country, the former president of Teachers College, Columbia University, and his research staff observed that most teacher training programs suffer from low standards, out-of-touch faculty, and poor quality control.

As the quality of undergraduate teacher training programs decreased, their course work nevertheless took up more and more academic time. For example, for more than two decades after the Massachusetts legislature mandated teacher licensure in 1956, state regulations required only 12 credits in education courses (plus student teaching). After the 1982 revision of the regulations, a minimum of 21 cred-

its in education courses (plus student teaching) was required.[3] Moreover, the total number of credit hours that the institutions themselves required in their undergraduate teacher preparation programs was usually much more than the state minimum. Although it varied widely from institution to institution and for the same license, it used up a significant portion of the credit hours toward a bachelor's degree. In 2002, further changes were made in state regulations, one of which reflected the legislature's requirement in 1994 of an arts and sciences major for prospective teachers (although it did not rule out the possibility of two majors, one of which could be an education major). In the wake of these changes, the Massachusetts Department of Education conducted a survey that identified the percentage of total credits required in education course work (including student teaching) as part of the total credits required for a bachelor's degree. These credits ranged from 16 percent to 39 percent in foreign languages, from 13 percent to 39 percent in science, from 13 percent to 42 percent in mathematics, from 22 percent to 51 percent in elementary education, and from 25 percent to 59 percent in special education.

Those most shortchanged by a diminished and impoverished liberal education were those undergraduates who planned to teach self-contained elementary and special education classes, whether or not they had two majors—one in an academic discipline and one in education. Not only did their licensure programs tend to have the most education requirements, as the above percentages indicate, but their arts and sciences major was usually not in an academic discipline taught in K–12. Instead, their major was in a social science such as psychology, sociology, or child development, which was an ironic development unanticipated by the reform-minded legislature that had eliminated the education major. (Prospective elementary, early childhood, and special education teachers, not surprisingly, went for the least-demanding majors they could find once they were required to have an arts and sciences major.) This phenomenon meant, as one scenario, that the prospective elementary teacher majoring, say, in psychology might need to use up to 60 of the 120 credit hours toward a bachelor's degree in required education course work alone and another 36 credit hours in required course work in his or her major. This would leave the undergraduate precious few credit hours for arts and sciences courses in the subjects he or she would actually teach (i.e., history, mathematics, science, and geography), never mind for courses providing cultural enrichment in art or music history or course work in the performing arts.

Lack of Incentives in Professional Development

Once prospective teachers graduated and began teaching, the absence of a strong foundation in the liberal arts was then compounded by the lack of requirements for professional development that might in some small way supplement their limited liberal education. In fact, incentives usually are lacking for teachers to continue their education in the arts and sciences at all.

Salary Schedule. The salary schedule in most school districts makes no distinction between a master of arts or sciences degree and a master in education degree, and the latter is much, much easier to obtain. Schools of education regularly offer late afternoon or weekend courses, and many also provide credit-bearing course work right in teachers' own school districts. Arts and sciences faculty rarely are so obliging. As a result, few teachers who have completed undergraduate licensure programs choose to take graduate courses in the subjects they teach and to complete master's degrees in the arts and sciences. Most teachers eventually get a master in education degree, usually to increase their salary, whether they teach a core subject (such as science or English) or are generalists (as is the elementary and special education teacher).[4] It seems to matter little to them or to their school administrators or school boards that the course work for a master in education degree may be totally unrelated (as well as mind-numbing, if not mindless) to the core subject(s) taught by the teacher.

Professional Development Credits. The criteria for earning professional development credits rarely if ever make a distinction in quality and credits earned between attendance in a pedagogical seminar and attendance in a discipline-oriented seminar. Moreover, opportunities to earn professional development credits on strictly pedagogical or curricular matters in the teacher's school arise in an expanding variety of ways—from serving on curriculum revision committees to attending in-service presentations by speakers selected by the administration to address hot-button social problems. All may be legitimate activities for earning professional development credits. Rarely, however, do they serve to deepen teachers' knowledge of their own discipline or broaden their understanding of other subject areas in the school curriculum.

In an ironic twist, those teachers who have had a strong liberal education in a selective college, like the teachers coming from Teach For America (TFA), tend not to continue in the classroom after two or three years of teaching. In a 2006 study of the relationship between about 10,000 "certified," "uncertified," and "alternatively certified" teachers of reading and mathematics in grades four through eight and their students' scores on state tests in mathematics and reading in New York City's

schools over a six-year period, Thomas Kane, Jonah Rockoff, and Douglas Staiger found that teachers from traditional training programs were generally no more or less effective than teachers from alternative (or no) programs, including a large number from TFA. More variation in effectiveness could be found within each status group than among them. Fortunately, despite the high turnover rate for the TFA teachers and thus little accumulated teaching experience, there was little difference in their effectiveness in comparison with teachers with greater longevity in the New York City schools. In other words, students were not penalized by the rapid turnover of higher-achieving teachers; they gained enough from these able new teachers to compensate for their lack of teaching experience. What has not been explored, so far as I am aware, is the role that the differential in the salary schedule between teachers with and without master's degrees may play in accelerating these TFA teachers out of the classroom after a few years. Faced with the prospect of enrolling in an easy-to-manage but substance-less master's degree program in education to increase their salary base, or to enroll in a far more intellectually stimulating graduate program that would not be easy to manage while teaching full time (but that could lead to more professional options in the future), they may understandably opt to leave teaching.

How Professional Development Can Make Up for a Liberal Education Lost

Peter Berkowitz suggests that the defining qualities of an educated person are as follows:

> …the ability to explore moral and political questions from a variety of angles. This involves putting oneself in another's shoes, distinguishing the essential from the contingent, imagining the contingent as other than it is, and reasoning rigorously without losing sight either of what is or what ought to be.[5]

In his judgment, these distinctive qualities of "mind and character" come from an education that expects students "to read widely and deeply, to acquire knowledge of the opinions and events that formed them and the nation in which they live, and to study other peoples and cultures." Undergraduates who have simultaneously completed a teacher licensure program and a bachelor of arts degree program could not have experienced the range of demanding course work that develops the qualities that Berkowitz enumerates. This range is what we have always understood by a "liberal education," of which historical knowledge is an essential component. So, what

might education policymakers do to help make up for the spotty liberal education that most of the current teaching force has received?

Free Seminars. First, at a specific level, veteran teachers need to be provided with more opportunities to attend free seminars, such as those sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History, and the Center for Civic Education. These discipline-centered seminars typically range from one to four weeks and are taught by carefully selected scholars, researchers, and other professionals in the humanities and the arts. These seminars seek to foster a deep understanding and appreciation of a specific topic in a discipline or art. This is often achieved by concentrating on an "anchor" work in its historical and cultural context or on a thematically related cluster of historically and culturally significant texts or objects of art (e.g., the seminal documents underlying the American founding, the architecture of an important public building, or the paintings of a prominent American painter), with or without direct relevance to what the teacher could be teaching in a typical public school.

The primary purpose of such seminars is to provide a broadening intellectual experience similar to a graduate course in the arts and sciences for teachers who cannot easily spend time at or afford a full semester or summer in a university course. It may strengthen their knowledge base in a discipline that is relevant to the subject they teach, but it doesn't necessarily have to. Such seminars, which try to (or should) keep to a minimum a consideration of "best practices" for the classroom, have been offered by federal and state agencies (often through humanities or arts councils), foundations, and a variety of other nonprofit organizations. The major problem that remains to be worked out for many of those professional development seminars now available to teachers is a mechanism to guarantee their intellectual integrity, such as an academically distinguished and inclusive advisory board that can publicly be held responsible for the intellectual quality of the speakers, texts, and learning experiences provided to participants (i.e., the board is not window dressing).[6] For a discipline-oriented seminar to extend teachers' intellectual horizons, its chief if not only goal must be learning for learning's sake, as in an authentic course in the arts and sciences. As soon as a seminar becomes a workshop, its real (and time-consuming) goal becomes a curriculum project for the teacher's classroom. To compensate for a lost liberal education, teachers need seminars, not workshops.

License Renewal. Second, to support these kinds of professional development seminars, states need to thoroughly revise the criteria for what counts for credit

toward the renewal of a teaching license. Few if any states give lifetime licenses any more. Instead, almost all now require completion of a specified number of professional development points, clock hours, or semester hours in college courses for renewal of a teaching license, according to the Web site for the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification.[7] What might count, over each five-year period, say, are two authentic graduate courses or seminars that can be considered culturally enriching—one in the teacher's own subject area, and the other on a topic that could be considered intellectually broadening but that is also discipline-based. This kind of policy could be enacted by a state board of education or legislature. Local school districts could expect more than two authentic graduate courses or seminars for purposes of their own salary schedule, but the state's interest should lie primarily in cultivating teachers' minds.

At present, almost any educational activity in which teachers engage can be awarded professional development credits, and many of these activities are of great use to the local school district (such as participation in revising the school's curriculum, advising the student newspaper, or coaching a debating club). No body of sound research, however, connects the outcomes of professional development as we know it to increased student achievement. Although the limited evidence available suggests the benefits of professional development that is aimed at the education level and specific subject that teachers teach, it is doubtful that we can find a clear, direct relationship between the specific content of a professional development workshop and subsequent student achievement. This relationship is hard to identify because of the many variables (e.g., the textbooks and other materials used, students' reading level, tutoring by parents or others, and, last but not least, the quality of the assessments used to determine both teacher and student growth) that intervene between what a teacher may have learned from a workshop and what students then demonstrate having learned in that teacher's classroom. It would be much better to have more modest expectations about the benefits of professional development and to spend far less money trying to backload what teachers should have learned in their undergraduate years and in their licensure program. Let professional development enrich teachers' minds so long as the learning experience is structured in a rigorous academic way.

Degree Programs. Third, to support this more modest goal, school boards should reward core subject teachers more highly for earning a degree awarded by arts and sciences faculty for course work in an academic discipline rather than for a master in education degree. This would be an elitist policy, and rightly so. Work for a

master of science or master of arts degree is far more intellectually demanding than that required for a master in education degree. If we want more knowledgeable core subject teachers, they should be offered a monetary incentive to take authentic graduate courses in their discipline toward an arts and sciences degree rather than content-empty courses in a degree program in education—with expenses reimbursed by their districts. This is a policy that should be worked out via collective bargaining with local teacher unions. School boards should approve the courses their teachers take and reimburse them fully once they complete them satisfactorily. Core subject teachers must also be reimbursed for taking arts and sciences courses outside of the subject they teach—for example, a course in music theory for a physics teacher—and encouraged to consider online courses as well as courses at local colleges and universities because they can be taken at the teacher's pace at any time of year.

Research Grants. Fourth, federal lawmakers could revise existing requirements for the Public Outreach line item in higher education research grants. The revised requirements should specify school-based lectures by grant recipients in a subject taught in the secondary school or field trips to historic sites, museums, or natural phenomena accompanied by well-trained docents. Attendance by district teachers could fulfill in-service requirements or earn professional development credits.

Philanthropic Involvement. Fifth, astute philanthropists could step in and pay the fees that leading scholars, scientists, and other professionals command for preparing and giving suitable talks to school teachers on intellectual or artistic work in their discipline. Most teachers would be far more eager to attend a talk on American history by David McCullough or Gordon Brown or a poetry reading by Helen Vendler or Robert Pinsky in their school district than a workshop on school violence given by an up-to-date education entrepreneur—the more likely kind of in-service presentation arranged for most teachers.

Summer Externships. Sixth, state and local education agencies and organizations should work out arrangements with local industries, museums, and other institutions to hire teachers as summer externs to work with experts in their subject area. For example, one of the projects associated with the Massachusetts Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Initiative, founded by the dean of the college of engineering at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, is the Teachers in Industry Program (TI-IN). Founded in 1997 with the objective of helping teachers understand the work environment in industry and the job skills required by employers, it arranges for teachers to spend a six-week externship during the summer work-

ing on a real-world project that the employer sponsor has assigned to them. The teachers are expected to bring back their knowledge and insight to their classrooms.[8] It is unlikely that enough such externships will ever be available for large numbers of teachers, but these kinds of work experiences should be awarded a significant number of professional development credits to encourage more of them. These externships not only supplement teachers' salaries but also upgrade their subject matter knowledge and help them to better understand the real-world applications of their subjects.

Final Remarks

All the suggestions I have laid out are possible. To implement these programs would cost much less than we now lay out for remediation of our teaching corps through something misleadingly called professional development. It is difficult in theory to justify the millions, if not billions, of dollars spent on giving already licensed teachers basic reading instructional knowledge (e.g., through Reading First, the K–3 part of NCLB) and basic mathematical and scientific knowledge (e.g., through the Math and Science Partnership Program sponsored by the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education) when the teachers in these programs should have acquired this knowledge before they began teaching, cost-free to the public. Although these programs appear to result in increased student achievement, they shouldn't be necessary. What would be less costly is the courage needed by education policy makers to tell the public why so many teachers are academically underqualified and need so much "professional development" and to address the problem at its roots.

The greatest opposition would likely come from two sources: the education schools and the hordes of professional development providers that swarm over our K–12 schools. Education schools have a major grip on teacher training despite all the accelerated routes that states have made available for those who want to teach without going through a full licensure program. Indeed, if anything, educators loudly advocate for more education course work for prospective teachers, not more arts and science course work. Arthur Levine's recommendations on this issue, for example, are to eliminate four-year teacher preparation programs and to prepare teachers in five-year programs, to be concentrated only at research universities with higher admission requirements. He has almost nothing to say about strengthening their arts and sciences education.

Education school faculty would be joined in their opposition to a strengthened liberal education for prospective teachers by the army of education entrepreneurs now providing professional development. The latter make their living provid-

ing remedial programs in reading, mathematics, history, and science to the academically underqualified teachers whom the education schools regularly pass on to the nation's public schools. Each source of opposition is highly unlikely to permit changes that would reduce the size of their captive audience.

A giant step forward could be achieved by one relatively simple policy. State legislatures could eliminate undergraduate licensure programs overnight by removing all credit for undergraduate education course work. This policy would immediately address the impoverished liberal education that most undergraduates intending to be core subject teachers now receive by enabling them to have a full four years of a liberal education. And a one-year post-baccalaureate teacher preparation program, culminating in a master's degree, would enable them to begin teaching at a higher salary and without any need to spend some of their time on course work for such a degree. Would there be a teacher shortage? We already have one in key subjects: mathematics, science, and foreign languages. But we would be unlikely to have a shortage in other areas, because we already prepare many more elementary and early childhood teachers than we can employ.

There is perhaps a more compelling reason for removing all credit for undergraduate education course work and for not turning undergraduate teacher licensure programs into the five-year programs Arthur Levine recommends (he would make the fifth year a full year of student teaching). Training programs that begin in the undergraduate years tend to attract the weakest undergraduates into teaching, at the elementary school level in particular. A July 2005 report issued by the National Center on Education Statistics corroborated earlier reports that college graduates who go into teaching after completing undergraduate licensure programs are apt to have lower Scholastic Aptitude Test and American College Test scores than those who don't go into teaching. They are also apt to have higher undergraduate grade point averages, which suggests that education courses are easier than other courses. A recent report from the National Center on Education and the Economy noted that a large number of U.S. teachers are drawn from "the bottom third of the high school students going on to college."

In effect, graduates of licensure programs that begin in the undergraduate years end up with an impoverished liberal education for their bachelor's degree. Although some potential teachers might be lost to other careers that can be pursued right out of college or to a lack of interest in adding another year or more of study in a professional preparation program (although this is exactly what librarians and social workers do), our public schools would gain a more liberally educated, academically stronger, and more motivated corps of teachers in return.

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Endnotes

[1] Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, pp. 1-8, 310-312.

[2] C. Hoxby and A. Leigh, "Wage Distortion: Why America's Top Women College Graduates Aren't Teaching," *Education Next* (Spring 2005), available at www.educationnext.org/20052/50.html (accessed April 21, 2007, at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MJG/is_2_5/ai_n1).

[3] Personal communication from Dr. Margaret Cassidy, program approval officer in the Massachusetts Department of Education from 1981 to 2004.

[4] Having a master's degree can make a big difference in a teacher's salary. For example, in Brookline, Massachusetts, a teacher with just a bachelor of arts degree earns $41,065 the first year, $43,318 the second year, $45,570 the third year, and $47,816 the fourth year. A teacher with a master's degree earns $43,784 the first year, $46,105 the second year, and $50,751 the third year. A third-year teacher with a master's degree thus earns much more than a fourth-year teacher with only a bachelor's degree. As soon as a teacher earns a master's degree, the teacher's salary schedule moves from the first set of increases to the second set.

[5] Berkowitz, "Liberal Education, Then and Now," *Policy Review* 140 (December 2006–January 2007): 53.

[6] What must be avoided are the kinds of professional development institutes I describe in detail in *The Stealth Curriculum*. In the humanities, especially, many professional development providers

offer workshops that have ideological, not academic, goals. Their materials or speakers may provide inaccurate or one-sided information to get teachers and their students to think in specific ways about particular social issues or historical figures and events.

[7] Information is missing for a few states, so it is unclear whether any state now gives teachers a lifetime license. The number of professional development credits required for license renewal ranges from 45 to 180, typically over a five-year period. The number of semester hours of college courses, if required, also varies from state to state.

[8] Since 1997, TI-IN has placed 85 teachers from 28 school districts with 39 different employers. Seventy percent of the teachers have come from high schools and 30 percent from middle schools. Twenty-one percent were science teachers, 18 percent mathematics, 18 percent English, and the balance from a wide array of specialties.