

Teacher Preparation in the New Millennium

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INTRODUCTION

A millennium teacher preparation program should be the foundation that: 1) provides future teachers with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are in tune with today's world; 2) satisfies the needs of the educational system within which they will work; 3) is in line with the capabilities and characteristics of today's students; and 4) elevates the teaching profession. To do these things, a millennium teacher preparation program preparing millennium teachers must include the following:

AN EMPHASIS ON "THE BIG PICTURE"

Historically, society has expected much of its teachers; it expects even more today. It is absolutely essential that preservice programs help future teachers build an understanding of the "big picture," of what is going on in today's technological world—and the implications and ramifications of technology-based global and national realities, needs, and trends for education. Future teachers must be better informed than most about the challenges and opportunities of this 21st century world. Today, the world of the teacher must "be the world!" Millennium teachers must have the full range of competencies that are essential to functioning in this new world and be able to pass these competencies along to their students.

Any millennium preservice program must impart to its future teachers an understanding that teaching is not just about "you and your classroom." It must convey, clearly and powerfully, the understanding that teaching is about them and their school, their district, their state, and even about American education. Millennium programs must help future teachers understand that what they will do in education must be done within the context of the "big picture," so that they can see more readily how what they will do "fits" the needs of society and can more easily form

a relevant and expansive vision for their work. By creating expanded and more relevant learning opportunities for their students, they will become more effective teachers, and through a more universal perspective, help break down the current isolation of educators and classrooms.

A radical thought in the preparation of teachers, to be sure, and a flip-flop in the hierarchy: First and foremost, every future teacher should be required to take a shortened version of the program generally required for the licensure of school principals. The program for would-be teachers would address such things as elements of a school; school climate/environment; school safety issues; school technology infrastructure; the audience ("today's" students); school finance (annual budgets, referendums/bond issues); national/state/local education funding streams, fundraising, and public relations; community outreach and values; leadership and management; relationship/team building; school policy issues; school-related laws and regulations; internal and external politics; legislative actions and processes; and professional development and self-renewal. A basic understanding of these critical school elements should be expected in programs that prepare millennium teachers. Research has shown that the teacher is the critical link in the schooling process; these are the issues and elements that impact the level of teacher effectiveness, and ultimately the quality of teaching and learning in every classroom, school, and school district.

Given this "big picture" foundation, the total school community would become as important and vital to every teacher as their individual classroom. A truer sense of being a part of a comprehensive and complex educational enterprise, as well as a millennium school, would emerge. The number of school ambassadors would increase—knowledge about the many facets of schools and schooling, about our diverse and changing student population, about the challenges facing education, and about school and staffing needs could be more widely understood and

articulated. There would be for every classroom teacher a greater allegiance to the profession and to all of education, a greater knowledge base upon which to make classroom decisions, and more possibilities for creativity and innovation in their teaching that more closely relate to today's students. For every educator, there would be (renewed) respect for the critical, changing, and inter-related roles and responsibilities each can and must play within education. With such an universal perspective, educators would more likely be able to “stay ahead of the curve,” and to set the pace in education as well as to instigate and promote positive school reform and improvement initiatives. They would no longer be as isolated or insulated from society, and from critical linkages and activities that can broaden and advance educational frontiers.

Once proficiency regarding these “big picture” elements is achieved, then and only then would one take on or study for the higher degree—that of teacher/specialist/guide/communicator/enlightener/impartor of information and content/positive role model.

BEYOND PSYCH 101—ONGOING AND CONTINUOUS STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGY

Every millennium teacher must grasp the critical importance of a thorough understanding of psychology—“the science of behavior” (Webster), the science dealing with the mind and with mental and emotional processes, as the underpinning of teaching. Teaching requires an understanding of how people relate to each other, how people learn and remember what they learn—how they are motivated to learn, as well as an understanding of the ability of people to grow and change. Teaching requires that teachers keep up with the research on behavior and learning, that they are capable of applying psychological principles. It requires that teachers be keen observers of human behavior. The application of psychology is key to such critical learning elements as setting school climate; fostering leadership and leading; promoting and accepting change; classroom management; school safety; and interacting with school personnel, students, parents, and community leaders. Millennium teacher preparation and ongo-

ing teacher professional development must continue to address and embrace this important science.

CRITERIA FOR ENLISTING FUTURE TEACHERS

Any teacher preparation program must have a well-thought-out plan that includes specific criteria for selecting its students; conversely, students seeking to become teachers should select their college based upon the teacher preparation program, on whether or not its goals/expectations are compatible with theirs. Admission's Criteria for Millennium Teacher Preparation Programs should include:

- Assurance that prospective teachers have a thorough understanding of what it means to be a teacher and what the job of teaching entails, including the responsibilities and expectations of millennium teachers and teaching. Teacher preparation programs should require that prospective teachers conduct interviews (at least 10!) with practicing teachers about their teaching experiences, and about the rewards and demands of the job, and weigh, heavily, their responses. These interviews would provide a look at teaching from a different perspective—not as that of former students, but as would-be teachers, analyzing and making decisions about a possible career. Students should select the teaching profession with care, and with the certain knowledge that teaching is right for them. They must understand that being a teacher is not for the fainthearted and that it is not for everyone (even though they may have “heart” and love being with kids). Making the right decision based on quality feedback, coupled with their own inclinations, capabilities, and desires will make them, ultimately, good representatives of their chosen profession.
- Assurance that prospective teachers bring individual millennium attributes that indicate they are well suited for the job, that they can be role models for youth, and that will raise the bar for everyone. These might include: a track record of leadership activities and change agent initiatives; drive and ambition; innovativeness and creativity; passion; the ability to listen; writing

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