

Catholic Teacher Educator or Teacher Educator Who is Catholic?

Teacher Preparation in a Catholic University

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This is total surrender: to be what Gods asks you to be. To accept that you are in the street if God wants you to be in the street—to accept that you are in the palace, if God wants you to be in the palace. To give whatever he asks you to give whether you are in the street or in the palace—and to give it with a big smile. This is the surrender to God.

— Mother Teresa

Often I have struggled with the question of "what am I to do with my life?" What does God want of me? It seems the answer has never come without scrutiny, reflection, time, prayer, and a willingness to be open to challenges, risks, and stepping out of my comfort zone. The call to become a teacher came early in my life. Becoming a teacher was a deep desire that I was able to fulfill with relatively little struggle, however, compared to the desire to become a teacher who could address the needs of children who traditionally were oppressed, marginalized, and at times literally in the streets. I have always sensed that because I was privileged, I had a responsibility to serve those less privileged and to help them realize the gifts they possess. Recognizing our gifts allows us the power to either hoard them for ourselves, or in a more Christian sense, share them with others.

Several events have occurred in the past years that have allowed me to explore how much being Catholic had to do with my service to children and their families; or to put it another way, how much being a teacher who is Catholic influenced my work. These events include being hired as a professor at a Catholic university, participating in Collegium, and participating in the UST Summer 1997 Seminar on Catholic University and Academic Freedom. In this essay, I hope to share my thoughts regarding preparation of pre-school, elementary, and secondary teachers, the relationship that this preparation has to the Catholic University, and how academic freedom in a Catholic university allows teacher educators to search for truth and share knowledge related to this preparation. I do not presume to speak for all individuals who work in the School of Education. However, by citing several works conducted by persons in the SOE, I hope to describe examples of our commitment to make a difference in society through pedagogy, and further, that this effort is steeped in Catholic tradition that is respected by our Catholic and non-Catholic members.

Preparation for Teaching Children in Grades Pre-K through 12

The University of St. Thomas has a long history of commitment to preparing dedicated and competent teachers to serve students in parochial and public schools. The first

teacher education courses were offered to students starting in 1917. Those first efforts to provide professional education courses have grown into a School of Education where thousands of undergraduate and graduate students have received teaching licenses, Master's Degrees and Doctorate Degrees in Education. As professionals, teachers are expected to demonstrate a thirst for knowledge and a continued effort to search for the truth which they pass on to children entrusted to them. In other words, teachers look for interventions that will address the strengths and needs demonstrated by their students. Teachers in training depend on *their* teachers (i.e., higher education faculty) to provide a campus where questions are asked, ideas are explored, and problems are solved in a civil, productive manner. Heft (1987, p. 226) suggested that it is not the responsibility of the professor to "provide the students with ready-made conclusions, but to train them to think for themselves..." The mission of the School of Education clearly states that administrators, faculty, and staff are

committed to the development of knowledgeable, ethical, reflective practitioners. The School of Education seeks to inspire all learners to reach their potential and to develop transforming, learning communities. (*UST School of Education Charter, 1997*)

The very principles of the School of Education guide its members in modeling authenticity, collaboration, diversity, inquiry, integrity, respect, and responsiveness. These principles certainly reflect Catholic values and the values of all the members of our School, both Catholic and non-Catholic persons. This "open circle" (Heft, 1988, p. 235) allows for vigorous dialogue and exchange of ideas from scholars who bring gifts of varying perspectives. These gifts are readily shared with our students and members of the St. Thomas community, and the community at large, in our efforts to prepare teachers to serve children and their families using state of the art practices based on rigorous scholarship, moral, and ethical treatment.

Teacher Preparation in a Catholic University

A great Catholic university must begin by being a great university that is also Catholic... it must be a community of scholars, young and old, teaching and learning together and committed to the service of humankind in our times. --Hesburgh, 1994, p. 5

One might ask why professional preparation of preschool, elementary, and secondary school teachers fits into a Catholic university. Another might suggest that of all the places where teachers are educated, a Catholic university which is committed to Catholic traditions such as service to the poor, social justice, love, and charity would be a perfect place to receive training. Marsden suggested that "Christians should be models of what it means to love and respect those with whom one differs, even as they may debate their differences" (1977, p. 54). Teachers prepared at the University of St. Thomas are exposed to members of the UST community who respect the Catholic doctrine and morals upon which St. Thomas is built. Faculty, staff, administrators, and students in the School of Education are committed to preparation and service to persons who represent a diverse community of learners. This is evidenced by the hundreds of students who have earned bachelor's and advanced degrees, and received teaching licenses in areas including

elementary and secondary education, special education, early childhood education, educational leadership, and community education. Persons who have completed our programs serve the community at large as teachers, administrators, and other types of school personnel. Several programs are designed to meet specific needs of the community. These include the Murray Institute which provides a model for Catholic School teachers to receive master's degrees in education with tuition paid through a scholarship fund. The Community Urban Educators program was developed to provide teacher education for persons from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who wished to acquire teaching licenses. As a result of this program, several hundred more teachers from diverse backgrounds now serve children in the Minneapolis and St. Paul schools.

Based on our record of teaching, scholarship and service, faculty, staff, administrators and students in the School of Education provide a vital component of the University of St. Thomas—a great university that is also Catholic.

Academic Freedom in a Catholic University

It has been said that academic freedom is difficult to practice in a Catholic university. On the contrary, I have felt a greater sense of academic freedom in this Catholic university than I experienced at secular institutions. Since being Catholic makes it difficult for me to separate my faith and values based on Catholic doctrine from values I have acquired due to other influences, I will not attempt to do it here. That would be analogous to asking me to separate my humanness from being a professional. That being said, I would like to share more on the idea of how members of the School of Education experience academic freedom in a Catholic university. According to Ryan (1997), academic freedom can be described as a search for truth through unrestricted research and critical analysis, sharing the knowledge gained by teaching it to others, and respecting the possibility for change through acquiring new knowledge. Members of the School of Education are encouraged and rewarded for engaging in these types of activities. To say that we are inhibited by being expected to adhere to Catholic moral teachings and values when considering research and what we teach would be a misnomer. In fact, we are bound by the ethics of the teaching profession when we consider the practice of scholarship and teaching (see for example Howe & Miramontes, 1992; Minnesota Board of Teaching, 1997). This code of ethics includes providing services to all regardless of race, ability, culture, or socioeconomic status; demonstration of care and compassion for others; and sharing of knowledge based on empirical data. These guidelines for ethical practice seem to follow Catholic doctrine and moral teachings. Most of the faculty who teach in the teacher preparation programs are themselves certified teachers. It would seem then that they are bound by the teacher's code of ethics in addition to the guidelines provided to practice academic freedom. Since we teach in a Catholic university, it is also expected that we teach and conduct research that is respectful of the Catholic identity of the university.

In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Pope John Paul II suggested that "because knowledge is meant to serve the human person, research in a Catholic university is always carried out with a concern for the ethical and moral implications both of its methods and or its discoveries"

(1990, p. 268). I would like to think that members of the School of Education all consider these guidelines when designing research and sharing knowledge gained through study.

Choosing what to teach and how to teach it is another aspect of academic freedom. In my own experience, I have struggled often with decisions regarding techniques and strategies that teachers need to learn about. For example, over the past twenty years persons who teach children with disabilities have discovered that segregating these children from their nondisabled peers in school and community settings may not be the best way to meet the needs of the child, their family, or persons in their communities. This discovery was made based on experience and research. Prior to the discovery that segregation of these children was as the very least discriminatory, federal legislation (see P.L. 94-142, 1975) was needed to guarantee a free and appropriate public school education for all children regardless of ability—a basic constitutional right that others in our country had practiced for over 200 years. Currently, there is still an attitude that some children do not deserve an education because of their disability. This has been the case especially for children who demonstrate emotional and behavioral disorders. While it is difficult for me to determine if it is my Catholic values and morals or some other influence that leads me to believe that discrimination of any human being is wrong, deciding which side of the argument to teach about also becomes difficult. To truly practice academic freedom, I must present all sides of the argument and allow students to discover what is right and what is wrong on their own. I can hope that modeling best practice, which suggests that all children deserve an education in the least restrictive environment possible, will have a positive influence on students.

Another example is related to specific interventions based on behavioral theory and their application in school and other settings. Academic freedom has also allowed for the discovery that some interventions related to behavior management were not respectful of human dignity and human rights (e.g., timeout, suspension, corporal punishment) (Galagher, 1997). Best practice now suggests that we teach new behaviors through direct instruction and recognize demonstration of these acceptable behaviors through a reinforcement paradigm. Behavior reduction strategies include talking to the child and providing for development of conflict resolution and problem solving skills. Application of any of these strategies requires that the teacher and others give careful consideration to cultural and other influences on the child/children before deciding on a particular intervention (e.g., McIntyre, 1996).

Although the research base for this new knowledge is extensive, the longitudinal effects have not yet been determined. However, respecting human rights, maintaining human dignity, providing love, care, and nurturance, and demonstrating respect and civility for others seems to be a notion that has been our guiding principle for thousands of years. We do have the academic freedom to teach what we want to but we have the responsibility to practice and model an ethical, moral way of behaving. As faculty in a Catholic university, we have no choice but to make sure that even the least among us is treated humanely and with dignity. No matter how much someone differs from us, we have the responsibility to maintain a Catholic vision, be sensitive to justice and injustice,

appreciate knowledge, demonstrate scholarly activity, listen to others, and be willing to serve all of God's children (McCormick, 1994).

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