

Transforming Teacher Education  
at a Small Private Institution:  
The Challenge of Meshing  
Internal and External Standards

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Introduction

Teacher preparation programs in California are governed by standards established by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, 2002). In September 1998, pursuant to Senate Bill 2042, California's recent comprehensive teacher credentialing legislation, the Commission launched an extensive effort on standards and assessment development that led to the development and adoption of new Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Professional Teacher Preparation Programs leading to a preliminary teaching credential in California. As a credential program sponsor and an early adopter of the SB2042 standards, our institution endeavored to include each of the elements of SB2042 in our teacher preparation programs. However, we were concerned that while we could include each of these elements, and while our teacher candidates might be prepared to be successful by most standards, many of them could still fall short in an area that is essential to our University.

Notre Dame de Namur University (NDNU) is the only four-year accredited university in San Mateo County. Founded by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in 1851 on the principles of educational access and community service, NDNU is committed to address the changing educational needs of its diverse student population. Figure 1 is a summary of NDNU's institutional core values.

Figure 1 Notre Dame de Namur University Signature: Core Values		
The Whole Person:	The Collaborative Community:	The Just Society:
A commitment to develop one's fullest potential.	A commitment to build an interactive, interdisciplinary community of learners.	A commitment to enhance justice & peace at the personal, communal & global levels.

Credential programs at NDNU place particular emphasis on NDNU's core values and competencies that promote social justice by creating equitable classrooms. The majority of the graduates of the credential programs find employment opportunities in districts in the greater San Francisco Bay area. By equitable classrooms, we mean classrooms where (1) all students learn and achieve at high levels, (2) there is little variation — or a small “gap” — between the levels at which students are achieving, and (3) there is no correlation between a student's level of achievement and his/her background characteristics (e.g., gender, race, primary language, family income level). We want our teacher candidates to support students from all racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds to develop skills, knowledge, and habits that they need to participate in and sustain our democratic society.

How have we responded to the mandate of SB2042 as a small independent university with specific core values and competencies that are somewhat different from the exceedingly prescriptive SB2042 standards? This article describes the complexity of our work in redesigning our programs, the challenges we face striving to maintain institutional integrity while responding to SB2042, and some of the strategies that we developed to address these challenges in order to design and implement a quality program that is in compliance with SB2042 and yet maintains its integrity as an institution with core values and competencies. This article also addresses why we believe that the substantive changes in our program will result in preparing teachers who are able to create equitable learning environments.

### Identifying the Challenge: Conceptual and Philosophical Complexity

Teacher preparation programs at NDNU are grounded in a long

history of liberal arts higher education in California. This tradition is supported by the University's mission to promote social justice through education.

In the past several years, NDNU's faculty has extended this mission to include core values and competencies — essential values and capacities that all NDNU graduates must develop. There are three interrelated principles we value as a faculty: (a) improving social justice through thoughtful and critical action informed by the foundations of education and a deep understanding of the multiple functions of schools in society; (b) building knowledge and skills pertaining to content standards, curriculum development, pedagogy, and assessment in the context of a collaborative learning community; and (3) developing the whole person through ongoing reflection, transformation, and professional development.

In November of 2001, the faculty of the School of Education and Leadership at NDNU began the journey of revising and redesigning our teacher education programs in order to be in compliance with SB2042. Given the number of standards and elements that we needed to address, we were concerned that our response to SB2042 could result in a program that “complied” with each and every discrete element without maintaining or strengthening a larger gestalt — a larger vision of what we want our teacher education students to experience and achieve. Furthermore, we have learned from the literature as well as from those actively engaged in transforming schools to promote social justice and equity (e.g., California Tomorrow, Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools) that we need to be intentional and purposeful in our efforts to prepare teachers who will create equitable and just classrooms and schools. That said, we were also concerned that, while we did not interpret SB2042 to conflict with our commitment to social justice, we did not feel that it required or reinforced this commitment. Therefore, if we were to use our response to SB2042 as an opportunity to renew our teacher education program, then we would need to take responsibility ourselves for making sure that our responses to the standards would reflect what it takes to create just and equitable learning environments for students.

How could we redesign our teacher preparation programs in ways that would (1) actualize our core values and competencies and (2) meet the standards presented in SB2042? The complexity of designing a program to meet both internal and external sets of standards is intellectually and logistically daunting. And yet, we are committed to addressing both. In doing so, we have identified several challenges at the design and implementation stages of our work that may strengthen the work of other institutions of higher education (IHEs) as they attempt to respond to SB2042 while maintaining — or deepening — their institutional

integrity. As a result of our hard work and collaboration with our K-12 partners, we have developed a framework for our programs that is concurrently grounded in the University's core values and SB2042 standards.

Three knowledge bases in teacher education form an integrated scholarly foundation for our philosophy regarding teacher education at NDNU: (a) research in teacher education regarding teacher quality (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2001; Haycock, 1998); (b) research regarding the necessary conditions and practices for promoting equity in racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse K-12 classrooms and schools (e.g., Nieto, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Olsen, 1997; Banks, 1999; Cummins, 1986; Thomas and Collier, 2001); and (c) John Dewey's (1967) philosophy of the relationship between theory and practice in education and the reflective practitioner model.

The work of Linda Darling-Hammond guided us in examining the relationship between teacher training, teacher qualifications, and student performance. According to Darling-Hammond (2001), teachers' knowledge, expertise, education, and experience account for a larger share of the success or failure of students' performance. Extraordinary teacher preparation programs involve strong grounding in the content area(s) to be taught; opportunities to learn and practice a broad repertoire of strategies to learners' diverse needs; connections between theory and practice; extended field experience that integrates course work, field work, and the strong support of a mentor; and a well-developed relationship with schools.

Current research regarding equity in diverse contexts convinced us that teacher candidates need to develop both the commitment and the capacity to promote equity. In order to develop the commitment to promote equity, teacher candidates need to (1) understand what equitable classrooms and schools look like; (2) understand some of the conditions that promote equity (and inequity); and (3) develop the will to achieve these visions and to create these conditions in their classrooms and schools. In order to develop the capacity to promote equity, candidates need to have concrete skills and strategies for creating conditions that promote equity, which include ongoing assessment, reflection, and action.

How do we integrate these two bodies of literature in our program design? To answer this question, we looked into a third body of knowledge — John Dewey's work regarding the value of integrating theory and practice. Our approach to teacher preparation provides candidates with the opportunity to apply the principles and theories presented in academic coursework in the field-based components of the program. Our program also engages teacher candidates in a process of

reflecting on their practice in foundation courses through a problem-posing and problem-solving manner (Dewey, 1967; Schon, 1987).

Between November 2001 and April 2002, NDNU teacher education faculty and our K-12 partners had extensive planning conversations, dialogues, and meetings which provided the opportunity to explore ways to integrate our beliefs regarding what it takes to prepare teachers in ways that promote equity and social justice with the timeline, the format, the process, and the requirements associated with SB2042. Collaboratively we redesigned our teacher education program to be grounded in the University's core values and the Standards of Quality and Effectiveness for Professional Teacher Preparation Programs pursuant to SB2042. We engaged in purposeful and intentional inquiry to review our work through the lens of institutional core values and competencies. Through this inquiry, we built trust in our institutional commitments to social justice, and we thought creatively about how we might be able to modify our program yet again in order to better serve these commitments.

#### Tackling the Challenge: Designing and Implementing a Response to SB2042

Designing and implementing a response to SB2042 that honors our institution's core values has presented us with many challenges. The following discussion will describe five of the challenges that we have experienced in our efforts to respond to SB2042.

*Challenge #1: How do we develop shared understanding with our IHE colleagues and K-12 partners regarding (1) what SB2042 requires, (2) the difference between our former program and the new requirements, and (3) the work that we needed to do to meet the new standards?*

In an effort to develop a collaborative community of diverse stakeholders, we convened many meetings with a large advisory group that included K-12 partners as well as full- and part-time faculty in the School of Education and Leadership (IHE colleagues). During these meetings, we engaged in various activities that were designed to develop participants' shared understanding of the standards and elements presented in SB2042, identify elements of our former program that already met the new standards, and brainstorm various responses to the 2042 elements that needed to be addressed.

One of the challenges that we experienced in planning and facilitating these meetings was the sheer amount of content that needed to be

understood in order to move forward with thoughtful planning discussions across role groups [e.g., SB2042 standards, elements within each standard, Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA), Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs)]. For example, throughout the planning process, we found that participants' simple clarifying questions often led to lengthy discussions of the SB2042 elements. We learned that the phase of "building understanding" endures much longer than we had originally anticipated; in fact, it is an important aspect of the work that deserves deliberate attention throughout the design and implementation phases.

In response to this challenge, we developed a few tools that facilitated our efforts to move quickly from clarifying questions to substantive design discussions. These tools included, but were not limited to matrices that aligned the various givens (e.g., TPA tasks, TPEs; our University's core values, coursework, and field experiences). Visual displays of the relationships between the many elements that we needed to address in our work facilitated the group's efforts to engage in collaborative planning conversations. These tools continue to be helpful to us in the implementation phase.

While the advisory meetings provided a core group of faculty and K-12 partners to collaboratively develop our program response, this core group was smaller than we had originally anticipated. Anecdotal feedback suggests that this was due to various factors, including the impacted nature of K-12 faculty/staff schedules, lack of financial incentives for participation (while we covered the cost of substitute teachers to release teachers to participate, we could not afford to pay participants a stipend).

One of the benefits of developing shared understanding was that we would share a picture of reality — where we formerly were, where we were going, and what it would take to get from there to here. Another benefit that the literature suggests is critical in the context of comprehensive reform is the meaningful inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the design, writing, and implementation stages of the work (Geiser & Berman, 2000).

*Challenge #2: How do we collaborate and work from consensus with our IHE colleagues and K-12 partners to re-design our program? How is the work associated with program re-design integrated into the work of "writing" the program document for the CCTC?*

When we created a structure to facilitate the process of responding to SB2042, the three of us were appointed as the writing team. At several different points in the process, we learned (and re-learned) that the charge of "writing" the document for the CCTC was not simply a writing assignment — it was largely an assignment of facilitating comprehensive

reform. This assignment therefore required thoughtful listening, responding, planning and coordination. Were we doing what our colleagues expected? Were we doing too much? Too little? Were we creating opportunities for collaboration at the right moments? These were questions that we grappled with throughout the process.

When it came to the actual writing of the document, our efforts to establish consensus with our colleagues and partners were challenged by the length and format of the product that was required for our external reviewers.

One of our challenges was writing a program document for two different audiences: one external (CCTC) and one internal (IHE colleagues and K-12 partners). This was very challenging because one document had to meet the needs of both audiences. We were able to overcome this challenge when we honored the fact that we had two audiences. This ultimately resulted in establishing consensus around the plan with our internal audience and approval of our plan by our external audience.

Our efforts to collaboratively re-design our program and write the program document were further challenged by the timeline for resubmission of sections that were not approved in our original draft. Our first round of feedback included requests for evidence of practices that had not yet been implemented (e.g., revised course syllabi); it also included extensive critique of our response to Standard 13: Preparation to Teach English Learners. This feedback could not be addressed by simply “re-writing;” it required additional development and/or re-design of the program. We received the feedback in late May; the deadline for resubmission was the first week in July. Some of the challenges that we experienced during those weeks were (1) the academic calendar and the 9-month schedule of faculty significantly limited our ability to collaboratively develop our revisions, and (2) we heard the request from the CCTC for additional evidence (e.g., revising course syllabi), and yet, without access to our colleagues during the summer months, we felt torn between creating the evidence (and thereby prescribing changes to syllabi) and honoring our collaborative process by responding that the evidence did not yet exist. Our learning from this aspect of the process was that faculty support needed to be built in to sustain designing/writing/planning efforts during the summer months — not just for the “writing” team, but for all faculty who would be responsible for implementing the new program plan.

*Challenge #3: How do we maintain and sustain professional interest, participation in, and collaboration in the implementation, reflection, modification, and ongoing program improvement?*

Throughout the planning and development period, but particularly now in the implementation phase of our work, we have struggled to sustain professional collaboration, commitment, and capacity to approach our response to SB2042 as one of continuous improvement rather than one-shot compliance. One strategy that has proven to be extremely effective in addressing this challenge was the appointment of one member of the writing team as a coordinator for the entire process. Coordinating our response to SB2042 included overseeing the planning, facilitation, and follow-up of our advisory meetings; managing a complex timeline that would enable us to meet our submission and resubmission deadlines; maintaining close communication with the CCTC in order to keep the faculty informed regarding revisions of the “givens;” and, following approval of our program document, provide leadership during the implementation, reflection, and modification phase of the process. To date, our coordinator has played an essential role in deepening faculty understanding of our program strengths *and* building faculty capacity to see our response to SB2042 as one of continuous improvement.

Additional strategies that have been used to address this challenge include monthly faculty “brown bag” meetings during which we discuss the relationship between course objectives, the TPA, TPEs, and course content. The sole purpose of these meetings is to improve the alignment between courses and the TPA; this includes improving the content and pedagogy of courses as well as the articulation between courses in the program. These conversations provide us with an opportunity to address yet another challenge — that of connecting our response to SB2042 to our students’ experiences.

*Challenge #4: Where are our students in this process? How do we help our students understand the philosophy and requirements of the new program?*

Throughout the planning and design phases of our response to SB2042, we struggled to develop ways to engage our students as collaborators. We effectively engaged one class of students in the Education Administrative Services Credential Program who were taking the “Program Initiation and Implementation” course. They were responsible for collecting feedback on changes in our programs from schools/districts they represented. While this class included a few alumni of our credential program, it did not include any of our active credential candidates. Faculty informed students of the changes being made at the state level and within NDNU’s program. While this provided many students with an incentive to complete their program in a timely manner in order to prevent becoming ensnared between the “old” program and

the “new” program, it did not lead to deeper discussions of the purposes of the changes or the implications of the changes for their careers.

Based on our experiences with our teacher candidates as well as growing evidence in the research literature, we know that teachers struggle to develop the consciousness and the true capacity to serve all students. In a system that emphasizes aggregate gains in student achievement rather than thoughtful examination and transformation of inequitable patterns of student learning and achievement, teachers need to have a profound commitment and capacity to improve equity if they are to support all of their students. As we continue to revise our credential program in response to new state legislations regarding teacher education programs, we are also committed to developing ways to ensure that NDNU’s teacher candidates demonstrate the commitment and the capacity to serve all students. This led us to identify a fifth challenge — and a point around which to focus our efforts to engage our students.

*Challenge #5: How do we plan and implement program re-design in a way that deepens our capacity to actualize our institutional core values in the areas of social justice, the collaborative community, and individual transformation?*

In reflecting on the meetings that we convened with IHE colleagues and K-12 partners, we realized that we spent much more time clarifying the logistics of our process, and the requirements of SB2042 than we did revisiting our University’s core values and commitments. This led us to develop a pilot project that will not only deepen our understanding of and commitment to our core values, including that of social justice, but will address some of the elements in the other challenges — the need to collaborate in meaningful and sustainable ways with our IHE colleagues, K-12 partners, and teacher education students in ways that actually result in improved teacher quality.

The first phase of the project consists of a Teacher Learning Community (TLC) Orientation in which credential students would participate in a three-hour meeting prior to the beginning of each semester. Students will participate in the TLC Orientation meeting prior to beginning their first course in the credential program. Each group that participates in orientation will form a new TLC “Cohort.” The purpose of this session is to provide the students with a framework for their teacher education program so that they can see how their various courses and experiences fit together to create a thorough and coherent teacher preparation program. We will also orient the students to the concept of social justice and how this can be furthered in schools by creating

equitable classrooms and schools. We will encourage students to ask questions of their instructors that will help them understand how to use what they are learning to support more and different students to learn and achieve at high levels. We will also introduce students to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, the Teacher Performance Expectations, as well as the Teaching Performance Assessment so that they are clear regarding the expectations associated with their profession.

In the second phase of the project, credential students will meet in Teacher Learning Community Cohort Meetings. During each semester following the TLC Orientation, one faculty member will continue to support each cohort of students. Cohort meetings will provide the students with the opportunity to revisit some of the ideas that were addressed in the Orientation through the new lenses that they bring based on the courses they have completed and/or the teaching experiences they have engaged in. This will challenge students to make connections between theory, practice, and their capacity to promote social justice.

The purpose of this work is to improve the quality of our teacher education program in ways that directly support NDNU's core values and competencies. We are attempting to make the University's commitments even more explicit than they already are in the context of our courses and program overall. We are attempting to take a bold step to provide our students with the additional pressure and support that we believe is necessary to grow in the areas of social justice, development and transformation of the whole person, and the collaborative community. By nurturing small cohorts of teachers, we will be working as collaborative learning communities to transform ourselves in ways that promote social justice in classrooms and schools. Faculty, students, and programs in the School of Education and Leadership may be transformed in the process. Will this, and our other efforts to address SB2042 in meaningful ways actually lead to the improvement of teacher quality in our program graduates? This may be the question that brings our faculty together to engage collaboratively in systematic and purposeful inquiry, for the data that we would gather to address this question would have implications for all aspects of our program — the courses we teach, the student teaching, supervising, and mentoring component of the program, and the very organization of the program itself. A thoughtful and valid evaluation component will be an essential element of our response to SB2042.

### Meeting the Challenge: Was It Worth It?

We have described the challenges faced by the School of Education

and Leadership as it integrated the new directions for teacher preparation and the core values of the University. We have also described a few of the challenges encountered when the faculty began its task of implementing the changes to our program. And yet the important question remains: will these efforts produce a change that will result in meaningful improvement in beginning teacher quality? Will these changes produce substantial gains in student achievement? Will teachers trained differently be able to communicate subject matter more effectively so that all students will learn?

School improvement and reform efforts to date have tinkered with everything from school structures, schedules, and size to curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Research suggests that most of these efforts have not produced equitable and high-achieving classrooms and schools (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Nieto, 2000). There is sufficient evidence to suggest, however, that high quality teachers may be one of the most important variables to attend to if we are committed to achieving equity and high achievement (Haycock, 1998).

#### New Reform Effort Mandated by Legislature

The new legislation (SB2042) in conjunction with the new CCTC mandates address teacher preparation as other efforts have but with a major difference. The new mandates include a set of standards for subject matter taught in the public schools, a set of Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) describing teaching tasks, and a Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) which measures those teaching performance expectations. By focusing on what teachers *know* as well as what they *are able to do*, this reform effort has the potential to result in improved teacher quality and ultimately improved equity and achievement.

The teaching performance expectations are a set of knowledge, skills and abilities beginning teachers must be able to demonstrate they possess. While this is yet another way of approaching reform, it is unique: the CCTC has worked with the Educational Testing Service and California educators to develop a performance assessment system that includes a set of performance tasks and scales. Under SB2042, all teacher candidates must take and pass the TPA in order to be recommended for a preliminary teaching credential.<sup>1</sup>

#### Pilot Experience

The process we used to analyze our program was to have each

instructor examine his/her course and determine which, if any, teacher performance expectation was taught as a part of that course. Using the backward design approach suggested by Wiggins and McTighe (1998), we began with the TPA. A matrix was then constructed which listed the Teacher Performance Expectations and the courses in which they were addressed. Intense scrutiny of each syllabus occurred because the process required each faculty member to use this complex systemic approach. The focus was on content and subject-specific pedagogy aligned with K-12 academic content standards. Particularly important was the determination of which courses would specifically address the TPA.

Revised syllabi were distributed to all faculty and discussion sessions were held to determine the extent to which the program provided a developmental sequence of coursework, fieldwork, and skill development. The exchanges provided the School of Education and Leadership with an opportunity to consider the strengths and weaknesses of its current program and the time for faculty to discuss what should be eliminated and retained from our current practice, what should be revised and what should be created. The result is assurance that each candidate knows how to address the needs of each learner so that each student can achieve greater academic success.

The CCTC has clearly directed the teacher preparation community to view learning to teach as a continuum and to collaborate with one another in the process of preparing professionals for the field. The process just described included representatives from local school districts who participated as true colleagues in the effort to improve the quality of the credential program at NDNU.

### A Closing Note

SB2042 has generated a rich discussion regarding our program at many different levels, not only in formal meetings and planning sessions as a whole faculty and with the K-12 community, but also in informal moments throughout our daily work. As members of the faculty team that participated in the process from Notre Dame de Namur University, we are making a concerted effort to use this reform effort to make changes in our program that will result in a graduate who is more able to create equitable and high performing classrooms. We have only just begun the work of institutionalizing systems to ensure that we will evaluate our work in relationship to our desired outcome. This requires us to document (1) the degree to which we are actually implementing program changes *and* (2) the capacity of our program graduates. Only by reflecting on these data and the

relationship between them will we be able to further adjust our work for the next academic year. Our commitment to improve the experiences and the achievement of the K-12 students who are served by our program graduates demands such ongoing evaluation and reflection. Herein lies the continuing challenge and the greater opportunity.

### Note

<sup>1</sup>For budgetary reasons, the CCTC has suspended the implementation of the TPA temporarily.

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