

University of Washington, Tacoma  
Teacher Certification  
and  
Educational Administrator Certification Ceremony  
6/1/05  
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I'd like to take just a few minutes and give you one more "take away" idea from your time at UWT... one big idea I'd like you to take as you leave us—the big picture, if you will. I'd like to state a contrast between two ways of thinking about your approach to your students in the future. Here is the question: How do the values of comparative vs. contributive abilities<sup>1</sup> grow out of your UWT experience?

Here's what I mean... We've spent time with you in assignments like: "compare and contrast" --teaching you the importance of assessment and evaluation. This is a needed skill in making decisions like choosing instructional tools, or curricula. In addition, we have spent most of our time giving you tools--- tools that you will use to help your students develop tools of their own: For example, tools of acquisition for literacy in numbers and words, tools for technology, scientific knowledge, or writing. However, in the ultimate assessment about the value of your education here, tool acquisition— even the tool of skillful comparing and contrasting— as useful as that skill is... it is not enough. A big enough take-away must be more than tool acquisition.

A university education, including that of teacher and administrator education is irrelevant, unless somehow it helps you make meaning for your life or helps you add value to the life of another. That's what I mean by the contributive factor. The big picture in education is the process of helping others make meaning. All throughout history and across all cultures, education--- even in its most primitive forms, for example parent-child relationships, apprenticeships, even early American school systems--- education has helped people find meaning in work, family, neighborhoods, and in their shared faith communities.

But, as our modern world has become less experiential and less relational—and more data and paper driven, more technology and simulation rich, and more consumer oriented (focused on stuff), education has also moved away from helping students find meaning in being with others, taking care of others, giving to others—and contributing to the common good. I challenge you to set up a culture and climate in your classroom and schools that also focus on this contributive factor. Looking at you I see leaders and potential leaders--as classroom teachers, building principals, and district administrators. I hope you will also someday look at your students and teachers and encourage them to become contributive leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> This notion is attributed to Robert J. Spitzer, S. J, President of Gonzaga University 5/7/05

In order to do this, I have five gifts you can give your students that will allow them to be contributors to our society. I hope that we, have in fact, given these gifts to you:

- 1) Voice—Help your students, or your teachers, find their own creative voices, enable them to write their own narratives (this might take form of authoring a play, creating an invention, planning a community service, writing a song). Here is where comparative tool use comes in... there are many good ideas, but students need to know effective ways of developing, evaluating, and expressing them.
- 2) Power—Enable your students and your teachers to feel they make a difference—this can only happen when they have the actual experience of truly making difference, contributing to the betterment of another person or the greater society.
- 3) Duty—Impart a sense of historically based duty that says we owe something to those who came before and to those who will come after us. We are responsible for caring for the world and the all in it.
- 4) Significance—help them finding meaning in active contribution. Part of your job is to create environments for them to do this, through service learning, or other curriculum-based projects. Help your student/teachers see how their lives fit into the big picture of society.
- 5) Love—give them your professional and authentic caring, your compassion, and your time. There is no substitution for this.

I can hear your questions now.... Because the process of developing a sense of voice, and power, of giving and receiving love, imparting duty, and of coming to believe in one's own significance--- take time. And if there is one thing missing from the current possession of teachers, it is time. Some things will need to go and everything begs for attention. Preparing for the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) takes time. Meeting EALRs, (Essential Academic Learning Requirements) and attending faculty meetings takes time. We only have a few hours per day to be with the kids. A critical set of decisions you will be making in your career is how to make those with whom you work know their contributions are valued. And this takes time.

Here is where your comparative skills come back in. Compare and contrast what you do and what you are expected to do with this big picture. What tools must be taught independently and explicitly? What concepts may be taught together, and integrated? What lessons are best learned through inquiry? Where are your gifts and skills best used, and when can you work with others for interdisciplinary learning.

Place skill development in the context of your students' lifelong learning and ability to contribute to the world, to their families, to their cultural traditions, and to their future work places. Most importantly, your students will learn from your example and your visible actions as a contributor.

Yes, help them develop procedural knowledge. But do this in the service of lifelong learning so that they may use their comparative skills to become positive contributors, give them these five gifts—voice, power, duty, significance, and love--so that they may create a better society—a better big picture.