

University of Washington, Tacoma
Teacher Certification
and
Educational Administrator Certification Ceremony
June, 2002
Ginger MacDonald, Director

This was a year like no other for TCP. Started the year with the Sept 11—tragedy... and in many ways it has defined us for this year. As a result of that terrible day, America has become—fearful, angry, reflective, patriotic, spiritual, anxious, emboldened, cautious.

It is a bit sad to note, our group is a smaller than when we started. This year, coping with normal challenges of life (deaths in family, financial problems, child rearing) have been somehow more difficult. But, you have persevered and succeeded. You are stronger today than you were last June.

When we first met last summer, I talked to you a bit about why people become teachers. Each one of us on the platform, each of your faculty have a little bit different story about why they became a teacher, as do each of you. But, if we were to each say out loud our reason.... there is a very common theme.

We believe that inside each of us is a **calling to care for the young**. A calling to help another person experience the wonderful joy of that “aha” moment that comes with learning something important. A calling to help mold and form the future citizens of our community and our nation.

We’ve heard a lot about heroes since Sept 11. Usually we mean police officers, fire fighters... and they are heroes. But a real set of unsung heroes were the teachers of our nation who helped our children cope with this threat to our security. Teachers were the ones who had to set their own fears aside and be strong for the children. They had to hold difficult discussions about the news on TV. They had to deal with children who developmentally regressed due to generalized anxiety in society. They calmed students whose parents or siblings were called into the service and sent to war. **You**, having your student teaching experience in the midst of this had an extra layer of emotional toll on you that no other group before you has faced. I’m very proud of how you handled it all year long.

This year you learned how to teach literature and social studies and fitness, and reading and math. You learned something equally important, that comes from within you, something we really can’t teach... but try to set up experiences for you to develop this essential teacher quality. That is the quality of **having hope for those who have no hope**. A child who has no hope will not learn. It is a primary role of a teacher, to develop a classroom climate of hope for every student. A climate where that teacher truly believes that each child can learn, and where you will not give up trying to find the window of opportunity for learning.

This is not a touchy-feely, fake self-esteem that can be destroyed with a cross look or an insult. It is a self-concept grounded in school success ---social success that allows children to honestly know they can learn and that what they learn is important.

Since learning sometimes takes a long time, we must build hope into the formula of our everyday teaching experience. We must model it. We must live it.

I had the privilege of briefly working once with a leading American theorist on helping people succeed in life. His name is Dr. Bernard Haldane, and his theory is called “Dependable Strengths.” He devoted his life to helping teachers show students that they have the strength to take on life’s challenges, including those in school. Dr. Haldane always said, “If you want to get the best out of people, you must look for the best that is in them.” We can translate that a bit. In order to teach those children who seem to have many strikes against them, who have in many ways given up on themselves, we must look for the strength—the hope within them and use it to build academic and social success.

We are here today to honor you for having the courage to step into this wonderful, challenging, hope building profession. You have worked so hard this year to prepare yourselves, and you are ready.

Charge to the TCP students by Ginger MacDonald (given ‘00 & ’01, ‘02)

As we conclude our time together today, I wish to give you a charge. A charge is a unique duty or obligation given for a specific purpose. I give the same charge to each graduating class. My charge to you is this:

Be a bearer of HOPE to all you encounter in your work as a teacher.

Deans of Education and commencement speakers all across the country are using this term this week in ceremonies similar to ours. HOPE is often spoken of in soft and fuzzy way at times like this, but today, in this charge, it is tough and demanding. This is not a small obligation, nor an easy duty to perform.

Do you realize that HOPE is a paradox? It holds both the belief in unlimited possibility and finds ways to address realistic limitations.

How many times have you heard us say things like, “all students can learn”. or “you can be anything you want to be”? You know, for some students, that is the greatest of all lies.... unless someone like you is there to help make that happen. Unlimited possibility is only true for some of the kids, and unless the limits are removed, through good instruction, the teaching of self-discipline, and an enormous amount of encouragement, it won’t happen.

On the other hand, HOPE is not merely unlimited possibility; it has a realistic side. How many of you have been told... “you can’t do that... you are (now fill in the blank... not smart enough, a girl, too old, a mother...). I recall that as a child, nothing could make me more angry or motivate me to perform than someone telling me I was not up to a certain task. I would do it just to prove them wrong. But many kids, when told

they are unable, believe it. And when they are told that often enough, it becomes part of who they are, part of their self-concept.

From our perspective as teachers, realistic HOPE sounds more like “yes, you can do it, and here is what you need to do to make it happen—let me help you. If you work with me, I will never give up on you.” I want you to know that we in the TCP program have held out HOPE for you this year. Many of you have begun soaring in that wind of unlimited possibility. All of you have also experienced the reality of how much hard work and determination it takes to make that possibility happen.

Now, you must take HOPE away from here and make it your gift to every single student you encounter in the many years of teaching you have ahead of you. I have HOPE in you and believe you can.