2007

Preparing Teachers for Their Prophetic Role to Serve with Heart, Head, and Hands

Cindy Harvel
Mount Vernon Nazarene University

Martine Audeoud
The American International School of Niamey

Recommended Citation

Preparing Teachers for Their Prophetic Role to Serve with Heart, Head, and Hands

Abstract

As teacher preparation programs seek to diversify their pre-service teachers' exposure to teaching situations, Mount Vernon Nazarene University's Education Department has discovered how to maximize its freshman's educational technology field experiences through meaningful cross-cultural community service. A plan has been implemented since the spring of 2004 where candidates taking educational technology classes are required to give 8 hours of technology tutoring as a community service to populations in cross-cultural situations. Based on the Spring 2004 successes, the cross-cultural tutoring opportunities have been expanded, leading to renewed vision in candidates' perspectives on education and job placements. At a freshman level, this challenge sets the tone for further diverse field exposure. This study will look at the multiple positive outcomes that result from a model that uses technology tutoring as the pre-service candidates' first exposure to a cross-cultural instructional environment and thus enhances the prophetic call that rests on teachers.

Preparing Teachers for Their Prophetic Role to Serve with Heart, Head, and Hands

Cindy Harvel and Martine Audéoud

Abstract

As teacher preparation programs seek to diversify their pre-service teachers' exposure to teaching situations, Mount Vernon Nazarene University's Education Department has discovered how to maximize its freshman's educational technology field experiences through meaningful cross-cultural community service. A plan has been implemented since the spring of 2004 where candidates taking educational technology classes are required to give 8 hours of technology tutoring as a community service to populations in cross-cultural situations. Based on the Spring 2004 successes, the cross-cultural tutoring opportunities have been expanded, leading to renewed vision in candidates' perspectives on education and job placements. At a freshman level, this challenge sets the tone for further diverse field exposure. This study will look at the multiple positive outcomes that result from a model that uses technology tutoring as the pre-service candidates' first exposure to a cross-cultural instructional environment and thus enhances the prophetic call that rests on teachers.

Introduction

The Call

"Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers" (Mat. 23:29-33). These were the words addressed by the Lord Jesus to the pharisaic leadership of his people. Today, in our affluent society and our well-to-do churches we are hearing the same words from our Lord Jesus. He entrusts those of us who are training Christian educators, to be His potter's hand to mold those who will be these prophetic wise teachers. In the role of a servant-leader we watch Jesus wash His disciple's feet, we model that servant leader role to our students, and then we watch and tenderly guide them as they wash the feet of those they learn to serve. We are His tools to shape them into teachers, leaders, servants. What an awesome responsibility!

Christian educational institutions' responsibilities are comparable to that of Christian churches. As salt on the earth and light on a table, the Christian church undeniably has a prophetic call that has been outlined specifically by our Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and in the apostles' writings. Snyder (1977) defines the prophetic call of the church as a reconciling agent within its surrounding communities, and as an entity that refuses and refutes the world's definition and unjust practices of power in order to promote kingdom justice (Snyder, 1977, pp. 107-115). Christian higher education leaders have therefore the profound responsibility to nurture pre-service teachers towards becoming who God wants them to become in their prophetic teaching role.

The Context

Mount Vernon Nazarene University draws over 80% of its student population from towns of 20,000 inhabitants or less. As a consequence, its student population is quite homogenous as shown in Figure 1 below.

Furthermore, its faculty is a reflection of this cultural setting: In 2004, five of its full-time faculty members represented minority populations. MVNU's setting – being at least one hour from major cities – is a challenge, too. Faced by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE) diversity and technology requirements, the MVNU teacher preparation program developed a cross-cultural community service component for each level of its program. This paper will especially focus on the cross-cultural community service component at the freshman level. Our goal is to be intentional as we invite students to teach, lead, and serve among diverse individuals. Although the term 'diversity' has been used by the lay educational leaders to describe part of the prophetic call of teachers, Christ's Kingdom calls for more than just

passive integration; it calls for a pro-active approach to take on a reconciling role that will promote Kingdom justice.

Christ never intimates that furthering His kingdom will require a passive role. Only pseudo-religiosity sees Christ and Christianity as inert and inactive, meekly submissive and quiet. Christ's command to "Go into all the world…" indicates action, eagerly awaiting the leading of the Holy Spirit. In light of His vibrant command, our desire as educators is that serving in a diverse community would accomplish three basic tasks: First, we would send forth our students to bridge gaps. In the Echoing Hills setting, that gap existed between healthy, active university students to those who were physically and mentally challenged. In the two Somali refugee training centers, the gap existed between cultures, races, religions, and economic levels. At the Fountain of Hope, our predominantly white, moderate income students were reaching out across the gap to African American young people from primarily lower income neighborhoods. At The ROCK and at Highlands Elementary, our largely intact family oriented Christian students were sharing technology with low income young teens, many coming from troubled home situations and who did not know Christ.

Our second task would be to reveal and eradicate stereotypic myths. We desired to help our students see all humanity as worthy of our time and energy. Society tends to view handicapped as less adept academically. The gentleman at Echoing Hills suffering from Cerebral Palsy who "appeared mentally challenged" pleasantly surprised our students when they found he was the editor of a national magazine, expressing a finely tuned intellect despite the outward appearance of his disoriented body. Our media portrays refugees as sullen and angry, some of our students were even reluctant to sign up for this category of service in fear of not knowing how to interact with a displaced, needy people. What a delight to watch Somali refugee young teens and middle aged women laughing and joking with one another and with our young people as they developed biographical slideshows.

A third goal would be to build community, to take the love of Christ to those we were serving and develop relationships of care. One of our students now volunteers occasionally at the ROCK, sharing not only her technology skills, but her love for Christ as well as she shoots pool, plays video games, and simply converses with the young people there that come seeking. Two volunteers attended a going away celebration for one of the main leaders in Echoing Hills, a gentleman from India whose passion for Christ touched their hearts.

One technology educator reflected, "The notion of Learning communities is rooted in the observation that knowledge and learning are a natural part of the life of communities that share values, beliefs, languages, and ways of doing things (Bransford et al.,1999)." As we share technology skills with those of another culture, we not only develop community between ourselves and them, we foster community to all the education, culture and learning that can be attained with the tool of computer education. As Schwier (2002) points out, learners are developing "social capital," they are investing in community that can expand to the virtual community that exists online, whose commonality is not race or physical appearance, it's not language or culture, the commonality is a desire to learn.

Figure 1: Full-time and part-time students

Community outreach is embedded in Vygotsky's (1978) model of learning as a social construction of knowledge within a community of practice where knowledge sharing is a key component of knowledge construction. More recently, Engestrom (1999) has developed an Activity Theory model where interaction between communities helps social communities to reconstruct their identities within the larger frameworks of their settings. When applied to educational technology, these conceptual frameworks will support the specific efforts for technology outreach to cross-cultural communities developed in MVNU's teacher preparation programs.

The first question that came to the mind of many faculty members as the program was initially developed was the following: why expose students to cross-cultural communities within an educational technology course at the freshman level? A number of reasons will support this choice:

1. Right at the beginning of their experience at MVNU, students need to experience their prophetic call as a 'way of life', as one of the prime values of

their teacher preparation programs.

2. Technology is a concrete, yet, 'open' tool that will facilitate a candidate's first exposure to tutoring situations while they have not yet been exposed to a number of teaching strategies and experiences. Especially today, the majority of our students come to us with computer skills.

3. Technology is an area where a number of cross-cultural communities feel that they are at a deficit compared to average middle-class American society.

4. Technology represents a powerful cross-cultural communication tool: through cyberspace, it enables tutees to showcase their own cultural background to tutors, and tutors are engaged to understand and get a more precise grasp of their tutees' needs and cultural challenges.

Description of Study and Data Collection Methods

The freshmen's cross-cultural community service requirement began the spring semester of 2004 . All education freshmen were required to take a class entitled 'Educational Technology'. Within that class there was a stipulation that required all members of the class need to give eight hours of technology training in a cross-cultural environment, needed to be approved by the instructors. The instructors then made contacts with various centers where technology tutoring would be an asset to the community.

Two computer labs in Somali refugee training centers were identified one hour away from the university. The populations served are Somali refugee adults and young teens who needed computer skills either for their professional growth or for educational and personal purposes. There were no other registration requirements, but registered participants had to commit to attend four hours of tutoring. At the end of their tutoring sessions, participants were given a certificate of completion. Transportation was provided for the tutors.

One African-American after-school outreach program, Fountain of Hope, was also identified. This center is located in the inner-city. They have a whole computer lab set up and other activities organized to support middle and high school students in their academic and social development. Transportation was provided for the tutors. These middle and high school students had to participate in four hours of tutoring and showcase

a technology project in order to obtain a certificate of completion.

Three low-income elementary schools were also identified in the adjacent county where the 21st Century grant had been approved for after-school support for at-risk students. The grant coordinator provided the placements for our students. This after-school program functions four days a week, with half of the program being technology interaction and the other half other content-related instruction and tutoring. Our tutors had to provide their own transportation to these schools and arrange their tutoring schedule with the school's grant coordinator.

A center for teenagers and adults with mental handicaps, called Echoing Hills, about forty-five minutes away, gave students insight into the world of special physical and mental needs. Our tutors had to arrange their technology tutoring time with the Echoing Hills director. They had to provide their own transportation to that center.

Finally, a youth center for outreach to teenagers, The Rock, was identified in a low-income area about twenty minutes away from the university. Again, our tutors had to arrange for their technology tutoring time with the center coordinator and provide their transportation to the center. Each of the selected technology tutoring centers represented at least two kinds of diversity perspectives, including racial, economic and special needs.

Each tutor was required to set up a KWL chart for each of their tutees and thus develop a tutoring plan for each one, except for the 21st century grant placements where the tutoring content was already laid out by the program. Tutors were encouraged to take tutees at the technology level that they were at, and move them up while taking into account their tutees' needs and personal desires. Therefore, tutoring could include the most basic skills such as how to use a mouse, to reading and art development through technology, word processing, multimedia-presentations and internet skills.

The first semester, qualitative data only was collected from students through a response paper where tutors had to summarize their experience, then reflect on their learning regarding technology tutoring in a

culturally diverse environment. Finally, they had to end their report by stating how this experience would affect the way they would teach in the future.

The second semester, the same type of qualitative paper was required from tutors. But tutors were also asked to fill in an evaluation survey that gave instructors more quantitative data on how the program was perceived by the tutors. This survey asked tutors to evaluate faculty support, site supervisor support, peer support, gains in personal knowledge, gains in cross-cultural approaches and gains in technology tutoring and teaching skills on a Likert scale. This qualitative data was then computed to inform next semester's service requirements, preparation and placement offerings. Forty-five students participated in the first community outreach effort, and thirty-one in the second one.

Findings

During this project, candidates were faced with a number of challenges: language barriers, physical and technical limitations, time management issues, fluidity of the curriculum and specific needs of their tutees. For most of the candidates, these challenges were transformed into opportunities for growth. This happened for several reasons, including pre-experience preparation, coaching during the experience and debriefing after the experience. Growth occurred in the candidates' professional expertise, but also in his/her social and emotional maturation.

Most of the qualitative feedback received from tutees was similar to the following:

"Through tutoring these Somali people I learned that it is a great experience to watch people learn to do things, and I also learned that even if you do not feel like you know enough to help someone else they will appreciate what you do know."

"Through this experience I have developed a desire to teach in a city school with diversity."

"I learned from this experience that reaching out to others should be something that I do more often."

"Through this tutoring session, I learned that I must think about what I am teaching not only from my own way of life, but try to think of what other people will be thinking, and how I can communicate best to teach people from a variety of backgrounds."

"Before entering the workforce, all teachers should have the experience of tutoring a child from a different culture."

"Every day I came home so excited for the day that I will have my own classroom. Hopefully, the lessons I learned now will stop me from making some mistakes in the future. I know that I not only made a difference in the fact that they may be a little more proficient in technology, but I was a role model for them when they may not have too many people to look up to."

"This experience will certainly influence my future. It encouraged me to seek other opportunities to tutor. In fact, I think it is everyone's responsibility to donate his or her time. I will most likely be tutoring on and off for the rest of my life."

"I have to be honest that I was a little hesitant about doing the tutoring because I was being selfish. I didn't want to give up a few hours of my weekend to go and teach others and to help them. But, as I continued to go I was so blessed with each visit and I came away feeling good about what I was doing and excited for the next time to go."

"I came away from this tutoring experience so blessed and a bit more open-minded I think. The way I was accepted by my students and the way they were so willing to share what they had with all of us really touched me."

"I came away from this experience not only blessed but touched and I think this will make me more willing to do similar things in the future and to not be afraid to give some of my time to help others. Although I was supposed to be the teacher I feel like I was the one being taught many things."

"Overall, I have learned that I may want to work in a place like Echoing Hills and have the opportunity to help the disabled people."

The next step in organizing findings required analyzing the quantitative data received through the experience survey. Thirty-one tutors completed the survey.

Figures two, three and four show how tutors perceived the support they have received from faculty, site supervisor and their peers.

Figure 2: Tutors' Evaluation of Faculty Support.

Faculty support (Figure 2) was deemed a crucial issue for the success of this new experience. Because tutors were moving out of their comfort zone, a key element of the successful outcome of their new outreach experience was to have a faculty member who would be like an 'anchor' who would help tutors identify issues that pertained to the new culture and ways to solve problems in culturally appropriate ways. Several tutors also commented about the positive impact that strong faculty support had on their experience. Faculty support was the strongest in cultures that were more 'different' from the initial culture. Faculty presence was almost constant at the Somali refugee centers, at the African-American Fountain of Hope center, as well as at the Echoing Hills center for handicapped people. It was encouraging to realize that faculty presence during those experiences, although very time-consuming for the faculty member, did bear the expected fruit, i.e. increased comfort and assurance for tutors to make their experience most valuable.

Figure 3: Tutors' Evaluation of Site Supervisor Support

Along with faculty support went the perception of the site supervisor's support (Figure 3). Except perhaps for the youth center, The Rock, and the center for handicapped people, Echoing Hills, students really appreciated developing a relationship with the site supervisors they worked with. Even in the two sites just mentioned, the positive perception of the site supervisors was held by 80% of the tutors or more. Why was it important that tutors develop a strong relationship with their site supervisor? In their comments, tutors identified specific areas or skills that had been enhanced through their relationship with their site supervisor:

Tutors learned to understand and negotiate appropriate expectations, behaviors and tasks.
Tutors learned to plan and organize themselves in en-

vironments much more fluid and less structured than those found in the classrooms that they were used to. They developed more relevant and meaningful communication capabilities.
Their self-esteem was enhanced.
The site supervisor became another very powerful help for tutors to 'translate' culture in educational parameters and thus helped shape the educational experience into a more meaningful experience for tutors and tutees.

Figure 4: Tutors' Evaluation of Peer Support

Peer support (Figure 4) was evaluated to find out the general 'mood' of the tutors throughout the experience. Tutors in all sites acknowledged a high level of peer support, the lowest being 80% in Highlands, where tutors did not have to work as closely in a team relationship as at the other sites. Tutors helped each other by looking for, creating or sharing resources to enhance the richness of tutees' learning.

Figure 5: Tutors' Evaluation of their Gain in Personal Knowledge

Another area of interest was the evaluation of tutors' gains in their personal knowledge (Figure 5), i.e. in knowing themselves better. The perceived gains were all fairly positive for tutors. In their comments tutors told of their increased level of patience, their new appreciation of their situation, and their improved communication skills. They also spoke of discovering new gifts, especially for those who went to tutor at the center for handicapped people (Echoing Hills). Several wrote that they found out that they seemed gifted to work with handicapped students. Others discovered that they enjoyed working in culturally diverse environments and stated that they would be seeking a teaching position in urban inner-city schools. For others, their passion for teaching and their desire to see students learn was highly reaffirmed through that experience. Several tutors also wrote that they realized that they are in fact capable of taking on new challenges and that they are actually able to adjust without too much difficulty to unknown or different situations. Not a single tutor who had completed the full amount

of required tutoring hours viewed the experience as negative or not having any impact on his/her life.

Figure 6: Tutors' Evaluation of their Gains in Cross-Cultural Approaches

Gains in cross-cultural approaches (Figure 6) were also rated very high in most centers except for the 21st century grant elementary schools (Highlands) and at the youth center (The Rock). This issue was discussed especially with the Highlands center coordinator. Both of the centers, Highlands and The Rock, are serving mostly low-income Caucasian students. Therefore, our tutors did not readily perceive that they were entering another culture. As freshmen, they had not yet been exposed to courses or lectures on generational or other types of poverty cultures and their specific features. Therefore, they were just looking for outside visual cultural characteristics instead of trying to dig deeper into identifying their students' cultures. A few tutors mentioned that they encountered some very challenging family stories by their tutees, or that their tutees' community was unsupportive of educational practices. Several tutors commented on the few learning opportunities that some of their tutees had been offered. However, as to the tutoring experiences in the other centers, tutors generally commented that tutees had been appreciative of this learning experience and were also struck by the fact that tutees in these communities were caring about each other. Another comment revealed how religious practices (in this case the fast of Ramadan) could influence students' learning. Several commented on the fact that they had to learn to communicate with tutees who had a much lower level of understanding of the English language and how that complicated the educational process. They acknowledged that they learned to develop different teaching strategies that included less verbal input and more modeling. They also learned to use technology to bridge cultural gaps and gain a higher level of cross-cultural understanding. For instance, in the Somali culture, they had their tutees locate some websites that were informative of Somali culture and current events. Discussions followed and, as a consequence, a better understanding of the new culture. Tutors also learned to make more explicit to their tutees some of the cultural differences that were pointed out to them by their tutees.

Figure 7: Tutors' Evaluation of their Gains in Tutoring/Teaching Skills

The last area of growth that was analyzed was the tutors' evaluation of their gains in tutoring or teaching skills (Figure 7). All the feedback received regarding that area was generally positive, except for the Somali refugee learning centers where several tutors acknowledged that their gains in actual tutoring or teaching skills had been minimal. This could be accounted for by the difficulty of communication that a number of tutors experienced in linguistic communication and therefore had felt somehow frustrated. On the other hand, comments on tutoring or teaching skills included behavior management techniques, development of higher level thinking skills, technology integration for increased student learning as well as very individualized strategies to meet specific student needs. Other comments pointed out that tutors realized that they had learned that everyone deserved to learn and thus it was a humbling experience for several to serve as a tutor. Many tutors also shared how the 'aha!' moment that they were able to capture on their tutees' faces definitely represented the best reward that they had received for their efforts.

Tutors' changes of 'dispositions' after their cross-cultural field experience and its influence on vocational/career choices were quite obvious. In the previous analysis, the change of dispositions addressed the following areas, according to a framework of community service and learning engagement developed by Australian universities (Butcher, et al., 2003). These areas are:

1. Relationships with people the service supports.
2. Relationships with other volunteers.
3. Valuing of people the service supports.
4. Work competence.
5. Social awareness.

Several Australian universities have designed a similar component to their pre-service education program. Butcher (2003) recorded the shift from the concept of community service to that of community engagement that actually describes a two-way relationship. As pre-service teachers engage in community outreach, benefits are not unilateral, but bilateral as both the community reaching out and the community reached out to are enriched by the experiences. A powerful

aspect of this bilateral enrichment is another outcome of the experience that had initially been left out of the analysis, but that Australian universities are strongly focusing on: Empathetic action. Actually, although students were not formally required to share in writing any expression of empathy with their tutees or with the community that they reached out to, it was obvious to see in the comments that empathetic relationships were developed by most of them during the experiences. Out of that empathy, greater respect grew between the community reaching out and that reached out to, and strong bonding experiences have affirmed several pre-service teachers' call to teaching in diverse settings. Many students commented on the enrichment that they felt through the relationship building experiences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As this community outreach was developed as an added component to education freshmen requirements in their educational technology class, doubts and questions were on the faculty members' minds. "How would our 'protected' freshmen be able to get out to the urban world? Would their low level of technology competency be adequate for technology tutoring? Would their low-level exposure to other cultures render the outreach experience difficult or negative?" After participating in two semesters of outreach efforts, there remained an overwhelming reassurance that this diversity service was a valuable approach to sensitize pre-service teachers. At the beginning of their education training this training contributed to enlarging their worldviews in their initial education courses to include many enriching cultures and cross-cultural teaching approaches. This service experience allowed students to embrace diversity outreach as a way of life.

The two faculty involved in the experience noted several needs to be addressed. 1) Students who received the most satisfaction seemed to be from the experiences that included a faculty member present. 2) Students seemed to benefit from locations which contained the most visual diversity (race or handicap). Students at the ROCK, for example, had difficulty viewing poverty or lower income level as "experiencing diversity." 3) Students seemed to value those settings with the greatest amount of structure. The more freedom they had to teach, the less they valued the experience.

On the other hand, technology tutoring proved to have been the appropriate approach for a first community outreach. In fact, according to students' comments, technology represented such a commonality between them and the community reached out to that it greatly enhanced the learning experiences. Tutors realized that technology represented a safe common ground for everyone, "a place of acceptance and still personalized" as one tutor commented. Tutors' seemingly lower level of technology proficiency did not to represent a major hindrance for the experience and was barely commented on in the qualitative feedback. Technology represented almost an 'excuse' for relationship building and access to a diverse educational setting.

Finally, by the end of that specific outreach experience, most pre-service teachers did acknowledge that they discovered a new dimension to their calling that, for the most part, they had not known about before. This reminded faculty that they were in a crucial position to foster that climate of discovery, encouraging students to take on a prophetic role in a variety of situations. Out of these experiences, students gained a vision for the practices of outreach, reconciliation, and compassionate justice that will take them far beyond what they probably anticipated. In that way, students have been learning to participate in God's merciful and compassionate deliverance (Stassen and Gushee, 2003, p. 47) and thus fulfilling Christ's vision for His people as outlined in the Beatitudes.

As teacher preparation programs are grappling with the necessity to expose pre-service teachers to rich and varied cultural environments, it is the authors' hope that the vision and practices that have been developed in this paper will encourage Christian leaders to develop and nurture experiences that will go beyond mere 'diversity' to fulfill the prophetic mandate of Christian teachers. This will richly contribute to the training of caring and compassionate teachers who, in turn, will be more effectively prepared to meet the cross-cultural challenges of the 21st century American classrooms with Christ's true spirit. Brian J. Walsh wrote: "We need to be transformational in education because the transforming vision of the biblical worldview is a vision that responds prophetically and creatively to each new situation" (2000). Enabling students to answer their prophetic call in practical ways and situations will engage their "prophetic discernment" and radically transform their worldview.

Sample Documents

Figure A: Student Assessment Form

Figure B: Sample Letter to Site Manager

Figure C: Student Directions and Attendance Chart

References

Butcher, J., Howard, P., Labone, E., Bailey, M., McFadden, M. McMeniman, M. Malone, K. Martinez, K. (2003). Teacher Education, Community Service Learning and Student Efficacy for Community Engagement. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, Vol. 31, No. 2.*

Engestrom, Y., Miettinen, R., Punamäki, R. (1999). Perspectives on activity theory. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Hiltz, Roxanne S., and Goldman, R. (2005). *Learning Together Online: Research on Asynchronous Learning Networks.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Mahwah, NJ.

Sherry, L. and Chiero, R. (2004). Project TALENT: Infusing Technology in K-12 Field Placements Through a Learning Community Model. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education,* 12(2). 265-297.

Daniel, B., Schwier, R.A., and McCalla, Gordon (2003) Social Capital in Virtual Learning Communities and Dirstributed Communities of Practice, *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology,* 29,(3).

Snyder, Howard A. (1977). *The Community of the King.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Stassen Glen H. and Gushee David P (2003). *Kingdom Ethics.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Vygostky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Walsh, Brian J. (2000). Transformation: *Dynamic Worldview or Repressive Ideology?* Retrieved August 29, 2005 from http://crc.sa.utoronto.ca/articles/Transformation.html.

Cindy Harvel is an Instructor of Education at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. Martine Audeoud, formerly of Mount Vernon Nazarene, is currently teaching at The American International School of Niamey in Niger, West Africa.