

---

2012

## Toward an Agenda for Teacher Education in Christian Colleges and Universities

Daniel C. Elliott  
*Azusa Pacific University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/icctej>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Elliott, D. C. (2012). Toward an Agenda for Teacher Education in Christian Colleges and Universities. *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/>-

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

---

## Toward an Agenda for Teacher Education in Christian Colleges and Universities

### Abstract

The first (United States of America) national symposium by major teacher educator organizations took place in December 1995. The Association of Teacher Educators, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, and the US Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement sponsored and conducted a National Congress on Teacher Education. Leading national figures in teacher education presented their views to the almost 500 delegates. Focus groups examined the views and reported to a conference coordinator. The coordinator, in turn, synthesized the concerns, ideas and recommendations into a daily log of issues. I list some of the salient points below. They do not reflect a consensus but, rather, a starting point for forging a national consensus on key issues.

## Toward an Agenda for Teacher Education in Christian Colleges and Universities

Daniel C. Elliott, Azusa Pacific University

### **A National Congress on Teacher Education**

The first (United States of America) national symposium by major teacher educator organizations took place in December 1995. The Association of Teacher Educators, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, and the US Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement sponsored and conducted a National Congress on Teacher Education. Leading national figures in teacher education presented their views to the almost 500 delegates. Focus groups examined the views and reported to a conference coordinator. The coordinator, in turn, synthesized the concerns, ideas and recommendations into a daily log of issues. I list some of the salient points below. They do not reflect a consensus but, rather, a starting point for forging a national consensus on key issues.

### **What kind of students will we have and what will they need to know and be able to do?**

Teacher candidates need to be prepared with multiple abilities to cope with diverse populations. A large number of participant-groups highlighted the diversities of needs, languages, family types, values and beliefs. This reiterates the emphasis throughout the literature on education reform of the need for very deliberate focus on the diversity of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural, ability and learning style groups in the schools. National congress participants recognized the highly unstable cultural and racial demographic base throughout the industrialized centers of America. They posited that this requires a need for teachers who can understand and relate to diverse cultural and language groups. The influence of the reconstructionist-oriented Holmes Group was clear from the pre-congress articles to which all participants were asked to respond. Social diversity with specified definitions and applications, often political ones, tended to characterize all social policy statements and initiatives put forth from these sources.

The Education Commission of the States released the results of a study at the Congress about what Americans expect from public schools (ECS 1995). Interestingly, “diversity” was not mentioned at all among its ten main findings published in this study. While educators and politicians highlight the problems of diversity, parents—the grass-roots consumers of education—do not seem to be much concerned.

The Congress identified the following important features of pupil performance:

- be value-minded and caring about others;
- understanding democratic processes and basic human rights;
- have excellent communication skills;
- master basic knowledge;
- demonstrate and apply information processing, high cognitive level thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and successful living skills;
- be able to cope with change; and
- appreciate the fine arts.

### **What kind of teachers do we need and what will they need to know and be able to do?**

For this question, the Congress participants included a long list of characteristics that describes a larger-than-life “super-teacher.” Many are obvious ones: love children and exhibit commitment and fairness to all; treat students as “whole persons”; model thinking and problem-solving strategies; be collaborative, globally-aware visionary leaders with the ability to manage change; be clear on standards and hold high expectations of themselves and others; and believe in their own ability to get the job done. Again, the concept of diversity came to the fore. Teachers must understand and be able to deal with diversity of values, genders, exceptionalities, languages, and developmental factors. They also need to understand and be able to deal with prejudice, violence and environmental

characteristics. They must be experts in learning who, specifically:

- know their students needs thoroughly;
- be skilled at classroom management;
- use technology as an instructional tool
- focus on student outcomes rather than instructional procedures;
- assess students authentically and effectively, using data to make sound professional decisions;
- collaborate with other professionals and human service specialists;
- work effectively with other adults, especially parents;
- be able to build consensus; and
- manage personal stress effectively.

#### **What kind of programs do we need?**

First, the Congress participants identified some general needs. The existing body of research on teaching and learning needs to be disseminated and applied more effectively. Similarly, existing effective models of teaching and learning need to be promoted, especially to policy makers. Connections must be forged among teacher education institutions and schools to enhance both professional induction and professional development.

The participants also felt that program are needed to help new teachers and administrators:

- connect with the parents of their future students;
- become action-researchers in their own classrooms;
- recognize and appreciate research and theory about teaching and learning, and be ready to contribute to the developing theoretical foundations; and
- become efficient and aggressive consumers of research on teaching.

With respect to certification, participants listed mandated national standards for teacher-educators and master's degree requirements as important. Some also favored rigorous standards for a national teacher certification process that would give professional recognition and fiscal rewards to those teachers who attained such certification.

Professional teachers should be able to select their own professional goals as determined by their self-assessment of need. Linkages should be developed between college and university departments of

education and practicing teachers in the field, with graduate programs based at school sites and oriented around needs of the particular schools or districts.

#### **How can we achieve these programs?**

The responses to this question begin to reveal an emerging agenda for teacher-education in America. On the one hand, it was suggested that the licensure options be expanded, making the profession rather than bureaucrats responsible for assessing candidate qualification and competence. On the other hand, some wanted to mandate NCATE to work together with state departments of education, or, alternatively, have state certification agencies agree on licensure standards in conjunction with professional associations of educators (not labor unions).

Recruiting new teachers needs to be done more aggressively, identifying suitable school-age as well as adult candidates. For the latter, we need an "open-entry" system with qualification and quality check-points along the way, based on flexible programs that do not sacrifice the development of theoretical mastery of both subject matter and teaching/learning strategies. New teachers and new administrators should be supported through an induction period, using trained mentors who are compensated for their role. Schools need to create effective career ladders for classroom educators with appropriate professional level compensation.

The preparation programs, participants suggested, ought to be field-based with much early classroom experience. Programs should be organized around student cohort groups so that students support each other as they proceed through the credentialing program. To increase the number of minority teachers, minority candidates need extensive fiscal support from external sources. A common core of knowledge must be identified for all states for basic admission to teacher credentialing. At the same time, more interdisciplinary linkages between liberal arts courses need to be established. Finally, teaching jobs must be reconfigured to permit professional development time for teachers.

#### **An Emerging National Agenda**

The institutions and organizations represented at the Congress forged a preliminary agenda, of sorts, regarding teacher education. There was no agreement on some key issues. Indeed, many

institutions and organizations offered agenda elements opposed to those of others. Moreover, the event was highly politicized. Both the Clinton administration and the NEA spokespersons were prominent. Their agendas were not aimed at better serving the children in the classrooms, but at the redesign of society—"the new educational order and the new domestic order" (Futrell 1995). Dr. Futrell spoke of "professionals' control over the education profession" On the surface that seemed appropriate until a deeper probe revealed that this really meant the NEA should control the education profession (ECS 1995).

### **Post-Modernism and Constructivism**

Secretary Riley called for teachers to be conversant with constructivist curriculum, asking teachers to "construct knowledge in [sic] students." Without recognizing the vast numbers of educational theorists and public school practitioners who treat constructivism as a means for creating personal meaning and understanding to knowledge Riley had flung down a gauntlet challenging for a right of philosophical supremacy. Riley's political agenda was clear—teachers are to be enlisted in the centralized force to shape the thinking of a nation (Riley 1995). Knowledge would only be knowledge when the approved leadership of education (the NEA and the Administration) so declared it to be knowledge and teachers would thereby be commanded to "lead" youngsters into "creating that knowledge" within themselves.

In chapter 8 of this book, Harro Van Brummelen establishes clearly the differences within post-modernism and the various agendas that these differences can produce. He challenges us to hone and refine within Christians-who-would-teach their "God-given gifts to respond to the balls and strikes [emphasis mine] that come" their way. In Chapter 9, Richard Hansgen reminds us about the "creation-of-knowledge" leanings that these social reconstructionists may be promoting. He also emphasizes how their very philosophy undermines their political agenda. We are reminded of the words of Jesus Christ, that any group, organization, city, or "house divided against itself can never stand but is laid waste" (Matthew 12:25). These conflicting world views were ever apparent at this first-ever national gathering of the educational leadership establishment for public education. Yet, powerful forces pressed forward to gather some sort

of a beginning from which the new agenda could emerge.

Roger White, in chapter seven, and Spencer Hedrick, in chapter 18, helped us to recognize the need to train Christians to be literate in their Christian faith, and so enable them to apply it accurately to the demanding tasks before them in the classroom and at large in the school.

### **Politics, "Diversity" and Teacher-Preparation**

Politically charged education-related groups represented at this huge gathering were among those calling for schooling and teacher-preparation to address "diversity." This concept was to be at the core of teacher preparation and of public education in general. It became clear, however, that the definition of diversity was limited to a particular worldview held by some more activist-elements of political and philosophical persuasions, along with the NEA and the Presidential administration.

These agreed with the findings of L. Darling-Hammond (1994) who suggested that local control was diffusing and diverting the effectiveness of education reform, and that only a powerful centralized educational governance element can correct the problems, discrepancies and differences among schools and teaching quality throughout the US.

Christian scholars in teacher-education are not without representation in this discussion. Wanda Williams, in chapter 12 of this book, has helped us to understand that "liberation" should be considered a proof of Biblical Christian faith. Citing the worldview of radical social reconstructionist Paulo Fiere, Williams suggested Christians are accountable to a moral imperative to boldly face cultural pluralism and embrace it as Christ embraces us. Further, Williams would have this reality be at the core of teacher-education.

Educational scholars from Wheaton College, evangelical Christians all, have also joined this debate in favor of cultural pluralism and Biblical living. Jeanette Hsieh, Louis Gallien, and Jillian Lederhouse, in chapter 13 of this book, gave us a context promoting cultural pluralism that is both historically and biblically sound. Citing the landmark work by Dr. Charles Haynes (1994) of the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, Hsieh, Gallien, and Lederhouse remind us teachers must be prepared

with strategies for pursuing common ground in the public arena. They demonstrated for us, through the Wheaton Teacher Education program, some important implications for Christian higher education in addressing cultural pluralism within and beyond the college classroom. They strongly suggested that for us who claim the power of God in Christ within, there can never be an excuse for failing to meet the needs of any learners. When we make even unconscious oversights toward a group of learners because of some “difference” about them, we fail to live up to our own Christian ideal. Therefore, Christians who are prepared to be teachers must be sensitized to such individuals and their needs if they are to be effective educators.

Shirley Pauler, in chapter 14, held up the standard of Christ likeness for teachers, never failing anyone with any unique individual need. Ken Pudlas, in chapter 15, reminds us of the important reality and necessity that we stop secreting away handicapped learners, but that we prepare all teachers to be able to meet such special needs, and do so in the authority of Jesus Christ.

An emerging new consensus of the appropriate role for religion in public education content has created an unprecedented opportunity for teaching about religion, for protecting the religious liberty rights of students, and for community-wide consensus on the teaching and modeling of core moral and civic virtues. It best falls to people of deep faith to be the leaders within public schools to protect and preserve religious liberty. Instead of attacking the supposed “secular humanism” in the public educational curriculum, Christian scholars of education can assist Christians who would be teachers to be well prepared in the story of America that includes our religious heritage.

Personal attacks, name-calling, ridicule, and similar tactics destroy the fabric of our society and undermine the educational mission of our schools. Even when our differences are deep, all parties engaged in public disputes should treat one another with civility and respect, and should strive to be accurate and fair. Through constructive dialogue we have much to learn from one another (Haynes, 1994).

Public schooling is, perhaps, the most sensitive arena in the public square. The inclusion of

religious or “anti-religious” information will evoke hostile and angry responses from all quarters of society. Yet, America is a nation founded on principles, one being “religious liberty.” Roger Williams, founding governor of Rhode Island, was a “Christian’s Christian.” A member of the Puritan church for a time and a minister, Williams fought hard to resist the church’s attempts to impose its teachings on people. He fought equally hard to persuade others of Biblical Christian teachings. Williams’ commitment to ‘soul liberty’ sprang from his deep Christian commitment. He attacked the churches of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for not separating fully from the Church of England. He later investigated and then parted from the Separatist Pilgrims of Salem for their “unchristian ways of restricting freedom. He helped to found the first Baptist Church in America, but left after six months because they refused to follow the Gospel and honor individual freedom of conscience.

“For Williams, the full liberty of conscience required by God is only possible when the state both maintains what he called a ‘wall of separation’ between the Garden of the Church and the ‘wilderness of the World,’ and protects the rights of each individual to “follow the dictates of conscience’ in matters of faith” (Haynes, 1996). Very much in the spirit of Roger Williams, all Bible-believing Christians would agree that religious liberty is an inalienable right of every person. By preparing teacher-candidates who are equipped to re-affirm this within the curriculum of the public school, and by teaching our Christian constituents that they are Christlike when they preserve complete religious liberty and unChristlike when they seek to impose only one sided religious liberty, Christian colleges and Universities are taking a stand well beyond that of our secular educational cousins—one more advantage for our input into the changing picture of effective teaching.

### **National Standards Found Wanting**

The proposed standards offered by the National Board of Teaching Standards found no support among any large numbers of symposium participants. These standards hinge on knowledge about facts. They are measured by paper-pencil tests and based on the opinions of individuals with questionable expertise in teaching/learning processes. There are, to date, no standards for teaching processes, nor any criteria for observing

and recognizing outstanding teaching processes. With a multitude of agencies, commissions, departments, unions, institutions, associations, and related pressure groups all vying for control of or influence into teacher certification, it hardly seems possible that a common view can be forged. Some raise the constitutional issue of delegated powers, ascribing those of education to the states and say that there should be no national movement to standardized education or teacher preparation. Others, who would forge a more centrally controlled society, disagree and press for such centralized initiatives.

We do have to deal with the self-serving views of the union leaders, the progressive and reconstructionist views of political liberal elitists, and the raging rhetoric of populists. Nevertheless, we can tease out some common needs in the cacophony of voices:

- Establishing a voluntary national accreditation standards for teacher and administrator preparation (while much disagreement exists over the level of control of any national accrediting body!).
- Training for linguistic diversity as well as for the impact of computers and other technology on the teaching-learning process.
- Orienting teachers toward basic values, virtues and common decency standards at all levels.
- Preparing teachers and instructional leaders who truly are “masters” of teaching.
- Preparing teachers and administrators to collaborate effectively with parents.
- Making parents full partners in the design and implementation of local education programs.
- Creating strong and effective network affiliations within communities and professional education organizations.

### **Is There A Christian Response?**

While education faculty from Christian colleges and universities, as well as members of the Christian Educators Association International, were invited to participate in the Congress, the invitations were individual and selected, and Christian input was scattered. Nowhere, it appears, is there a cogent, cohesive rationale and preferred agenda for teacher preparation at the national level designed by Christian teacher educators. We have not, to date, developed an agenda, or even a commonly agreed-

upon initial set of standards among the 90 members of the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities, all of whom espouse and support a strong commitment to a biblical worldview. We have not begun to make proactive proposals from a unified front. The Christian community, it would appear, has been content to leave the agenda setting for all of public education to the secular institutions and organizations.

Nancy Moller and Patricia Wilson, chapter 16, shared how openly they prepare teachers while integrating Christian faith and its attending virtues. Bonnie Banker and Verna Lowe, in chapter 17, provided us with a value- or virtue-based framework for teacher preparation at their institution.

I suggest that such a unified effort is long overdue. In fact, the window of opportunity may be soon close. We have a decision to make. We can be driven and controlled by the national groups and their political orientations. Alternatively, we can be led by God’s Holy Spirit in the design of a proactive agenda that we put on the table as “wisdom” with regard to teacher preparation. The opportunity exists for meaningful input into the eventual vision of a properly prepared educator. We can inform the national discussion on the basis of Biblical guidelines, especially with respect to ethics and values. We can do so emphasizing teaching as a high calling without using evangelical “code-words.” The invitation is before us to do so.

### **Recognizing the Creation, Fall and Redemption as We Prepare Teachers**

Nurturing Christians as Reflective Educators has been a work of love for the Lord and love for teaching by the contributors and editors of this book. We have attempted to collect and present good scholarship accomplished around the task of teacher and educational administrator preparation—accomplished by Bible-believing Christ-centered scholars in the field of professional education. Donovan Graham, in chapter one, challenged us with an excellent model for teachers to view students, parents, colleagues, and leaders. The Bible provides the backdrop for this interaction and Christians, who are willing to reflect accurately on this could make a greater difference in their students than otherwise prepared teachers. David Anderson, in chapter two, and Jill Lederhouse, in chapter 22, both reminded us that Christians are servants

foremost, and that teachers ought to be “servant-leaders.”

What impact can my ‘little’ (impotency-thinking) Christian college or university make, you ask? Alone, perhaps little. But, in God’s grace, united together, we can make a mighty impact. Jesus started with just a hand full of folks and invested in each one. We are the result of that investment. The power is there for Christians to literally “change the world” if we should choose to submit to it through the Lord.

John Van Dyk, in chapter three, clearly revealed that the mere identification with a Christian faith does not make a powerful teacher candidate. He suggests that we must infuse the candidates with the biblical principles of that powerful faith to which they claim allegiance and relate it to servanthood in teaching. Steven Holtrop, in chapter four, suggested a “responsibility model” for teaching in a way that he and others describe as “Christianly.” Karen Neufeld, in chapter six, reminded us of how uniquely located Christian teacher-educators are to prepare public school teachers for the legitimate inclusion of religious information now required on an increasing level in most school districts.

We can offer biblical perspectives on issues like instructional methodology, learning styles, curriculum design, classroom management strategies, national vs. local control, and involvement in professional organizations and unions. We can also ask key questions like these.

- Should instructional design be subject-centered or learner-centered? How do we maintain proper standards and, at the same time, like Jesus, teach students according to their individual needs?
- Society today again pays lip service to the need to reinstall common virtues and values, and once again wants the public schools to play a role. Can the body of Christ represented by Christian teacher-educators effectively inform the discussion? Can we develop a curriculum that appropriately reflects biblical precepts and guidelines and, yet, is acceptable in a pluralistic school system that preserves honest religious liberty in the public square?
- What role should education faculty play in defining the religious information elements to be reintroduced into public education? What roles should our faculty scholars play in the public

discourse being pursued by organizations like the Freedom Forum’s First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt—seeking a “common ground” for deeply held differences within the public square. Why are we not taking the lead in promoting what is essentially “Christ’s agenda” for safety, concern for the needy, individual charity, and genuine love and respect for all other persons.

- Is it biblical to assist members of under-represented, disadvantaged groups by deliberately restricting members of what is perceived as the majority? Is there another model for dealing with differences which the body of Christ can suggest that might better resolve inter-racial and inter-cultural social conflicts?
- Should a Christian teacher-education program connect with the NEA and/or the AFT? Are the agendas of these organizations compatible with a Christian worldview? Is it more appropriate to link up with local, independent organizations? Can we find options for linking with these and with educational organizations based on a Biblical Christian philosophy, such as the Christian Educators Association International based in Pasadena, CA.

What questions would you pose?

### **Recommended Study**

Using the format of the National Congress on Teacher Education, I propose that we plan and conduct a CCCU-based (Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities) study to develop a “common mind” regarding the essential elements in preparing reflective teachers from the perspective of a Christian worldview. What are the common elements which Christian college and university departments of education can endorse? Where can we join with our colleagues at secular institutions with good conscience? How can we, as a collective body of professionals with a biblically-based perspective, inform the discussions about all teacher and administrator education policy makers?

The study would begin with a survey of all teacher educators at CCCU institutions, as well as of Christians teaching or administering in public schools recommended by CCCU faculty. The survey would deal with the same agenda items raised in the Congress, but ask respondents to provide answers that they justify on the basis of their biblical worldview. In short, the investigation would be a descriptive and analytical study used to



forge proposals to the national agenda setting process. These proposals should carry a strong Christian rationale and clear focus.

To move ahead, we should seek a grant to make this national investigation a high priority and highly visible project. We could ask the CCCU leadership to assist in getting the cooperation and collaboration of all member institutions. The CCTE (Coalition of Christian Teacher-Educators—the group that has been meeting around this topic for the last few years), under supervisory oversight by the CCCU, might even serve as a clearing house and central focal point for this effort. The data can be gathered via discussion groups in each CCCU teacher education department. The data can then be collated across the Coalition and a special Dean's Conference held to review the findings and draw conclusions.

*Shall we grasp the opportunity?*

## References

- Association of Teacher Educators. 1991. Restructuring the education of teachers. Reston, VA.
- Association of Teacher Educators. 1995. Certification of teacher educators: A preliminary report of the Task Force on the Certification of Master Teacher Educators for comments, analyses, recommendations. Reston, VA.
- Commission on Teacher Credentialing. 1995. Educator preparation for California 2000: The accreditation framework. Sacramento, CA: Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
- Darling-Hammond, L. 1994. The current status of teaching and teacher development in the United States. Background paper prepared for the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Reprinted for the National Congress on Teacher Education, December, 1995.
- Education Commission of the States. 1995. Coming together and moving forward: The 1995 education agenda. Denver, CO.
- Education Commission of the States. 1995. Organizational promotional brochure. Denver, CO.
- Futrell, M. 1995. Teaching for the new millennium. Keynote address, December 10, 1995, National Congress on Teacher Education, Washington DC.

Haynes, C. 1996 Liberty of conscience for all. Georgia Humanities Lecture. Atlanta Georgia, Georgia Humanities Council

Haynes, C. 1994 Religious liberty, public education and the future of American democracy: A statement of Principles. Nashville, TN. Freedom Forum, First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University.

Haynes, C., & W. Nord. 1993. The hidden moral (and religious) assumptions that shape the curriculum. Symposium conducted at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's 48th Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Haynes, C. 1993-94. Beyond the culture wars. Educational Leadership 51(30).

National Center for Education Statistics. 1995. Findings from the condition of education, 1994 No. 3: America's teachers ten years after "a nation at risk." Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

Riley, R. 1995. Aligning teacher education with national goals and standards. Keynote address, December 11, 1995, National Congress on Teacher Education, Washington DC.

U.S. Department of Education. 1995. STAR schools. A packet of information about the STAR Schools Project. Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Education. 1995. Teachers and goals 2000: Leading the journey toward high standards for all students. Washington, DC.