

**Field Based Cohorts:
The Teacher Education Programs
At
Georgia College & State University:
The Beginning**

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September 14, 2010

Preface

On September 3rd 2010, I attended a celebration at GCSU's College of Education. The Board of Regents had selected for its annual award as the best department in the entire University System the department of Early Childhood and Middle Grades Education. No doubt the quality of the department's programs was a key consideration in making the award. Prior to the celebration, I spent some time with Assistant Dean Carol Bader. Our conversation drifted to how these programs came into being. I started relating the narrative. At one point, she grabbed a pen and a pad of paper and said, "I think I ought to take notes on this." She was clearly interested in this story. Perhaps others would be, too.

After gorging on ice cream and cake, I headed back to my residence in Decatur. While driving, it occurred to me that the genesis of these exemplary programs had never been formally chronicled. It was a tale of dreams, intrigue, risk-taking, negotiations, politics, good guys/bad guys, and ultimate triumph. But mostly it was about the determination of a few teacher educators with vision who sought to develop something unique and outstanding in teacher education programming. The story needs to be told.

The development of these programs took place some 15 or 20 years ago. There were dates, facts and sequences I just couldn't remember so I contacted some colleagues who were there at the creation to tap into their recollections. This is the most accurate telling of the story I can do, and of course, it represents the story from my perspective.

I came to Georgia College (GC) as Dean of the School of Education (SOE) in August 1983. This was four months after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*.¹ Previously, I had been the Chairman of the Department of Elementary Education at Ball State University.

¹ *A Nation at Risk: An Open Letter to the American People* was a report to the Secretary of Education made in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The eighteen members of the commission were drawn mainly from higher education and K-12 administrators. Among their recommendations were, "Master teachers should be involved in designing teacher education programs and in supervising teachers during their probationary years."

GC had a reputation for having good, solid teacher education programs drawing its students mostly from a 75-mile radius of Milledgeville. Teachers prepared at GC were generally well regarded in the schools in which they were employed.

The programs themselves were best described as traditional. Students seeking certification in early childhood education (EC), middle grades education (MG), special education, health and physical education, and music education, majored in the desired certification area, took the required education courses, and did student teaching at or near the end of their program. Students seeking certification in secondary areas majored in those areas that were housed in the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), and took education courses and did student teaching taught and typically supervised by SOE faculty. Usually, students in all these majors were able to complete their programs in four years and were awarded T-4² certificates.

In 1987, the Georgia Legislature added \$10 million of “special initiative funds” to the University System’s budget. The Board of Regents allotted \$1 million to teacher education. The central administrators of the System’s teacher education component skimmed \$100,000 off the top for their own purposes, thus leaving \$900,000 to use for program initiative grants. Interestingly, they did not make any grants to the University of Georgia or to Georgia State University as might have been expected. Rather they made four grants to senior colleges with teacher education programs: West Georgia College, Valdosta State College, Georgia Southern College, and Georgia College. Each teacher education program received \$225,000 for the generalized purpose of “program improvement.” The receipt of these funds was the impetus behind the development of dramatically new teacher education programs at Georgia College, and this is where the story begins.

Early Childhood and Middle Grades Programs

I had never received so large an infusion of money into a budget under my control in my entire professional life. Theretofore, budgets for teacher preparation at GC were lean, and extra dollars for innovative programs just did not exist. With this new funding, I met with department chairpersons and other administrators to explore various ways of spending this money. We had to spend it and there certainly were programs and administrative entities that had been on meager rations over the years, so some money was devoted to patching up and/or maintaining existing programs.

A major problem in spending the money was the nature of the funding. Soft money is fine while it lasts but one is limited in what it can be used for. I did not want to make the mistake some financial institutions have historically made: lend long and finance short, i.e. develop long-range programs and have the money run out. I was informed by the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Ralph Hemphill, who knew Georgia law and politics really well, that if special funds awarded by the legislature in year one are awarded again in year two, the funds would then be a permanent part of the institution’s

² In Georgia, this is the initial teaching certificate with a bachelor’s degree preparation.

budget. So, during year one, we met and discussed and took care of some maintenance issues with the special funding. When we received the funds again in year two, 1988, soft money became hard money and we knew we could make long-range plans.

The discussions I had with SOE administrators and individual faculty were long and frequent. We covered a lot of ground and came up with a plethora of ideas. Then I had an epiphany: I realized what we could really do with this kind of money. I told my department chairpersons that we had a once in a lifetime opportunity to do something really special.” Let’s think big,” I told them. “Suppose we wanted to create the best imaginable teacher education programs. What would these programs look like?” I continued, “How would they be configured? What could we do to ensure that the students going through our programs would be exceedingly well qualified for teaching positions?” Of course, a major challenge was whether we could do it all in a manner that would a) make sense pedagogically, and b) be acceptable to students, faculty, the institution, the Board of Regents, the Professional Standards Commission, and our national accrediting agency

We decided to give it a try.

I had always believed in the common sense notion that there is a difference between knowing about something, and knowing how to do something. And I had observed that in teacher preparation programs, there was too much of the former and too little of the latter to constitute a meaningful pre-professional program. This imbalance, I believed then and continue to believe, was the root cause for the teacher preparation programs that did not adequately prepare students for classroom teaching in the public schools.

A close colleague, Dr. Kathryn Powell, and I had extensive talks about the possibilities for a new program structure. Dr. Powell was a wonderful combination of an experienced and respected teacher educator, and was the only faculty member with both elementary and secondary school experience. She was a senior member in the SOE faculty, a risk-taker, and a delightful person as well. Also, she was a political ally, and a loyal and trusted confidant. She, too, liked field-based idea, but also wanted to see developed a spiral integrated curriculum, which I thought was a terrific idea, meshing well with the field-based approach. She was my partner in developing these programs.

Now it was time to get down to brass tacks. We sketched out the program and I took it to the VP for his take on it. He liked it, and gave me the go-ahead to develop the programs.

Early Childhood in Macon

We started with the EC program and decided to start it at our Macon Center. As it turned out, this became the model for the development of other field-based programs in Macon and other locations. The decision to use Macon as the first site for the program was based on two factors. First, Macon/Bibb County was a large population center and we believed that there would be a sufficient number of students to make the needed enrollment figures. Second, there were some nay-sayers (described below) among the SOE faculty,

and we didn't want to risk them contaminating the enthusiasm of those involved in the program.

The features of the program were as follows:

- The program would comprise two years (six consecutive quarters).
- The students would be organized as a cohort that would begin the program and end it together.
- A cohort leader with faculty rank would supervise the cohort for the entire six quarters.
- Every morning students would be in the public schools for the first five quarters. (The last quarter of the program would be full day student teaching.)
- In the first five quarters, students would be assigned to experienced and highly rated teachers and would serve in an apprentice-style role.
- Each quarter, the students would be rotated to another school or classroom with different characteristics in terms of grade level, pupils' socio-economic level, classroom teachers' style, urban/rural/suburban, etc.
- Students would take their college class work in the afternoons. The cohort leader would teach some classes but most teaching would be done by other teacher education faculty.
- The five-quarter hour content courses would be divided and spread out over several quarters to develop a truly integrated curriculum. This feature recognized that an elementary school teacher is responsible for teaching all (or most) of the elementary school curriculum. The integrated units of study we would present to our students were built using the content areas represented in the integrated curriculum.

The juxtaposition of classroom field experiences and college classes on a daily basis was deliberate. After a morning in the classrooms, we planned that the students would gather with their cohort leader and exchange experiences. Questions generated by the morning's classroom experiences would generate a multitude of "teachable moments." Our idea was that practice would inform theory, and theory would inform practice, all done in an integrated, cumulative, spiral curriculum.

My experience with and study of teacher education programs revealed to me that many of individual program features we had assembled for this program had been done one way or another at other times and at other places. However, no one had ever put all of them in combination the way we had. That's what would make our programs unique.

Gaining Necessary Support

There were four groups whose support was necessary for the launching of the new program: SOE faculty, the public schools, the Professional Standards Commission (PSC), and the students.

- SOE Faculty. Most of the faculty were supportive of the new program. We had met frequently and the features and benefits of the program were explained in great detail. There were four major holdouts--three "old guard" tenured professors and one new "old guard" professor, all of whom liked things just the way they were. I met with each of them one-on-one to explain the rationale and benefits from the program, but they were adamantly opposed to it. I told them that most faculty supported the program and that we were planning on implementation. They were not pleased but there was enough support from the remaining faculty (and in particular from some influential faculty of their same generation) to move ahead.
- Public Schools. There were no problems with the public schools in which our students would be placed. In fact, they welcomed the extra help. This was at least partly because the cohort leaders were from the community and were known quantities to the school administrators.
- The PSC. Our colleagues at the PSC were at first wary of these new programs. They liked the field-based component, but it took much explaining to have them understand how we had to divide content courses into components to be delivered over time so we could present a truly integrated curriculum.
- Students. I had heard some rumblings of discontent from a few students who had found out about the possibility of a new program. They were concerned about making a commitment for six contiguous quarters, and also about the cohort configuration that did not allow the "in-and-out" program completion that had previously been the case. I explained the benefits to them and they were generally mollified.

Staffing the Program

The old adage "programs are people" would certainly be the case in a venture of this sort. The key person in this new endeavor would be the cohort leader. We wanted someone who a) was a crackerjack classroom teacher, b) was old enough to have experience but young enough to be a risk-taker, c) would be acceptable to the existing faculty, d) had at least a masters degree e) had a good sense of human and public relations, and f) believed in the philosophical underpinnings of the program.

Our thinking was that it would be better to find a classroom teacher in the community who enjoyed classroom teaching and who knew the ins and outs of the school system,

rather than hire a candidate from somewhere else with a doctoral degree and unknown classroom teaching talent seeking a tenure track position. The idea of taking such a candidate and inculcating the joy of classroom teaching and the interest of working closely with our students and classroom pupils was not appealing to us; indeed it was probably impossible. Stated otherwise, you can take a good teacher out of the classroom, but you can't take the classroom out of the good teacher. So the cohort leaders would have to be successful classroom teachers.

I was reluctant to tap into the existing SOE faculty for cohort leaders for a variety of reasons. First, I didn't know how talented they were as classroom teachers and further, I suspected that some of them would not like to change the routine of teaching three classes, doing a minimum of other professional activities, and leaving the office in early afternoon. Being a cohort leader was a labor-intensive endeavor.³ To some faculty, teaching three classes was their job, and their department in the SOE was their home, their nest, and they wanted to stay in it. It was their sinecure.⁴ Moreover, some faculty members did not have good relations with the public schools. And a few faculty would be just plain unwelcome there. The key to the program was our emphasis on field experiences in the public school classrooms without the cooperation of which the program would be doomed to failure. And the *sine qua non* for a successful classroom experiences was the quality of the cohort leader. We needed some fresh blood at this time.

I anticipated that there might be a problem with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) because as we conceived it, the duties of the cohort leader would be those expected of other teacher education faculty, and NCATE usually wanted such people to have completed doctoral degrees. So, we finessed the situation by making the potential cohort leaders an offer that they couldn't refuse: become a cohort leader in a non-tenure track position, start a doctoral program, and upon completion of the doctoral program and with a successful job rating, be considered for a tenure track position. If within five years, the doctoral programs were not completed, they would be discontinued from the program and could return to being a classroom teacher. If they received the doctoral degree and did not want to continue with our program, they would return to classroom teaching but with a T-7 certificate and its concomitant salary increase. It was a win-win situation. I spoke to NCATE about this plan of using teachers without doctorates for this role and they were agreeable to it.

Classroom teachers in whose rooms our students would be placed for their field experiences were carefully selected from a pool of in-service masters degree students in our M.Ed. programs. Our program planners wanted to be sure that we had quality

³ It was labor-intensive for the students as well. They made a full day commitment for two academic years. If they needed income, they would have to work in the evenings and/or on weekends. For some, it was overwhelming. We quickly learned that if we could get them through the first quarter or so, they would successfully complete the program.

⁴ It is of interest to note that many large institutions with teacher preparation programs have had difficulty with field-based programs. Publishing research is what gets you promoted and tenured at many of these institutions, not teaching. Aside from which, fieldwork takes time and is often inconvenient, and many professors prefer to stay in their offices and do their research and a bit of teaching. That's what they signed up for, not spending time in public schools. Fortunately, GC was (and still is) an institution that prizes good teaching, and the support for these field-based programs was strong and ongoing. For a while anyway. More later on this.

teachers to assist us in this endeavor and so they pre-screened any potential teachers before seeking approval from the school districts in which they taught.

To be the first cohort leader in this brand new program, we found the perfect person in Ms. Erin Weaver, a teacher in the Macon schools, who had recently received her master's and specialist's degree from GC. Dr. Kathryn Powell had worked closely with Ms. Weaver in her program. So we knew her, she knew us, and we knew that our chances for having a successful program would be enhanced by having her on board for the first iteration of what we hoped would be an ongoing program. We feared that had this first attempt not gone well, we might have had to abandon the whole idea of the program. So, hiring someone of Ms. Weaver's caliber was crucial.⁵

Ms. Weaver successfully initiated the first field-based cohort program in the history of GC's SOE. It was an EC program started in 1989 at our Macon campus, and it became a model for all subsequent programs. Another EC program began in Dublin a year later

Unexpected consequences

The success of the programs included some unexpected but welcome consequences. In retrospect I suppose they could have been anticipated, but the program was so new we didn't know exactly what to expect. Some examples:

1. In a conversation with Dr. Tom Madison, then superintendent of the Macon schools, he mentioned to me that our field-based programs were the best and cheapest in-service training he could provide to his teachers. He explained that the GC students came to the Macon classrooms from their prior field experiences and college courses with new ideas for teaching and curriculum development that they had received from their GC professors and from other public school teachers in whose classes the students had served.
2. The in-service teachers in whose classrooms our students would be placed were very receptive to the program. They appreciated the presence of our students in their classroom: another pair of hands attached to a good brain and warm heart. Often, the in-service teachers would tell me that they wished that they themselves had been in a teacher preparation program such as ours.
3. Cohort leaders told of the bonding experiences that occurred in their cohorts.
 - One student was experiencing marital problems and the other students came to her support, counseling her and providing for her material and emotional needs.

⁵ Ms. Weaver completed her doctoral degree, stayed on our faculty until 1999 having served ten years as a cohort leader, after which she returned to the P-12 arena. She became a high school principal, and is currently District Director of Early Childhood Education for the Macon/Bibb County schools

- A student had a brief illness that made her attendance spotty at times. The others students brought her the work assignments and helped her through the process.
 - In one cohort, two students fell in love and were married during the program. The minister who performed the ceremony was himself a member of the cohort.
 - An amusing effect: The first cohort in Macon was taught at the then GC campus located in the Cigna building in North Macon. This was a modern, four-story, glass exterior building that housed the offices of the Cigna Insurance Company as well as other businesses. We noticed that our cohort students maintained a more professional bearing and a spiffier appearance than students at the Milledgeville campus
4. In the mid-1990s at a career fair at which school superintendents and personnel directors seek to hire our graduates, I consistently heard that our students interviewed exceedingly well. One superintendent said that they interviewed as if they were experienced teachers. I told him about the extensive field experiences that were part of the program, and then he knew why. By virtue of their extensive time in a variety of classrooms, they were, in many respects, experienced teachers.

In 1990, a year after the program in Macon had started, we initiated the same program in Dublin, with Ms. Janet Fields, a Dublin resident, as cohort leader.⁶ Ms. Fields, as was the case with Ms. Weaver, was eminently qualified for the position and was the perfect person for the job. Interestingly, the Dublin program had a new twist. After a few years, we gave students in the Dublin program the option to do their student teaching in Newcastle, England. Many took advantage of this opportunity.

After the successful launching of the EC programs, we began MG programs in both locations, in Macon in 1990 and in Dublin in 1991, and brought the programs to the Milledgeville campus a few years later.

Secondary Education

After the successful launching of the EC and MG field-based programs, I turned my attention to the improvement of secondary teacher preparation. Nationwide, secondary education was, and had been for some time, widely criticized by the public. Numerous negative reports in Georgia as well as nationwide were published. Complaints centered around teachers' lack of knowledge of subject matter, as well as their inability teach effectively in a classroom. High on the list was the dearth of field experiences in their preparation programs. Upon examination, one would find that most of the preparation

⁶ Ms. Fields also completed a doctoral degree and joined our faculty as an assistant professor. She served Director of GC's Dublin Campus, and was Dean of the SOE from 2001-2003 prior to her retirement.

programs of secondary school teachers had major problems, most of which were structural.

At GC, secondary teacher preparation followed a model used by many colleges and universities at that time. Students seeking secondary school teacher certification would major in the desired content areas that were housed in the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS). They would take their education courses in the SOE as required for certification prior to a full quarter of student teaching. Upon successfully completing student teaching, they would be graduated with a bachelor's degree from the college and would be recommended for appropriate certification. This model caused two major problems that militated against meaningful program revision.

Problems

The first problem was, "To whom do these students belong? The SAS or the SOE?" There was no major in secondary education in the SOE, so it could be argued that the students belonged to the SAS. On the other hand, the students ostensibly were going to be teachers, so clearly the SOE had an important role. The allegiance of these students was determined by the VP's office in 1990 by asking these students where they would like to sit at the graduation ceremony. Would they want to sit with students of the SAS or those of the SOE? The students overwhelmingly wanted to sit with the SAS students. And I really couldn't blame them. After all, most of their classes had been in the SAS so that was their primary identification.

The second related problem was, "Who has primary responsibility for the preparation of these teachers-to-be? The SAS or the SOE?" The responsibility was of course shared, but who was ultimately responsible for their success as teachers? In other words, "Who's in charge here, the SAS or the SOE?" This was a murky area and there was no clear agreement. These students were in a "no man's land," and confusion abounded. This arrangement demonstrated the truth of the adage, "When everyone is in charge, no one is in charge."

Part of the problem resided in the advising of these students. This was done primarily by faculty in the SAS. Coordination of the students' SAS and SOE courses was monitored by a designated liaison in the SOE. In conversations with those faculty in the SAS who advised these students, I discovered that often advisors discussed with their advisees career opportunities in the major field, but suggested that the students take courses for teacher certification so they would have something "to fall back on," in case career opportunities in the major field did not materialize. The focus of the advisors and thus of the students was on the content area major, and not the teacher preparation component of the degree program.

Clearly, the confusion and lack of direct responsibility was a major impediment to program improvement. Few faculty members in the SAS and the SOE thought this structure was a good one, but attempts to make meaningful modifications usually came to naught. Society's problems with secondary education had come to our doorstep. We

could help in a limited way by implementing a quality teacher preparation program for secondary teachers. If secondary education in the USA were to stay at its present level or get worse, it shouldn't be because we at GC's SOE didn't try to improve the preparation of its teachers.

I discussed this issue with the SOE faculty involved in the secondary teacher preparation courses and their chairperson. Most of them were not happy with the present arrangement. It was time to do something.

Developing the Master of Arts in Teaching Degree

The blending of field experiences and college class work was working so well in the early childhood and middle grades programs that I sought to incorporate this combination in a new secondary preparation program. However, in order to do this we, the SOE, had to be running the program. So, with some assistance from interested parties in the SOE, I sketched out a masters degree program as the program delivery structure.

Some research revealed that the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree had been developed in the 1960s at Brown University for students who had majored in a field of certification but had not had any education courses. For some reason, this model had never really caught on nationally, but I thought it had potential for use at GC.

What I had in mind was for students interested in teaching in secondary schools to complete their bachelor's degree in the teaching field of choice, without taking any courses in the SOE. Then, they would enroll in the MAT, and we in the SOE would turn them into teachers. I ran this idea by VP Hemphill and he liked it, but he said, "You'll have to convince Bernie. You'll need his cooperation to do this."

Bernie Patterson was the dean of the SAS. He had come to GC a few years before and we had we hit it off well. We developed a cordial and supportive relationship. [I was reminded of the public comment Margaret Thatcher made after meeting Mikhail Gorbachev: "I like Mr. Gorbachev. We can do business together."⁷] I felt the same way about Dean Patterson. I believed that if I presented the MAT program to him and showed him the benefits to the SAS, the SOE, and society in general, he might very well be supportive of this model.

We met and I outlined the program to him. The major features were:

- As undergraduates, these students would take all their course work in the SAS.
- The teacher preparation component would take place at the graduate level.
- The program would take one academic year and one or two summer sessions.
- This model would eliminate the awkwardness and confusion in advising and responsibility.

⁷ From a 1984 interview, England's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher referring to Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

- The roles would be clear-cut: the SAS would be responsible for the content field preparation, and the SOE would be responsible for the professional education preparation.

Dean Patterson was aware of the clutter and confusion arising from dual allegiances on the part of students, and was also aware that the present program was just not a good one. I explained that everyone would win if this program were adopted. Although the SAS would be giving up more than a dozen programs, it would generate more credit hours. This would be the result of the students taking more courses in the SAS to replace those vacated by the dropping of the undergraduate teacher education courses. Moreover, in order to meet PSC requirements for T-5 certification, the students would need to take three content graduate courses in the SAS as part of their MAT coursework, generating additional credit hours. And advising would be simplified as both the SAS and SOE faculties would have defined responsibilities. But most importantly, the criticism of the typical secondary teacher education programs—not enough content and not enough teaching skills—would be addressed. Our MAT program could be a model for others to emulate.

After some discussion, Dean Patterson was agreeable to the new program. Indeed, he was enthusiastic about it. He and I certainly could do business together. His support of this MAT program was crucial in its development.

Benefits for Students

The first benefit for the students would be that they could get more of a liberal arts education. This would be especially beneficial to students seeking broad field certification such as in science or social studies. For example, a student seeking broad field science certification might major in biology, but now would have room in the undergraduate program for additional course work in chemistry or physics. Or a student seeking broad field social studies education might major in history and take additional course work in economics or political science.

These additional courses would have the effect of broadening the students' fields of study so as to be better prepared for the teaching world, and in addition would make them more hireable since they would be prepared to teach several subjects within the broad field. This would be especially important in smaller secondary schools. Even in a narrow field area, there would be benefits coming from the vacated undergraduate education courses. For example, an English major might have a minor in French. Or a French major might have a minor in Spanish.

The second benefit to students would be that they would have a much better chance to be hired and be successful as a teacher with this better preparation. Moreover, they would enter the teaching field with a T-5 certificate and receive higher pay.

Gaining Faculty Support

I had previously sounded out some SAS faculty and chairpersons about this model and most were enthusiastic about it. Their lives would be greatly simplified. One chemistry professor was absolutely delighted with it, and told me that this was the model used to prepare teachers in his native Scotland. This simplification also affected the SOE faculty and most of them liked it as well. Here would be a program that would attract students who really wanted to be teachers rather than those who viewed teaching as a “fall back position.”

Regarding the SOE faculty, as I expected, the four holdouts from the early childhood and middle grades programs didn't like this one either. In fact, they liked it even less because two of them had strong associations with secondary education. I could not convince them of the benefits of this MAT model. Their lack of a decent counter-argument suggested to me that their disapproval was more personal than pedagogical. A few years later when the program was deemed to be an overwhelming success, two of the three holdouts took early retirement, and one got a job at another institution. Without the support of these three, the fourth member of the group was rendered politically impotent.

Benefits to the Institution

The benefits to GC as an institution were significant:

- The program would generate graduate credit hours thus increasing operating funds received from the Board of Regents.
- Non-GC students having liberal arts degrees from other institutions might well be attracted to the MAT. This would include the twenty-something-year-old recent graduates of other institutions, but also older career-changers, retired military, etc.
- The MAT would be the only such degree offered within the University System. GC would be viewed as a leader in teacher preparation, a “light among nations.”

Getting the MAT Started

Much of the continued “special initiative” funds first received in 1987 was already encumbered for ongoing support of the EC and MG education programs. However, in 1991 the PSC announced a grant program for innovative teacher education programs. I submitted the MAT proposal to them and we were awarded \$50,000 for each of two years. Prior to sending in the proposal, VP Hemphill assured me that if we got the grant, and when the PSC grant funds ran out, and if the program was successful, he would continue funding it with institutional funds.

As was the case with the early childhood and middle grades program, we knew that the success of the MAT would be highly dependent upon the talent of the cohort leader. We wanted someone with secondary education experience, an excellent teacher educator with good organizational and personal skills, and who believed in the program. We found such a person in the existing SOE faculty. Ms. Elaine Wiggins had been a GC for a number of years, and was well liked and highly respected by the faculty. She was the perfect choice and she was agreeable to doing it.

The first MAT program was launched in Macon in 1992 under the leadership of Ms. Wiggins. It is continuing to this day with multiple cohorts in Macon and Milledgeville.

Epilogue

The EC program in Macon was started in 1989, and in Dublin in 1990, and MG programs at those locations started shortly thereafter. Even after several years, the programs were going strong, and meeting enrollment numbers was never a problem. But then there came a new wrinkle.

In the early 1990s, Board of Regents designated GC as the public liberal arts college in Georgia. A new president arrived in 1998. She believed that the undergraduate programs in Macon and Dublin detracted from the new mission of the college. Moreover, the existence of these programs might have jeopardized GC's admission to COPLAC, the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges. Accordingly, shortly thereafter those programs were discontinued. However, the EC and MG field based programs on the Milledgeville campus were continued and are still offered. Also, programs in special education were converted to field based cohorts

Currently, the SOE (now the COE: College of Education) offers the following number of cohorts on the Milledgeville campus: four in early childhood, three in middle grades, three in special education, three MATs in secondary education, and one MAT in middle grades education. At the Macon campus are offered three MAT cohorts in secondary education, as well as three Ed.Ss. and two M.Ed. cohorts in educational leadership.

Some Thoughts from an Aging Dean Emeritus

While I understand the president's 1998 strategic decision to close down the undergraduate EC and MG programs in Macon and Dublin, it was really a shame. They were going great guns. I, and many others, believe if they had not been phased out they would be ongoing to this day. However, when the decision was made and implemented, I had already retired. Besides, such a decision was above my pay grade.

Since my retirement in 2000, I've visited the SOE at least once annually. As I see the students and talk to the faculty, many of whom post-date my tenure, I am always amazed at how accepted and quotidian these field-based programs have become. It's as if everyone thinks, "Of course we have field-based cohorts. How else could you have a

quality program?” As detailed above, ‘twasn’t always this way. The adage *Plus ca change, plus c’est le meme chose* was negated. And contrary to Scripture, there are indeed new things under the sun.

“Imitation is the most sincere form of flattery,” or so the saying goes. In the late 1990s, the assistant vice-chancellor at the Board of Regents who was focused on teacher education promulgated a policy (the Regents’ Principles) calling for more field experiences in teacher preparation programs. Perhaps the SOE was indeed “a light among nations.”

It is of interest to note that notwithstanding the turmoil in teacher preparation emanating from various state and national sources, our original program models have held their own with little or no change in more than two decades. Our goal was to develop the best teacher preparation programs imaginable, and I believe we succeeded in doing it.

Now, some twenty years after their inception, implementation, and acceptance, I look back in amazement at the chutzpah I possessed at that time that drove me to completely revamp the traditional programs that had been in effect for years, and substitute for them completely new and innovative ones. I don’t know if I could do it now; perhaps such moxie dissipates with age.

Furthermore, I could never have done this alone. Fortunately, I worked with good people: Dr. Powell, and Ms. Weaver, Fields, and Wiggins were superb at handling the day-to-day operational aspects of the programs. The institution and the Board of Regents were supportive. In addition, in the late 1980s, the time was right for changes.

These programs have been well received by students, K-12 educators, and the public. By any measure—retention rates,⁸ employer satisfaction, student interest and satisfaction—these programs have been wildly successful. In the mid-1990s, the word around the PSC and the Georgia Department of Education was, “If your child wants to be a teacher, send the kid to GC&SU.” It was music to my ears.

I wish the very best to the faculty and administration of the COE. The students are fortunate to have these programs and caring faculty available to them. I offer them all my best wishes for professional success.

The development and initiation of these field-based programs was the highlight of my thirty-three year professional career in teacher education. If I had to do it over again, I think I’d do the same thing. But maybe better.

For comments or questions about this paper, please send them to ewolpert1@juno.com

⁸ Over 90% of our program completers were still teaching after five years of service, compared to a national average of about 50%.