“If I should not be learning now, when should I be?”
—Lacydes

While visiting Angor Wat in central Cambodia, my wife and I spent a leisurely afternoon in a sprawling market in the nearby city of Siem Reap. As we were inspecting a collection of carved wooden elephants in a crowded stall, we heard two young women speaking to each other in front of a display of silk scarves hanging on racks across the narrow alley. From their conversation and accents, we decided that they must be American coeds, and as they walked out into the corridor of the market, we joined them and asked where they were from.

“Holland,” they said, still speaking English that sounded as if they had grown up in Omaha. As we walked and visited, we learned that they had just completed their bachelor’s degrees in preparation for becoming middle school teachers, but had delayed their careers to travel in Southeast Asia. They were midway through their itinerary, and were spending a month in each of six countries. Their adventure had begun in Thailand, where they had traveled north into Laos, then over into Cambodia, and from there were headed into Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. They explained that it was common for college graduates in Europe to save for years in anticipation of traveling for a period of time after college graduation, spending from a month to a year becoming acquainted with other parts of the world.

We asked what value they expected to gain from their travels, and one of them shrugged almost matter-of-factly and said, “This is the world we are going to be teaching our students about. Don’t you think it is important that we have some experience with it ourselves?”

What separates these new Dutch teachers from most of those who graduate from our colleges of education every year and enter the teaching profession? For one thing, they spoke a second language as fluently as their own. They also had degrees in one of the area of content they
would be teaching, rather than a degree in the “process” of teaching. But, more importantly, they saw their formal education as only a piece of what would be required to be a great teacher, and recognized that, in a world as completely interconnected and interdependent as ours, learning needed to be continuous and global.

It struck me that, philosophically, if we thought of teacher preparation as endowing the novice with three attributes—solid grounding in an academic content area, an understanding of the global context in which their students would live and work, and a clear grasp of teaching methods and classroom management strategies—these students and their countries had chosen to emphasize the first two attributes, while we focus almost entirely on the third. We also make no consistent effort to insure that content and global context are ever acquired, but spend four years helping students master technique. For the Dutch teachers, teaching was first about knowing. For us, it is more about doing. As part of our community-based effort to reform education, there is a perfect opportunity to reform the way we develop our teaching talent by shifting our emphasis from “how to teach” to “what to teach and why,” then insuring that it is taught well.

Assuming that we can agree that a content-rich curriculum can best be presented by teachers who are content-specialists, this point of agreement indicates where to begin with teacher development: by turning each faculty member into a content-specialist. As products of our current system of teacher education, many are not. Granted, they may have areas of concentration or minors in a discipline, but by international standards this hardly qualifies them as specialists. Each of them needs at least a bachelor’s degree in an academic discipline, even for teaching in the elementary grades.

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**Discipline-based Teaching Certification**

Reporting on research that evaluated the effectiveness of teacher education programs, a panel convened by the American Education Research Association found that teachers who had completed five-year programs requiring a major in a content area in addition to their teaching credential rated themselves higher on eleven of twelve items assessing teaching ability than did those completing traditional four-year programs. Five-year program graduates also showed greater satisfaction with their teaching careers, had lower attrition from the profession, and indicated that they planned to remain in teaching longer than did those with a four-year teaching certificate.

Recognizing the strength of the five-year model, universities such as Rutgers, the University of Virginia, William and Mary, West Virginia University, and Truman State now require a major in a discipline as part of teacher certification, believing, as West Virginia’s Benedum Collaborative five-year Teacher Education program declares, “Traditional four-year teacher education programs across the country typically fail to address