

The Useful Teachers College:

A proposal for a
4-year undergraduate teacher training
and life-skills community



Mark Riccio, Ed.D.
1616 Liholiho Street apt. 1102
Honolulu, HI 96822
mark@organicthinking.org

Opening Statement:

Imagine a college that prepares future teachers for the teaching vocation according to the maxim that *wisdom is knowledge applied*.

“Knowledge applied” means teachers who can teach life-skills (house building, farming, food preparation, clothes making, and practical chemistry); imagine teachers who have the ability to sing, act, recite poetry, and think artistically; who are competent in discussing the great works of literature, philosophy, theology, history, physics, biology, and psychology; who have experience and expertise in several pedagogical systems; who have mastery of at least one healing and martial art.

The USEFUL TEACHERS COLLEGE differs from a normal four-year college. UTC students are preparing to enter future classrooms with a plethora of skills and life-experiences that make them suited to lead children into the world of wisdom, a true preparation for life. Thus, all subjects covered in UTC classes always have a pedagogical focus and UTC students codevelop their education with the professors.

For example, when the class covers a great book, the students read, discuss, ask questions, prepare notes, but in turn, also focus on how they would present this book to their future 9th grade class. The same goes for the practical arts such as house building or clothes making. UTC students would focus on how to teach these skills to elementary and high school students. Graduation at UTC depends on how knowledge and skills are successfully applied. Future schools will welcome UTC teachers since they come equipped with practical wisdom and pedagogical know-how.

The educational philosophy of the Useful Teachers College is based on the idea that true education is the drawing out of knowledge and abilities from the souls of students. Its pedagogy is a coalescing of several wisdom-based educational systems. The educational mission of the Paideia Proposal (Mortimer Adler’s great books list and discussion circles), Waldorf Education (Rudolf Steiner emphasis on art and moral develop toward freedom), and John Taylor Gatto (genius comes from real work and from experience with adults who can lead children to meaningful experiences) all come together in the UTC project. UTC should be an off-the-grid college preparation for the teaching profession in the broadest sense of the term.

Problems of Current Teachers Education:

Alternative educational schools have increased while teacher preparation remains materialistic, conformist, lacking in liberal educational values, and without a unified philosophy.

Charter schools have been blossoming such as the neo-classical Great Heart School and the arts-centered Waldorf School in the last ten years. There are few colleges that interested teachers can attend that address these types of alternative pedagogy except the very limited great books programs and Waldorf teacher trainings. Having a BA today is rarely considered adequate for teaching in a private high school, so a great books college will give the BA its original ideal of what it means to be educated.

A new breed of teacher is required to meet the needs of children. Future teachers should be prepared by having the broadest definition of a liberal arts education including life-skills and practical arts. UTC should be a model school by combining high-level academics with useful knowledge applicable in life. Every aspect of the school should reflect the maxim that: wisdom is knowledge applied. UTC educational idea is a radical departure from existing practices of teacher preparation.

Awakening Future Teachers:

The emphasis at UTC is not memorizing textbooks, but on building skills. *Each skill a teacher acquires awakens the teacher to their own power and abilities.* An empowered teacher has much to share with students. A college that merely instructs without unfolding new skills is basically limiting the teacher's potential and wisdom. All aspects of the UTC experience should awaken some insight or capacity in the teacher. This maxim will be reflected in the learning experience of UTC entire educational program.

The UTC program has **seven** areas of mastery. At the foundation of these areas is a unique course on organic thinking and organizational logic. Educational renewal requires a new type of thinking and pedagogic system that I have written about extensively in my book, Logik of the Heart. This organic thinking course is taught to all teachers. Organic thinking is taught in all of the seven areas whether it is in life skill classes, science classes, or writing classes.

1st Life-Skills:

The first component deals with **life-skills**. Teachers should know how to grow their own food, compost, harvest and preserve, house-build, make their own clothes and shoes, plumbing and electricity, cook, treat sewer water and so on. These are not hard skills to acquire when they are practiced over the course of several years. It gives students a connection to the cycle of the year, to eating seasonally, to living a life in harmony with natural cycles. As the college grows, other industrial arts can be practiced such as paper making, book publishing, and other important crafts.

Imagine the impact on children when they realize that their UTC teachers have many noble and useful skills. Imagine that UTC grads could eventually found their own self-sufficient communities.

2nd Great Books Program:

The second component is a **Great Books program** designed to prepare students for teaching at prep schools, great books schools, or Waldorf high schools. Great books program, as it is conducted in great books high schools, is a *seminar style discussion* of the classic works of literature, philosophy, and history. Most great books programs are limited to mainly fiction authors, while UTC's program includes science and the other disciplines. Teachers need a broad education and the great books seminar teaches good habits of close and accurate reading, speaking, listening.

In true great books discussions, there is no right answer, since the goal is to open the students up to their own intuition and thoughtful connections. Great books discussion includes offering insights, listening to the comments of others, and adding to what was just said. The ability to read a text accurately, to have insight into the content, and to share one's insight is an important skill, and is in harmony with our motto: *knowledge applied*.

Teachers must develop the skill of leading students into lively discussions as well as having the competence of understanding the literary and philosophical pillars of civilization. Great books method is an effective way of teaching students how to continue the great conversation of civilization.

3rd Two Modes of Pedagogy:

The third aspect of UTC is the experiencing and teaching of two modes of pedagogy: **Waldorf** and the neoclassical **Great Hearts**. These two school types are some of the fastest growing in America, especially in the charter school movement. Very few teacher college programs focus on the wholeness of curriculum or require their teachers to be instructors in many subject areas. Learning to teach all the grades of a given pedagogical system, allows the teacher to see the interconnectedness of learning and curriculum - where those connections exist. Teachers would practice teaching both systems and cover the literature and subject matter necessary to be effective pedagogues. This would include reading the hands-on pedagogy of Mortimer Adler and Rudolf Steiner.

Waldorf curricula has its worldview in German Idealism as presented by freedom oriented spiritual worldview of Rudolf Steiner. Neo-classical education has its basis in French Idealism which is grounded in Greco-Roman classics and Christian Humanism. Waldorf Education has a strong emphasis on arts and some industrial education, where Great Hearts is academically more challenging and accelerated. Great Hearts emphasizes Socratic seminars in the humanities classes but limits its science classes to lecture and textbook. Waldorf is unique in that its science classes are based on having students make their own hypotheses about phenomenon (Goethe's approach to science). These methods complement each other nicely and both believe that arts, music and academics are of equal importance. At the basis of both systems is *humanitas* a quality carried by dedicated teachers.

UTC students start to specialize in their third year by choosing elementary or a high school track to certification.

An "experimental school" attached to the college will serve both the local community and the UTC students in their training.

4th Spoken Arts:

The **spoken arts** such as poetry, theater, and lecturing are the fourth component of UTC's curriculum. Teachers should be well-versed in poetry, theater, and public speaking. No teacher colleges that I know train their students in how to prepare a lecture, conduct a play, or perform poetry. At UTC, it is important to prepare teachers who are effective and artistic communicators. Thus, students will regularly perform plays and poetry, hold lectures, and learn to be directors of children's plays.

5th Applied Sciences:

The fifth component is the **applied sciences**. Physics, chemistry, and biology should also be practiced as practical sciences. Chemistry is taught by making useful products such as soaps and house hold chemicals. The more applications they master, the more worthwhile activities they are able to teach young students. Biology as a practical science is used in farming, sewer treatment, composting, botany and medicinal plants, animal behavior and food prep.

Because teachers will be able to focus on the high school and elementary school level science, they should be able to master more than enough material to be competent in a living knowledge of science. In this way, teachers will be able to connect the sciences to real life situations appealing to the minds and hands of their future pupils. This useful knowledge will prepare UTC teachers to be great science teachers, and they will thereby awaken students to the world of science in a way that the students will want to be active in their learning.

6th Visual Arts and Music:

The sixth component requires that students have competency in the **arts**. Drawing, painting, sculpting, some knowledge of architecture and art history, choir and music theory. Both Waldorf and Great Hearts programs hold art as essential to moral and intellectual development. They are also integral to our ability to make our space aesthetic, - and teachers should have such abilities. Art and artistic modes of thought must be integral to the thinking of teachers. UTC students should master singing and basic music theory as well as learning several types of dance and movement arts. The lack of aesthetic sense in society should be countered by teachers who understand the importance of art, and can bring true artistic sensibilities into their classrooms. Artistic thinking develops a harmony in the character of the teacher and their projects. Although UTC is not an art school per se, regular practice of these arts can be utilized in the classroom and is required for well-rounded educators.

7th Spiritual Arts:

The seventh component has to do with the **spiritual arts**: marital arts, meditation, and a healing art. In the Daoist tradition, only a strong body can maintain a powerful mind and spirit. All students should graduate with some ability in a martial art such as kung fu, aikido, judo and/or karate. Yoga, healing arts, and martial arts are necessary for self-knowledge. Healing and martial arts are about overcoming the self and personal limitations. Having knowledge about massage, health, meditation, and basic medicine is important for well-rounded teachers. Martial arts and meditation give teachers a confidence that comes with knowing that one can be a formidable force both

physically and spiritually. The fruits of both ancient and new age spirituality should be familiar to anyone who considers themselves educated.

The Facilities:

UTC requires 6 main buildings or facilities. Sufficient acreage is necessary for a small farm and basic crops, and student gardens.

The life of the college is the **Pedagogy Building** dedicated to the study of great books and K-12 teaching in the style of Waldorf and Neo-Classical Education. In additions to classrooms for all subjects, a stage for plays and auditorium are necessary.

The **Life-skills building** would encompass all the practical arts such as construction, chemistry (making household products), farming composts and seed storage, food and canning, clothes and shoemaking, and greenhouse science. In this building all the sciences would find some useful application so that future teachers could recreate these in their future teaching engagements.

A **Food Hall** with mini kitchens for preparation is required. All students participate in the meal plan by learning to prepare and serve food as part of their education. The food hall should also serve as an evening café and a 24-hour center for study and socializing.

A **Spiritual Arts Buildings** with meditation, martial arts, and a yoga space. A hall for ceremonies and other social artistic event would serve the spirit of the school. Few colleges even possess spaces such as a traditional Asian space for physical-spiritual practice such as meditation and healing arts.

Farm and house-building project: a small farm including dairy and cheesemaking should be part of the school. This will help students work on the connection between composting and farming. In addition, students as part of the house building curriculum will construct new dormitories and living spaces as time goes on.

The **Dormitories** should be off the grid and self-sufficient. Students should also learn things that reflect a sustainable future such as water reclamation, sewer treatment, solar energy, and other commonsense life-sustaining activities.

UTC Innovative Pedagogy:

The Truth is in the Overview, Lessing’s Method: What is Lessing’s method? It is a method of becoming “intelligent” by having overviews in many different subject areas. Can you give an overview of European History from Ancient Greece to The French Revolution in a twenty-minute lecture? How about the evolution of dance? An overview of Aristotle’s main theories? French impressionism? What are the main differences between Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism? Future teachers should be able to lecture on various subjects by presenting an overview of a particular discipline. Rudolf Steiner called this “economy in teaching” or the ability to see from the whole to the parts. Hegel was famous for this type of philosophical presentation.

For example, students prepare a lecture on the evolution of writing instruments from the stylus to the ball point pen. In art history class, UTC students should be able to explain the development from Sieneese Art through the major steps in the Italian Renaissance Art to Rococo with ease. In Economics class, they should be able to give an intellectual history of economic theory from Smith to Friedman (not to forget such topics as usury, CDS, and other important nomenclature). In the great books discussion, six utopian authors from Plato to Bellamy should be discussed and presented. This type of organic thinking is rarely dared by college professors. This way of learning could be called the “Lessing” or “Mozart principle” because both men became geniuses by their ability to either survey the whole of a piece of music or define the steps in the evolving of a discipline. Having an overview is a powerful tool.

Although this type of thinking is a small part of the great books program, students and professors should work together on practicing this type of lecturing. Teachers, after four years of study, will be able to give effective overviews on many different subjects, thus easily gaining the attention and respect of their future students. UTC will invite guest lecturers able to give overviews in their disciplines as a way for UTC students to watch expert lecturers perform their craft.

Contemporary Capstone: Every discipline should pose the question as to what it means to be *absolutely contemporary* for our modern age and consciousness. What is the highest purpose of art in 2018? How does society define the most contemporary art? Is art simply a political tool to awaken people? Is the recent leaning toward figurative art a reaction to the overdone conceptual art? Should art redeem the idea of being human and so on. Was Hegel right in announcing the “end of art” in the 1820s? Can art uplift the human condition, or is it solely reflective of the symptoms of decay? What kind of thinking and doing is appropriate for our times?

What question might the *contemporary capstone* pose about economics, economic arrangements, and theories? Are our current economic thinking and arrangement “contemporary enough” for our modern consciousness, or are we unable to evolve because of our fixed ideas and prejudices and dualities (free market vs. government) from the past?

Imagine each discipline posing these types of questions. Capstone questions have to do with essence and future possibilities. Students could tap their own genius and free themselves mentally by posing capstone questions and by intuiting creative answers for all disciplines: biology, architecture, psychology, and theater. Capstone questions would mean different things for different students, but everyone should have an eye to a better future by never accepting the status quo in any discipline.

Societal and civilizational evolution depend on humanity’s ability to generate ever new ways of renewing self, surroundings, and institutions. If we have no vision on how things could be better, then there is no plan of action. UTC in this sense offers something important to college

life that is rarely practiced. UTC students can begin to look in the individual disciplines for those types of thinking and social arrangement that best fit modern consciousness in its desire for moral, fair, responsible, and abundant ways of living. UTC students will bring a new consciousness to their own classrooms that is both history- and future-oriented.

Shared inquiry of UTC Professors and Students: Students and professors cooperate in the exploration of great books and in the Socratic seminar method. The art of posing leading questions doesn't always come easy to novice teachers. A great question can open amazing debates about a great work of literature, philosophy, or science. Although standard questions exist for leading a great books discussion, teachers need to develop their own *intuitive capacity* in teaching. Teachers must learn to trust their ability to reach a unique class of students by creating questions that address the singular needs of this class alone.

The pedagogy program covers two main types of education: Waldorf and Neo-classical. They both have their own reading lists with much overlap. When students and professors explore as equals in the reading of great books, the tone can be set to see future high school students - not as empty vessels - but as valuable contributors to the discussion of great ideas. This brotherly ideal must become a leading idea for high school and college education. UTC is about the development not only of reading skills and teaching, but about preparing teacher to trust their own genius in teaching.

Great Books of the Sciences: Why do American schools focus so much on reading novels but so little on reading non-fiction? Non-fiction great works should play a significant role in education. Could there be a consequence to having our high school students read “teenage angst novellas” while neglecting great scientific thinkers such as Aristotle, Galilei, Darwin, Heisenberg, Weber etc.? Shouldn't our students rather be admiring Heisenberg and not Holden Caulfield?

Mortimer Adler has on his list of great books pivotal scientists from nearly all disciplines: astronomy, biology, sociology, psychology, history, mathematics. UTC's approach to the sciences should make a significant difference in the style sciences are taught by helping teachers immerse themselves in the *overarching ideas* of each discipline so they don't simply get lost in a sea of details. Science teaching today is often limited to “facts” without regard to the deep thinking that underlies many of these facts.

Studying Biographies and Autobiographies: Education is about learning the paths that others took, their risks, their rewards, their dedication, their example. Discussing the lives of incredible people always sheds light on who we were, are, and can be. Waldorf's elementary program offers much in this direction already. But I believe that future education will focus less on rote academics and much more on human potential and activity as is shown in the biographies of great individuals. John Gatto's work has provided numerous examples on how the study of amazing people can show us the power an individual can have even at an early age in creating a full life such as Warren Buffet or Admiral Farragut.

Teachers Ober-Seminar:

The heart of UTC is the teachers' oberseminar. Weekly meetings should be dedicated to teachers presenting/lecturing/teaching each other. For example, teachers would prepare the Waldorf first grade curriculum and present a lesson to the group such as Grimm Fairy Tales. By having a student-driven performance class, budding teachers can learn to present in front of a tough/loving audience of peers. By presenting consistently in all fields of the curriculum, students will have the opportunity to gain valuable teaching experience before entering the classroom. Also, the oberseminar is a forum for discussing possible issues one could have with the material and brainstorm with peers to generate solutions.

Classes and Curriculum:

UTC classes run all year long. UTC skills classes require the cycle of the whole year. The farming, construction, martial arts and yoga intensives, and other hands-on learning are best done during the summer.

The first year the students jump right in into the elementary education seminar. The second year is dedicated to high school education and practice. The great books program runs through out the four years. As students enter the third and fourth years they specialize in their educational fields. By learning to teach and prepare lesson plans for every grade, UTC students master the curricula for two school systems.

At a typical college, professors and students have 12 hours of class a week. At UTC, teaching seminar, great books, and other classes would run about 25 hours a week not including skills classes. Since the UTC schedule runs all year long, there is never a need to rush through material, and students have the possibility of graduating in three years especially if they have immersed themselves in what UTC has to offer.

UTC Lab School:

Students at UTC should be active in the college's free private lab school serving the local community. In this way, UTC students can accomplish their student teaching requirement. As the UTC grows, so will the UTC Lab School in the community at large. The success of the UTC Lab School will reflect the effectiveness of the mission of UTC itself.

Reading Lists and Teaching Lists:

Below is the list of books that an educator needs to have read to be ready for their vocation. The Great Hearts List is predominantly novels not all of which are great discussion pieces. The list will be expanded by classics of economics, sociology, philosophy, religion, biography, and history. Eastern classics of world literature such as Confucius, Bhagavad Gita, selected Buddhist writings (Lotus Sutra) will be added. It is amazing that the Great Hearts science classes don't include Socratic discussions. *A new list will evolve that contains all disciplines of the great books.*

Thus, students would read about 75 books over the course of their 4-year education in addition to pedagogical books, biography, and other important books not on the list.

Reading list of great hearts high school and for UTC:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. My Antonia | 36. The Prince |
| 2. Red Badge of Courage | 37. Essays |
| 3. Autobiography of an American Slave | 38. Meditations on First Philosophy |
| 4. The Great Gatsby | 39. The "1844 Manuscripts" |
| 5. Old Man and the Sea | 40. Reason in History |
| 6. Billy Budd | 41. Brothers Karamazov |
| 7. Walden | 42. King Lear |
| 8. "Civil Disobedience" | 43. The Scarlet Letter |
| 9. Democracy in America | 44. Frankenstein |
| 10. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn | 45. Herodotus' Histories |
| 11. Othello | 46. Paradise Lost |
| 12. The Tempest | 47. Lessing Education of Humanity |
| 13. Utopia | 48. Max Weber Protestant Ethic |
| 14. Second Treatise of Government | 49. Taoism |
| 15. Pride and Prejudice | 50. Rousseau's Inequality |
| 16. Discourse on Inequality | 51. Goethe Faust |
| 17. Tale of Two Cities | 52. Dante Divine Comedy |
| 18. Communist Manifesto | 53. Beowulf Grendel |
| 19. One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich | 54. Augustine Confessions |
| 20. Crime and Punishment | 55. Machiavelli The Prince |
| 21. Henry V | 56. Confucianism |
| 22. Iliad | 57. Herder's Another Philosophy of History |
| 23. Odyssey | 58. Dystopian Novels: Brave New World,
Looking Backwards |
| 24. History of the Peloponnesian War | 59. Emerson |
| 25. Theban Plays | 60. Brothers Karamazov |
| 26. Five Dialogues of Plato | 61. Nietzsche Use and Abuse of History |
| 27. Republic | 62. Hegel Introduction to Philosophy of
History and Fine Art Lectures |
| 28. Nichomachean Ethics | 63. Hobbes Leviathan |
| 29. The Books of Genesis, Exodus, and Job | 64. Philosophy of Freedom |
| 30. Hamlet | 65. Plotinus |
| 31. Aeneid | |
| 32. Confessions | |
| 33. Gospels of Mark and John, Acts of the
Apostles, and Epistle to the Romans | |
| 34. "Treatise on Law" | |
| 35. The Divine Comedy | |

The Waldorf list would add: Faust and Parzival. Waldorf has no non-fiction on their list! All other classics of the Waldorf curriculum are already present on the Great Hearts list. Both of their elementary and middle school lists look identical as they include much wholesome literature. Essential to both schools are the books needed for teacher preparation which in the case of Waldorf would include for the history classes: Grimm's Fairy Tales, Animal Fables, Old Testament, and Norse Myths, Ancient history, Greece and Roman, European History to the Reformation.

The list above is for high school and elementary teaching and there is no reason to cover every book on the list. However, a college level list will be provided that includes the sciences, history, sociology, and philosophy.

Conclusion:

The UTC vision will provide an organic and innovative educational experience. All aspects of the UTC education focus on skill formation and an active style of learning. UTC is a living discussion with professors, life-skills instructors on how-to teach. By learning to be confident in so many fields such as great books, music, art, crafts, food production, meditation, the UTC graduate can bring their know-how to their classrooms and communities.

UTC graduates will eventually go out into their world and found new UTC campuses with ease and grace, since they would be able to internalize the skills, ideas, and mission out of their own experience.

A UTC campus should be a place that people would want to gather and even live close to, as each campus has so many useful activities to offer the community at large.

This is my vision.

Mark Riccio

My Biography:

I have an Ed.D. from Columbia University in Educational Philosophy and Spiritual Foundations of Education. My mentors were Professor Douglas Sloan (Teachers College) and Professor Rabbi Joseph Lukinsky (Jewish Theological Seminary). I did original research on Waldorf Education by showing that the current understanding of Waldorf Education is a compromised implementation of the founder's ideas. At Teachers College, I had the pleasure of attending some amazing classes on pedagogy and educational philosophy.

My destiny prepared me for a life in educational reform. I have attended many different kinds of schools in my lifetime. I am a Waldorf graduate, but I also attended Jesuit Schools (Loyola H.S. and Fordham U.) and as a child I attended no less than three preschools: Montessori, Riverside Church, and a Jewish community school.

I have worked in the New York Public School System, in an Arizona Public Charter School, and in several private academies as an English, History, Philosophy, and German Teacher. I taught Educational Courses at Northeastern Illinois University. My other area of interest has been making the great books accessible to *all* students. I have taught great books at the college and grad school level as well as at a great book's high school called Great Hearts.

My mission is to inaugurate an organic learning experience in a way that future teachers can first transform themselves, and then bring new forces to the world of education, thereby changing learning and teaching as we know it. If the UTC project becomes a success, it will be replicated through the world in many countries and cultures.