THE PREPARATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS IN THE UNITED STATES: FOUR TURBULENT DECADES, 1950's-1980's

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An ongoing controversy regarding the proper preparation of professional educators has been part of the scene in the United States for many years. It dates back at least to the early nineteenth century when the normal school movement began. It also flourished during the first half of the twentieth century. This inquiry, however, is not a complete historical analysis of the teacher preparation issue, but rather focuses on this public policy debate since the 1950's. Its aim is to analyze the main aspects of the conflict during the most recent four decades.

Underlying Aspects

Our first task is to identify the locus, or rather, the multilocuses, of the disagreement. Similar to most other public policy debates, this one is complex. Some would call it a many headed hydra.

One key aspect concerns whether or not education is a true profession. This issue involves identifying the characteristics of recognized professions in American society. Four classic professions, which can be traced back to their roots in antiquity and formation in medieval times, are law, medicine, theology, and university teaching. These careers are the best recognized and most prestigious, although not always the highest paid. Added to them today are some newer professions such as architecture, engineering, and optometry. These share much of the aura of the classic fields. Many social

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commentators, however, recognize what they term «aspiring» or «emerging» professions, among which they place education.

Fully recognized professions, as perceived by these sociologists, have ten basic characteristics:

1. They provide essential services.
2. Their spheres of needs and functions are well identified.
3. They command a body of knowledge and require the performance of normative behaviors and skills.
4. Decisions are made by their practitioners on the basis of widely respected principles and recognized theories.
5. Reputable undergirding academic disciplines are their basis.
6. They are organized to regulate admission into their ranks, maintain minimum standards, examine and license, enforce professional ethics, and administer discipline when it is required.
7. Protracted programs of professional preparation are required for entrance into these fields.
8. Considerable public trust has been engendered.
9. Strong human service motives usually characterize their practitioners, exercised with relative authority and freedom.
10. These careers typically represent lifetime commitments.

Although many efforts have been made by American educators to meet these professional criteria, the field of education is generally perceived by the public to be a semi-profession, with less status. Admission into a semi-profession requires shorter preparation periods, and most observers believe that the level of expertise that they require doesn't justify much autonomy. Their practitioners emphasize conceptual and theoretical bases less, and tend to have their primary identifications with their employing institutions rather than with their profession as a whole. Practitioners of semi-professions are accountable to their immediate superiors - not to the profession itself. They have few, if any, rights of privileged communication between their clients and themselves as professionals. Finally, semi-professions are gender skewed, attracting a preponderance of women into their ranks.

The fact is that most American educators today are quite well described by these eight criteria of semi-professions. A key dimen-
sion of the controversy about the preparation of educators, therefore, revolves around the professional versus semi-professional issue. Teacher organizations claim that their members belong to a profession. Much of the public and most higher education faculty regard education as a semi-profession. So for many years there has been a struggle going on of a large group of people who aspire to move from semi-professional to full professional status. It is not merely status, however that is involved. Other related issues are salaries, working conditions, opportunities for advancement and mobility and equity.

The conflict is further complicated by the complexity of having many educational specializations, often stemming from different heritages. Early childhood education, with day care and pre-school programs, is a special field. So are elementary and secondary education. Often middle school or junior high school teaching is another specialized field. Special educators are experts in a sub-field of educational practice, as are vocational educators in another. Then there are the school psychologists, media specialists, and school librarians. Educational leadership is another extensive domain that includes administrative and supervisory personnel with special qualifications. Further specializations follow the areas of the disciplines: English, foreign languages, mathematics, science, social studies, business, and home economics. The fine arts are included with art, drama, dance, and music. Sports and leisure studies are another specialized domain of education. The debate swirls around where and how to best equip all of these specialized educational practitioners, how to verify their competence, and how to improve their performance on the job.

The lines of argumentation reflect many of the special interests that get involved in making policies regarding the preparation of professional educators. During periods of declining public school enrollments, such as the 1970’s and early 1980’s, it is natural that members of the liberal arts and sciences faculties in higher education look favorably on having prospective educators taking most or all of their programs in their departments or colleges. These critics perceive a lack of rigor in the courses being taught in departments or schools of education. They regard the education faculty as less thoroughly prepared than themselves. The need for people who plan on teaching careers to know their subject areas well is stressed, and
other necessary learnings overlooked. The critics among liberal arts faculty seldom, for example, mention the necessity of aspiring teachers to be acquainted with the psychology of learning, the history, philosophy, or social foundations of education, or any methodologies of instruction. Many liberal arts faculty perceive no need for pre-service teachers to learn about the legal aspects of educational practice, for instance, because they themselves never studied this knowledge domain. Similarly they ask, «Why should teachers study anything about moral development theory? We never learned anything about the processes of human character formation.» Or, «Who needs to learning anything about educational testing and measurement? We never studied these matters, and look what successful professors we have become.» And so the conflict rages.

It is notable that the latest Carnegie Foundation report, College: The Undergraduate Experience in America, notes that: «we found that the under-graduate college, the very heart of higher learning, is a troubled institution.» Most of the recommendations made in this document have appeared elsewhere as well, and indicate that there is little evidence that the quality of instruction in the liberal arts and sciences is better than that at schools of education. Major recommendations for improving undergraduate education in the United States include having better orientation procedures, developing proficiency in the written and spoken word, giving a good general education, establishing optimum faculty priorities, encouraging creativity, and raising the general quality of campus life. Ernest L. Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation, concluded that, «for most of the nation's colleges and universities, where large numbers of undergraduates are enrolled, priority should be given to teaching, not research.» (3) It thus appears that liberal arts and education faculty could best collaborate to respond to the criticisms being made of both areas of higher education.

There are still other dimensions of the controversy to be recognized, whether it is pre- or in-service education of teachers that is under examination. After initially being certified to teach by a state board or office of education, virtually all American educators get additional preparation for their careers, usually through graduate degree programs. Part of the debate concerns what they study. Is teaching a technical process to be learned by mastering some technology? Is it an art? Is there some aesthetics, then, that teachers
should be learning? Is it a science? If so, what scientific competencies must all teachers possess? Can the skills and understandings teachers need to have be organized sequentially and systematically? These are some of the most hotly argued topics regarding professional education programs.

We are told that schools of education are, on the one hand, «monolithic bastions of conservatism.»(4) On the other hand, their critics charge that they are anti-intellectual, too permissive, and out of touch with the real world of teaching. Schools of education are accused of having low academic standards resulting in incompetent teachers. Again, little objective evidence exists to back up these charges, and the fact that three-fourths of most professional teachers’ educations were received in liberal arts classes in conveniently overlooked.

Perhaps the most pressing issue in teacher preparation currently is the fact that older teachers are retiring and many younger ones leave for other occupations. The fact is that the numbers of new entrants into teaching aren’t enough to meet the growing demand, and often the new recruits aren’t as academically qualified as the teachers they replace. Research conducted by the Rand Corporation with a federal grant, for instance, found that:

In 1981 fewer than half of the newly hired teachers in math and science were certified or eligible for certification in the subjects they were assigned to teach. Fewer than two-thirds of the new hires in English, social studies and other secondary subjects were qualified by this criterion.

Again in 1981, colleges granted fewer than 1400 bachelor’s degrees in math and science education combined, a number that represents less than one math or science teacher for every ten school districts in the United States. The next year some 18,000 math and science teachers left their teaching positions.

Severe teacher shortages have been identified in physics, computer programming, chemistry, data processing, bilingual education, special education, earth science and biology.

The report says that by 1988, the supply of new teacher graduates ‘may satisfy only about eighty percent of the demand for additional teachers.’(5)
The fundamental concern about the preparation of professional educators in the United States, therefore, has not only quality, but also quantity dimensions. Just at a time when departments and schools of education have experienced a decade of diminishing support, it is becoming evident that they face new challenges. Means must be found to attract academically talented students into the teaching profession, equip them with the best known competencies, and support them with competitive salaries and good working conditions.

A Selected Review of Literature

Any controversy that persists for as long as has the one about preparing professional educators has generates a huge corpus of documents. It is not feasible to exhaustively review this mound of literature in a paper prepared for a symposium, so I have elected to rather focus attention on ten items produced during the last thirty-five years. It can be claimed, more or less, that they are representative of the printed evidence regarding teacher preparation and schools of education in the United States.

We begin with a famous monograph by Harold Rugg, who had been a Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, entitled The Teacher of Teachers. A classification of «insider» or «outsider» will be used to categorize the materials, and The Teacher of Teachers was clearly the work of an educationist, albeit a social liberal and radical innovator. Rugg grouped the past history of teacher education into three eras. Prior to 1890 teachers were trained as apprentices or in pedantic normal school programs. Then between 1890 and 1920 American teacher education was characterized by what Rugg termed, «The Conforming Way.» It was during these years that the first professional curricula in education were introduced into colleges and universities. The older normal schools began to emerge as teachers colleges dominated by practical considerations and the need to establish the field of education as a legitimate academic discipline.

The great depression following World War One rang down the curtain on «The Conforming Way.» Between 1920 and 1950, Rugg discerned «The Creative Path» in teacher education. Three new areas characterized it, in his opinion. First, the science of society and
culture was developed, providing the social foundations of education. Second, the science of behavior emerged, becoming the basis of modern educational psychology. Third, new emphasis was placed on the arts or communication and expression, leading toward aesthetic and humanistic dimensions of teacher preparation. After 1950, therefore, Rugg anticipated the implementation of what he termed «frontiers» of theory and practice in teacher education through the application of «creative imagination.» He probably would be disappointed to observe how much teacher education in the 1980's resembles what he was describing as the 1950's type of teacher preparation. Somehow, the model of the three core disciplines: Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Psychology, and the Foundations of Education, has persisted almost everywhere. Around them are arranged programs of Educational Leadership, and Sports and Leisure Studies. The basic configuration in schools of education, however, hasn't been altered substantially for some fifty years. It is thus quite resistant to change.(6)

The next book to be reviewed is by an «outsider» academician, Arthur E. Bestor's, **Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools.** Originally issued in 1953, a new edition has recently come out, attesting to the value placed on Bestor's analysis by many critics of American education.

Bestor rises to defend disciplined intelligence as the aim of education rather than citizenship preparation, socialization, or vocationalism. He believes that an educational meritocracy based on academic ability and achievement is democratic, and equates educational equity efforts and compensatory education with a lack of rigor. The worst thing that Bestor observed in American education was what he called «life-adjustment» training. By this he meant the implementation of progressive education principles such as child-centered and active learning, problem solving, and emphasis on the student's reflective experience. These trends are to be banished, with a firm re-emphasis on liberal education, by which Bestor - himself a history professor - meant the traditional liberal arts, with excellence maintained by means of external examinations.

Attention was drawn to the «interlocking directorate of professional educationists» by Bestor, whose pernicious influence he believes must be eliminated. It is this group of false academics who
train the teachers in American schools. The teachers, in turn, support and legitimate their professors and the institutions that prepared them, creating a vicious circle. Bestor asserts that the training of teachers for the public schools is one of the most important functions of the American university. It must therefore always be treated as a function of the university as a whole moving into the «vacuum» which the educationists have created through the present «iniquitous system.» The faculties of liberal arts and sciences failed to devise appropriate curricula for teacher education, so the educationists took over where others were too proud or lazy to contest their dominance. Thus Bestor advocates abandoning undergraduate teacher preparation at schools of education in favor of having aspiring teachers major in a liberal arts or sciences discipline.(7)

Three books can be chosen to represent the fray during the decade of the 1960’s. By far the most influential was compiled by another academic «outsider» to teacher education, James B. Conant. Conant’s *The Education of American Teachers* was published in 1963. A former chemist and past-president of Harvard University, Conant actually had field observations and surveys made of American teacher preparation programs all over the country. He also criticizes the isolation of faculty and schools of education from the rest of their colleges and universities. He points out the proliferation of separate scholarly organizations and professional groups for educationists and other disciplines and professions. The Conant report identified some lacks of rigor and scholarly emphasis at schools of education, but the tone of it was meliorative and reforming, not hostile and purgative.(8)

A much more belligerent tone was adopted by James D. Koerner in *The Miseducation of American Teachers*, also first published in 1963. Koerner was writing as the Executive Director of the Council for Basic Education, a small, conservative organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. He obtained documentary evidence from thirty-two colleges and universities, but apparently did not conduct on-site observations or interviews. His charges, therefore, are based almost exclusively on his analysis of documentary evidence.

Koerner judges professional education to be dismal in its development and scope as an academic field. His sampling leads him to believe that education faculty are poorly prepared and unproductive
as researchers and scholars. Their students are the academic pits, as Koerner sees it, low in both intelligence and achievement. As he characterized them, education courses are lacking in content and requirements. After reviewing many of the textbooks used in them, Koerner concluded that they were poorly written and insubstantial. Even the instruction in education courses, he claimed, is of poor quality. The masters and doctoral programs in education Koerner ridicules as undemanding and trite. He cites some case histories in support of his negative impressions of them. According to Koerner, even education graduates giving what he terms «consumers’ reports» damn the programs that prepared them. It isn’t surprising, therefore, that Koerner advocates uprooting schools of education, firing their faculties, and returning to the model of teacher preparation in which all instruction is located in the liberal arts and sciences. As an example of scientific inquiry The Miseducation of American Teachers leaves a lot to be desired both methodologically and in reasonable evenhandedness, but no reader of Koerner’s is left in any doubt about his opinion of the evils of teacher preparation in America at that time. Since 1963 the Council for Basic Education has been consistently hostile to all conventional teacher preparation programs. (9)

The third item from the 1960’s was written by an «insider», B. Othanel Smith, a philosopher of education at the University of Illinois, Bestor’s institution. This book, issued in 1969, was titled Teachers for the Real World. Smith had analyzed the social changes taking place in American society and pointed out the many areas where new competencies would be required if teachers were to prepare their students to cope in the future. He advocated reforming teacher education to make it more responsive to the emerging needs of society. (10)

Apparently Smith perceived that his earlier work had had little impact, because he authored a lead article on «Pedagogical Education: How About Reform?» in a special issue of Phi Delta Kappan on teacher education in 1980. Here he points out that teachers are prepared in nearly 1,400 institutions, of which some forty percent are private senior colleges with fewer than a thousand students and a mere handful of instructors of education. The remaining sixty percent, about eight hundred institutions, include private universities, old-line state universities, newly created state universities, and some
independent schools of education. As he sees it, the problem is that with such diversity, it is next to impossible for teacher educators to agree on reform plans and implement them. There are too many internal and external constraints, and rivalries. Education faculty lack a common core of beliefs, fear the loss of tenure, and are confused about whether they offer a general or professional education to their students. Colleges and universities, on the other hand, fear enrollment drops and loss of income, and prefer full-time faculty to adjunct or clinical staff. Thus, much debate results in little substantial change.(11)

The decade of the 1970's saw two major reports on teacher education prepared and issued by academic organizations affiliated with the American schools of education. The National Society for the Study of Education came out with Teacher Education as Part Two of its Seventy-fourth Yearbook in 1975. It was followed the next year by Educating a Profession issued by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in recognition of the American Bicentennial in 1976.

The NSSE volume was an edited work containing chapters on the historical development of American teacher education, philosophical conceptions that have implications for the preparation of teachers, and an overview of the findings of recent research regarding teacher education. Two competing models of teacher education are represented in other articles. On the one hand there was performance-based teacher education (PBTE), linked with proficiency testing and the accountability movement. On the other there was «The Training of Teachers for Affective Roles» related to the movements for alternative and humanistic learning. The book ended with a chapter on teacher education in the future, anticipating changes in accreditation standards and shifts in the credentialing of teachers.(12)

The position of the authors of the AACTE volume was clearly shown in this statement:

Teaching is a profession. In practice it is an applied or clinical science involving services to people; using processes of diagnosis, prescription, and implementation; and characterized by the creative integration of professional knowledge and skill, personal style, and teaching art.(13)
Coming from within schools of education, this «insider» panel advocated getting on with upgrading and improving teacher education within the current institutional structures.

From among the scores of documents regarding teacher education issued so far in the 1980's, we can describe only three items. Certainly the most discussed has been A Nation at Risk: The Full Account drawn up by a National Commission on Excellence in Education created by the first Secretary of Education in the Reagan Administration, T.H. Bell. Its eighteen members were selected from the conservative side of the academic community, school administrators, and the corporate world. The second paragraph of chapter two has now become famous.

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.(14)

After such a clarion call for school reform, it is interesting that A Nation at Risk does not recommend radical changes in the preparation of teachers. Among the research commissioned in connection with the report was a study called Charting Directions for Preservice Teacher Education by Kenneth R. Howey of the University of Minnesota. Howey believes that schools of education will have to negotiate more formalized and shared responsibilities for teacher education with other socially responsible parties. He urges incremental improvements to be implemented in four areas. (1) Methods and procedures for recruiting and selecting teachers; (2) Upgrading the quality and extent of programs for preparing teachers; (3) Improving the evaluation of teachers and teacher education programs; and (4) Critically reexamining teachers’ role expectations and school conditions.(15)

A public hearing on «Teaching and Teacher Education» was held in Atlanta, Georgia with testimony given by twenty-three individuals. There were many specific recommendations for strengthening teac-
her education, but again, the prevailing tone is supporting incremental improvement of the existing programs, not their elimination or radical change. (16)

Perhaps the most humorous document I encountered was Education’s Smoking Gun: How Teachers Colleges have Destroyed Education in America by Reginald Damerell, issued in 1985. If you assume that this volume is simply the work of crank, let me mention that I obtained the copy I read from the public library in my community, and it had been well circulated before I got it. Applying the «insider» or «outsider» criteria to Damerell is difficult because for eleven years he was a professor of instructional media at the School of Education, The University of Massachusetts at Amherst, when Dwight Allen was Dean there. But the author firmly identifies himself as an «outsider» drawn into teacher education from advertising, with a liberal arts degree from Columbia University. He had no graduate degrees or earned doctorate, yet was a member of the doctoral committees of people earning Ed. D. degrees at U-Mass. If you wish to read a diatribe about the evils of American schools of education, this is the book for you. Damerell denounces their lack of scholarly rigor, failure to engage in what he regards as relevant research, and inability to maintain academic standards. He fails to explain, at least to this reader, why, if the conditions were so miserable, he persisted on the faculty of a school of education for more than a decade. His expose was written only after he had been dismissed by a new administration. Also, many Americans will take umbrage at Damerell’s attack on the great television hero, Bill Cosby, who earned his Doctor of Education degree at U-Mass with Damerell as a member of his advisory committee. At the very least, Cosby has certainly popularized the Ed. D. in American society. (17)

Today at schools of education the great debate swirls around Tomorrow’s Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group issued in April, 1986. This group of influential deans of the education schools at major public research universities advocate removing teacher education from the undergraduate curriculum. In keeping with the graduate emphases of their institutions, they contend that American teacher education ought to become a post-baccalaureate function in keeping with other professions such as law, medicine, and the ministry.
The university-based schools of education, as the Holmes Group envisions their functions, would stress study, teaching, research, and service. They would develop networks of relationships with other educational agencies, so that much expanded internships and in-service opportunities for professional educators would be feasible. Various levels of skills and knowledge among teachers would be recognized, permitting more career tracks and recognition than presently exist. If the Holmes Group recommendations were implemented, and to some extent they probably will be, schools of education would no longer compete with the powerful liberal arts and sciences faculties for majoring students. The undergraduate education major would cease. The graduate programs would be professional degrees comparable to those now awarded in other human services fields. And schools of education would have new allies in the form of the community educational agencies with which they would be cooperating. This seems to be a winning combination to many observers.(18)

So the debate about American teacher education rolls on. There are no signs at present of its slowing down or ceasing. On the contrary, the strident assertions from many quarters seem to be increasing. Four year liberal arts colleges now find themselves in danger of having obsolete education departments. Research universities recognize that graduate teacher education would generate far more research funding than is currently available to them. So hold onto your academic caps and keep a firm grasp on your tenure, if you work in an American school of education. Unless I miss my guess, some massive changes will occur during the next decade. And many of them won't turn out to be what was recommended or expected.

NOTES

(2) Ibid., pp. 8-9.
(3) UConn Advance 4(10), November, 6, 1986, pp. 1, 6. The article is based on Ernest L. Boyer, editor. College : The Undergraduate Experience in America. New York : The Carnegie Corporation, 1986. This report was issued on November 1, 1986.


(10) B. Othanel Smith, *Teachers for the Real World*. Washington, D.C.: AACTE, 1969. AACTE is, of course, the prime organization of teacher education institutions and their administrative leaders.

(11) B. Othanel Smith, «Pedagogical Education: How About Reform?» *Phi Delta Kappan* 62(2), October, 1980, pp. 87-91. PDK is the largest and most influential honorary organization of professional educators.


(15) Ibid., p. 36 f.

(16) Ibid., p. 56 f.


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Appendix One

NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS RELATED TO THE PREPARATION OF EDUCATORS(1)

American Association of School Administrators, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, VA 22209.
American Association of School Personnel Administrators, 6483 Tanglewood Lane, Seven Hills, OH 44131.

American Educational Research Association, 1230 Seventeenth Street, N.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20036.
American Educational Studies Association, Department of Secondary Edu-
cation, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA 12801.
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, 11 Duport Circle, N.W., Wash-
hington, D.C. 20036.
Association for Childhood Education International, 3615 Wisconsin Avenue,
N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016.
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 225 North Wash-
ington Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.
Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education,
College Box 111, North Manchester, IN 46962.
Association of Teacher Educators, 1900 Association Drive, Suite ATE, Rest-
ton, VA 22091.
*Council for Basic Education, 725 Fifteenth Street, N.W., Suite 1004, Wash-
hington, D.C. 20005.
International Council on Education for Teaching, One Dupont Circle, N.W.,
Kappa Delta Pi (Honor Society in Education), Box A, West Lafayette, IN
47906.
National Academy of Education, 11 Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 130, Wash-
hington, D.C. 20036.
National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1801 North Moore
Street, Arlington, VA 22209.
National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive,
Reston, VA 22091.
National Association of State Boards of Education, 526 Hall of the States,
444 North Capitol Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.
National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certifi-
cation, Empire State Plaza, Cultural Education Center, Room 5A11,
New York State Education Department, Albany, N.Y. 12230.
National Catholic Educational Association, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite
National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 700 North Rush Street, Chi-
cago, IL 60611.
National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1919 Pennsylvania
National Education Association, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington,
D.C. 20036.
*Phi Delta Kappa (Honor Society in Education), P.O. Box 789, Bloomington,
IN 47402.
Pi Lambda Theta, Inc. (Honor Society in Education), 4101 East Third Street,
P.O. Box A-850, Bloomington, IN 47402.

(*) Mentioned in the narrative section of this paper.