TRAINING AND EDUCATING
A CRITIQUE OF TECHNICAL-MINDEDNESS IN TEACHER PREPARATION

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The last five years have witnessed a resurgence of concern about the quality of education in the United States. In part due to perceived declines in economic, military, and social strength and vitality, and in part because of "internal" criticisms of teachers, administrators, and parents, the public schools are once again the topic of frequent commentary. Teachers have often been identified as the primary cause of the current "crisis" and a number of proposals have been made to "professionalize" teachers, as a key to the reform of education. These include recommendations to make the requirements for admission to teacher education programs more demanding; lengthening the time required to complete such programs; mandating graduate level education programs exclusively; instituting merit pay plans for practicing teachers to reward the most productive; developing career ladders within schools so that a more differentiated pattern of staffing can be created; and instituting more comprehensive programs of evaluation and supervision of practicing teachers.¹

The focus on teachers as the key to school reform has a plausible ring to it, and surely teachers are crucial for the improvement of teaching and curriculum offerings. Yet an isolating focus on teachers, together with an essentially technical focus on teacher preparation, constricts school reform efforts. Such an approach frequently places the blame on those whose professional decisions are shaped by larger patterns and expectations that need to be seriously analyzed in considering reform possibilities. By holding teachers responsible for inadequacies that frequently have their
origins outside the classroom and the school, we misunderstand both the
dynamics of teaching and what is required in teacher preparation programs.

To understand the predicaments of teaching within a broader context,
this essay is dedicated to going beyond the usual technical framework in
teacher preparation. More specifically, I argue against the separation of
educational studies and teacher preparation from liberal learning, of the-
ory from practice within programs that prepare future teachers; and for a
conception of teaching as moral, personal, and social praxis. A key argu-
ment in this regard is that, as people who shape students' consciousness,
personal and communal identity, and social relationships, teachers do not
just judge achievement, estimate socialization, and gauge how learning is
proceeding in the various forms of knowledge thought appropriate, but they
also help generate individuals and the social, political, and economic sit-
uations in which they will live.

The issues I will be discussing are, of course, not new. Histori-
cally, the fusing of school and teacher preparation reforms has ample
precedents. Indeed the beginning of the common school movement in the
United States was closely allied with the provision for teacher training on
behalf of aspiring teachers through the creation of normal schools. Horace
Mann was a primary force behind both efforts, arguing that normal schools
have historic importance as they form,

a new instrumentality of the race. . . . Neither the
art of printing, nor the trial by jury, nor a free
press, nor a free suffrage can long exist to any benefi-
cial and salutary purpose without schools for the train-
ing of teachers.²

The term "normal school" was formally adopted by the Massachusetts State
Board of Education in 1838, and the first schools for the training of
teachers were established by that state one year later.³ The training of
prospective teachers in the upper division classes of high schools was still in evidence, however, at the same time that efforts to provide systematic instruction for prospective teachers were undertaken in normal schools. It was not until after 1860 that normal schools proliferated, making professional preparation an increasingly common expectation.

A basic conflict could be seen in the operation of normal schools—one that continued even after their elimination. The rift between "scholars" and "schoolmen" (or advocates of professional preparation) reflects deeper divisions between "pure" versus "applied" areas of study. Posing two of the simplest questions: Are the aims of higher education compatible with the goals of professional preparation? How different are these activities? The literature on teacher preparation, as perhaps the most applied wing of educational studies, has generally promoted the demarcation of theory and practice in promoting a technical rationality for the preparation of public school practitioners. Below are three easily identified representative examples which demonstrate this rubric and contribute to the vocational nature of teacher preparation.

First, in A Design for a School of Pedagogy, B. Othanel Smith concludes that "academic pedagogical knowledge seldom yields teaching prescriptions" and that "theory has value in the art of teaching only if 'theory' is used to mean empirical clinical knowledge. Since this form of knowledge is not called theory in either pedagogy or other sciences, the appeal to theory as practical knowledge in classroom teaching is bootless." Given that the main goal of teacher training is to equip people to perform whatever teaching strategies and methodologies are extant in the profession, direct knowledge of such strategies, whether through clinical observation or direct instruction, should be emphasized. "Academic peda-
gological activities," on the other hand, are not conceived as valuable for the practice of teaching since they are less than immediately directive in terms of teaching strategies and behaviors. Thus, Smith reports, "teachers are correct when they assert that what they learn in the so-called foundations of education is not helpful in managing the classroom and carrying on instructional activities."  

Second, there is an increasing emphasis on field-based experience in teacher preparation programs. In many programs students now participate in "early field experiences" so that student teaching is no longer the first and only time they work in the field; the feeling seems to be that the more time spent in the field the better. Despite the ambiguity of research undertaken on field-based experiences,^ studies seem to consistently indicate that student teaching and other forms of field-based teacher education contribute to the development of "utilitarian teaching perspectives." Student teachers tend to accept the practices they observe in their field placements as forming the practical limits of what is desirable. Katz refers to this condition as one of "excessive realism." The school serves as a model for practice and is not itself an object for investigation and analysis. Within such a perspective the school becomes the site for professional socialization and technical manipulation of predefined activities and ends.

Third, yet another popular orientation to preservice training is the "personalized" approach based on the work of Frances Fuller and her colleagues at the University of Texas. The aim of this approach is that the content of teacher education curricula be matched to the level of concerns that students are experiencing at a particular point in time. Given the largely survival-oriented skills articulated by Katz as being of special
concern to beginning teachers, as well as Fuller's own corroborating studies of teacher development, this would mean that the curriculum for teacher education would be constructed primarily with a view toward helping student teachers survive more comfortably within a context that is largely taken for granted.

These three approaches to teacher preparation are by no means identical, of course. Yet they do share an important set of presuppositions. All tend to see teacher preparation as existing to help students take on currently dominant teacher roles and expectations. Teacher preparation within this perspective is aimed at equipping students with the skills, dispositions, and competencies necessary for the perpetuation of school practice in its present form. Since educational foundations allegedly fail to help students cope with the day-to-day encounters of school practice, they are seen as dysfunctional, extraneous, and irrelevant.

Within this orientation, there is a tendency to assume a taken-for-granted posture with respect to both current school practice and educational programs that serve to train people to occupy the necessary occupational roles. The preparation of prospective teachers is, accordingly, often delimited to replicating current practice, or modifying such practice within certain prescribed limits, with the result that teaching is seen as problematic only within a technical and ameliorative perspective. Activities and solutions to problems tend to be circumscribed by what we might call an "internal" perspective on teaching. The domain of teacher preparation within this perspective is defined by and limited to classroom phenomena and processes abstracted from wider, more encompassing contexts. Teacher training, accordingly, is often felt to primarily involve isolated practice, dominated by concerns for such matters as increasing student
achievement, maintaining discipline and order in classrooms, or increasing the "time on task" for students.

The general irrelevance of normative questions within technically oriented teacher training is baldly asserted by B. O. Smith:

> The preservice student should not be exposed to theories and practices derived from ideologies and philosophies about the way schools should be. The rule should be to teach, and to teach thoroughly, the knowledge and skills that equip beginning teachers to work successfully in today's classroom.¹³

As perhaps the clearest statement of the vocational approach to teacher preparation, Smith's views exemplify the posture commonly assumed by those involved in teacher training. Such programs characteristically present curriculum knowledge as a predefined set of activities to be mastered. This externalized or objectivist conception of knowledge characterizes teacher education in the United States and, as a result, prospective teachers come to believe that knowledge is something that is detached from the human interactions through which it was constituted and by which it is maintained.

The dominant culture of teacher preparation is one emphasizing the following traits: vocational training, the replication of current school practices, field-based experience aimed at promoting survival skills, technical proficiency, utilitarian approaches to curriculum and teaching, and the measurement of competencies that are specific, often behaviorally organized, and systematic. Within this culture the sort of thoughtful questioning and analyzing often touted as key aspects of mature theoretical reflection are all but absent. Instead, a largely technical, quantifiable, specific training in discrete skill areas is mandated. "Theory" is either rejected outright as irrelevant or accepted grudgingly, provided it does not intrude too closely on the territory of application or practice.
Proposals to reform teacher preparation have heightened the tensions between "theory" and "practice" just as they have exacerbated the tensions between "liberal" and "applied" study. For example, in discussing ways to help students meet new and more stringent standards associated with their National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession says, "the undergraduate years should be wholly devoted to a broad liberal education and a thorough grounding in the subjects to be taught. The professional education of teachers should therefore take place at the graduate level." Similarly, The Holmes Group rejects the idea that education can be a proper subject area major at the undergraduate level. Instead, "academic" courses of study are to be emphasized at this level, which will provide the necessary "undergirding discipline" for professional preparation. The role of liberal education for prospective teachers is further clarified when this group contends that, the reform of undergraduate education toward greater coherence and dedication to the historic tenets of liberal education is ... essential to improving teacher education. Teachers must lead a life of the mind. They must be reflective and thoughtful: persons who seek to understand so they may clarify for others, persons who can go to the heart of the matter.

Because they are concerned with "the life of the mind," liberal studies are central for good teaching, as they provide the content for instruction. Yet education, as a "professional" field, is valued only instrumentally, as it translates this content into effective teaching strategies. Thus, a hierarchy of subject matters is reinforced.

In opposition to the current reform movement, I want to suggest an alternative to the division between "pure" and "applied" fields of study, scholar and schoolperson, theory and practice. In essence I seek a reconstruction of teacher preparation which avoids the pitfalls of a removed and
aloof scholasticism on the one hand, and a technical/vocational orientation to the professional preparation of teachers, on the other. In outlining this approach, I offer both an alternative conceptual framework and a view of the resulting practice of teacher preparation at Cornell College over the past 18 months.

One of my central claims is that the study of education is an integral part of liberal learning. I reject the isolation and fragmentation of educational and liberal studies that is apparent in many institutions and programs. The view that education is a "professional" field without a unique methodology, set of perennial questions, and characteristic ways of proceeding; and that the liberal disciplines are dedicated to the "pure," objective, disinterested search for knowledge via the existence of those very things missing in education as a professional field, is at best misleading. When this dualism is encouraged (along with the associated dualisms of theory and practice, reason and emotion, facts and values, mind and body, and so on), the liberal disciplines are apt to become fossilized, removed from the real problems and issues confronting people, and divorced from a social context that provides inquiry a vital part of its human and social significance. At the same time, we need to go beyond a technicized view of teacher preparation. When we consider education a professional, illiberal field, it becomes separated from other areas of inquiry, sacrificing its own potential distinctiveness and cultural value as a scholarly field.¹⁶

Education as a field of inquiry is essentially integrative, or synoptic, in its vision. It seeks to synthesize a variety of methodologies, issues, and areas of research, integrating perspectives and issues from a variety of areas without being reduced to any of them in isolation. The
synthetic nature of education as a field of inquiry is due in part to the multi-dimensionality of what it means to become educated. While there are particular purposes that schools may further, none of these capture the more general meaning of becoming educated. As Dewey puts this, "with the renewal of physical existence goes, in the case of human beings, the recreation of beliefs, ideals, hopes, happiness, misery, and practices. The continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social group, is a literal fact. Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life."17 In providing for continuity, education must be understood as including virtually all aspects of individual and social life, as we make possible future experiences that may challenge present practices. To consider the full range of education is to consider the multiplicity of interactions, meanings, ideas, and values to which people give voice. Such considerations require a wide range of educational investigations and inquiries. A recognition of the complexities involved here has given rise to the need for an expanded set of tools with which to understand the dynamics of education. For example, recent studies in education have pointed to the importance of ethnographic, qualitative, and participatory studies that add a needed dimension to our empirical understanding of educational matters—an understanding not available within more positivistic, psychometric research programs. Again, the insights made available through historical, philosophical, and sociological studies in education, and the important understandings developed by Women's Studies, Black Studies, and other more critically oriented traditions, are synthesized within educational inquiry in a way that differentiates it from many other fields. The fine and performing arts as well as political inquiry—and the languages of aesthetics and politics—are also crucial ingredients of educa-
tional studies. The integrative strength of education as a field indicates a particularly vital role for the preparation of teachers. What it has meant and may yet mean to be an educated woman or man, the nature of knowledge and its transmission to others, the relation between social justice and the family and other educational institutions, and the appropriate values for a democratic state in an imperiled world, for example, are all educational questions of first order importance, and ones requiring sustained, careful inquiry by all of us. Maxine Greene eloquently captures the comprehensive quality of teacher preparation:

Many students of teacher education have stressed the fact that more than technical or applicative knowledge is involved in the effort to function as a professional. They have stressed the importance of inquiry into the "interpretive context," meaning the ideational and socio-cultural contexts of teaching and learning as they proceed in schools. . . . They have stressed the fact that teachers are not only obliged to become scholars and theorists in specialized fields but persons explicitly concerned with the polity and the kinds of action that make a difference in the public space.18

The preparation of teachers, most of whom are women, cannot be seen as a technically or vocationally oriented domain that moves away from liberal arts traditions. For teachers are not technicians, and their education cannot adequately proceed as a species of vocational training. More than anything else, public school teachers must be able to exercise judgment, to think reflectively and critically about the nature and conditions of their work, to continue intellectual engagement with others after graduation, and to deal with the complexities of an environment that frequently places a number of stresses on their time and energy. In short, they need the very orientations and habits of mind and heart that are prized by spokespersons for the liberal arts. The tendency to dichotomize educational studies and liberal learning has led to many of the contemporary problems identified in
recent reform proposals, and is detrimental to both the study of education and other forms on academic inquiry.

Yet much of the teacher education reform literature is premised upon a denial of education's distinctive relationship to liberal learning and of its cultural value as a scholarly area of inquiry. Such reform measures do not only jeopardize education departments within undergraduate liberal arts institutions. In lengthening the time and increasing the cost of teacher preparation, they also threaten to limit the participation of ethnic minorities, the working poor, and many women in the work of teaching school.\(^{19}\) Colleges and universities committed to social responsibility and equality in education therefore face a moral challenge to assume a humanizing leadership role in ongoing debates about the nature, purpose, and values of education as a field of inquiry, and about the quality of teacher preparation programs.

Educational studies, and the preparation of school teachers as a part of such study, integrates areas that go beyond the liberal arts as traditionally understood. Many writers have promoted the importance of liberal inquiry, claiming that it improves "the life of the mind," increases tolerance, advocates a love of learning beyond a college education, and helps to civilize human life. These are clearly aims of central importance for many liberal arts advocates.\(^{20}\) What educational studies provides is the critically important function of questioning whether "the life of the mind" should be conceived apart from the pursuit of personal and social action. Taking various perspectives, recent philosophic critiques in educational studies have claimed that the rift between mind and body must be overcome.\(^{21}\) Implicitly, and often even explicitly, such challenges place liberal arts colleges in a position to make good on the promise of liberal
learning's transformative potential. Concerned with moral and political ideas, educational studies is equally committed to ethical conduct; committed to social justice, it seeks avenues for its concrete expression in practice; impressed with the need for reason, care, and reflection, it promotes practical actions that embody these qualities in a human context. Thus educational inquiry not only respects liberal learning, but articulates ways to further such learning in the real, social, interactive contexts in which people live. It seeks to bridge the chasm between theory and practice that has been sculpted into so many institutions of higher education.22

As a field of inquiry, the study of education must become an integral part of the institutions of higher education within which it resides. The effect of educational inquiry upon the student is not necessarily to "narrow the mind and spirit to an early practicality and specialization."23 Its peculiar power rests in an ability to enlarge the mind in ways that connect it to the body, to practical action, and to the social good. Educational inquiry in this way makes an important contribution to the liberal disciplines as traditionally conceived: it allows us to keep the promise of the latter as we move beyond a fragmented scholasticism. As a field of action, education has much to offer undergraduate students, regardless of their majors or anticipated occupations. At the same time, departments of education within colleges and universities make vital contributions to the life of higher education institutions and to other faculty members in particular. In situating education within the ongoing context of social life, it brings to awareness a variety of contemporary and perennial problems that must be faced. For example, the nature of literacy and its role in a democracy, the meaning of social inequality in contemporary society, the
problems associated with cultural diversity and pluralism within an homoge-
nized set of institutions and practices, are all educational issues that we
may help illuminate. More concretely, as people concerned with teaching
and learning, curriculum design and development, educational evaluation,
the development of a system of values to undergird social relationships,
and how these things happen within a set of institutional parameters, we
have something to offer our colleagues in higher education. Since we are
all teachers and educators, the community that comprises higher education
is already actively involved in those activities that constitute our pro-
fessional identity: the study of education.

The perspectives sketched here are obviously only a beginning at for-
mulating a set of ideas that can reaffirm the value of educational studies
within higher education. They do, however, capture a set of core ideas
with which this reaffirmation can proceed. What do these ideas imply for
the actual, concrete practice of teacher preparation?

Beginning in the fall of 1986, the preparation of school teachers was
fundamentally reconsidered at Cornell College. The previous programs em-
phasized the more or less standard array of courses in educational psychol-
ogy, methods and materials of specific subject area instruction, and the
provision of field experiences both before and as a part of student teach-
ing that seemed to emphasize a commitment to professional socialization for
students. There had been concerns expressed about components of the
teacher preparation program in this regard. Many faculty saw them as less
demanding, and less intellectually respectable, than other areas of the
college. One of the obvious gaps in the program was the absence of course-
work in the historical, philosophical, and sociological foundations of edu-
cation, though given the sentiments of B. O. Smith noted above, this might
be seen as a positive attribute of the programs that had been in existence at Cornell.

During the 1986-87 academic year, several of the existing courses were dropped, while new courses were created. In particular, we introduced new courses in the three foundational areas of study mentioned above, and also developed a course in educational psychology that consolidated courses in human development and learning theory, which had exhibited a substantial degree of overlap. A general course in secondary curriculum replaced a variety of more specific courses in methodology. More important than the creation of specific courses was the aim of a reorganized department generally. The aims of the reformulated Department of Education can be briefly summarized by noting the following ideas and intentions.

First, we intended that the study of education generally, and the preparation of school teachers for a teaching career in the public schools, be seen as important, vital concerns of all students, faculty, and administrators. To accomplish this, it was imperative that educational studies be accepted as a full partner in the liberal arts tradition of the college. Thus our courses and programs had to be seen as valuable educational offerings for all students, not only those planning to be school teachers. Likewise, it was crucial that we offer specific, introductory courses for non-majors, so that beginning students at Cornell were able to explore the study of education as an academic field of inquiry. Such courses make an important contribution to students' education, regardless of future majors or employment prospects.

Nearly all the courses recommended as our new curriculum were designed to explore a variety of educational issues and ideas that are not exclusively tied to the vocation of teaching. As liberally oriented courses,
they explore such perennial questions as the meaning of and responsibili-
ties associated with becoming an educated person, the relationship between
education and larger institutions and practices, and the educational values
necessitated by a truly democratic order.

In raising such fundamental questions, moreover, we prepare more ade-
quately that significant group of students planning to teach in our public
schools. Rather than regarding teaching as dominated by technical forms of
rationality that reduce teachers to technicians or managers, the new cur-
ricula emphasize the nature of teaching as a moral, political, and gender-
sensitive act. In short, one of the important bases for this new orienta-
tion to teacher education was a vision of teaching founded on praxis: the
integration of critical reflection and engaged practice.

Second, in an effort to recognize the essentially synthetic nature of
educational studies at Cornell, we also sought to engage cooperatively with
faculty in other departments to offer cross-listed, interdepartmental, and
team-taught courses. While this undertaking met with considerable resis-
tance initially, we have been able to make some progress on this front, as
I outline below.

Third, each of the courses we proposed was predicated on the notion
that the study of education must be intellectually rigorous, aimed at link-
ing educational theory and practice in the creation of an informed praxis,
and dedicated to helping students develop the capacities to think criti-
cally and reflectively, express written ideas and arguments cogently and
persuasively, and engage in dialogue and interactions that are thoughtful
yet assertive, reflective, and compassionate.

The new courses all emphasize the centrality of written and oral modes
of expression. Each involves major research efforts that entail concen-
trated attention to written and oral communication. These efforts are vital for all students, of course, and especially so for those planning to become school teachers.

We have made additional attempts to integrate the study of education with other departments and programs. For example, we have recommended that a new course, "Plato and the Origins of Western Educational Thought," be cross-listed and team-taught with the Department of Classics. Additionally, we have proposed that "History of U.S. Education" and "Educational Philosophies, Fiction, and Gender," be cross-listed with Women's Studies.

We have also suggested that the following courses be created:

1. "Introductory Seminar in Educational Studies," an elective that would be open to incoming freshmen.

For teacher certification:

2. "Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Ideology," which will combine both historical and theoretical issues in curriculum with the development of an approach to curriculum making for those seeking to become school teachers.

3. "Aesthetics and the Culture of Schooling," required of all elementary education students and those desiring secondary certification in the arts and humanities.


5. "Educational Praxis," a course explicitly concerned with relating issues and ideas in educational studies to the world of schooling.
6. "Senior thesis," which will combine the sort of reflective/analytic orientation of the program generally with experiences from student teaching.

Significantly, all the courses in this sequence for certification will require a substantial amount of field work in schools and/or other social institutions. These new courses, then, together with the four foundations courses already mentioned, plus the student teaching experience, will, if approved, comprise the certification programs at Cornell.

We have also recommended that a non-certification major be created for students interested in educational issues and analysis but not preparing to become school teachers. This highlights our view that the study of education should not be limited to a "professional" orientation that divorces educational questions from other areas of study. We have also proposed that the name of the department be changed to the "Department of Educational Studies."

These program and policy changes represent our attempts to articulate a different orientation to teacher preparation and educational studies. They highlight the synthetic nature of our field and our commitment to overcoming the same sort of dualisms with which John Dewey was centrally concerned. Such a conceptualization is especially timely, given the proposals for the reform of teacher preparation that are underway. More broadly, the ideas and programs discussed here are a way of continuing the discussion over the inseparable means and ends of education.
NOTES


5These ideas are explored in greater depth in Landon E. Beyer and Ken Zeichner, "Teacher Education in Cultural Context: Beyond Reproduction," in


7Ibid., p. 75.


12Katz, op. cit.


14Carnegie Forum Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, op. cit., p. 73.

15The Holmes Group, op. cit., p. 89.


