



Professing Education

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Editorial: A Marketplace of Ideas

Ken McClelland

Welcome to this issue of Professing Education. As professors of education we often find ourselves asking, “What should our students be learning in college?” Richard Rorty, in his book *Philosophy and Social Hope* directly challenges the merits of asking such a question. It is a question reflecting a remedial task, and for Rorty, the extent that nonvocational institutions of higher learning have to take on the kind of remedial work that should otherwise be accomplished at the lower levels represents a diminishment of the democratic potential of a humanistic higher education. Asking the question, “What should [students] learn in college?” is a bad question to be asking at the college or university level. To ask this kind of question, says Rorty, is to “suggest that [non-vocational] college faculties are instrumentalities that can be ordered to a purpose” (p. 125). Rorty continues with these words:

The temptation to suggest [that faculties can be ordered to a purpose] comes over administrators occasionally, as does the feeling that higher education is too important to be left to the professors. From an administrative point of view, the professors often seem self-indulgent and self-obsessed. They look like loose canons, people whose habit of setting their own agendas needs to be curbed. But administrators sometimes forget that college students badly need to find themselves in a place in which people are not ordered to a purpose, in which loose canons are free to roll about. The only point in having real live professors around instead of just computer terminals, videotapes and mimeoed lecture notes is that students need to have freedom enacted before their eyes by actual human beings. That is why tenure and academic freedom are more than just trade union demands. Teachers setting their own agendas – putting their individual, lovingly prepared specialties on display in the curricular cafeteria, without regard to any larger end, much less any institutional plan – is what non-vocational higher education is all about. (p. 125)

For Rorty, the university is an intellectual culture. It is meant to draw the forming (rather than the already formed) student into the eros of

learning. Professors ‘putting their individual, lovingly prepared specialties on display’ are fulfilling a function of freedom and growth within an intellectual culture. Their task is not to open the tops of their students’ heads and dump information in. Their task, at least from a liberal education perspective, is to fire their students’ imaginations. In many ways it is the task of creating the conditions of novelty. As Rorty (2000a) said in a lecture at the Museum of Modern Art: “The thing to do with novelty is just to be grateful for it, and to create the socio-political conditions which will ensure that there will be a lot more of it” (p. 5). Getting students to be comfortable with novelty and change is turning into an uphill battle.

It is very easy in administrative and government circles to put the majority of efforts into fine-tuning the expectations of what it is a university education should be offering and to lose sight of the individual. In the name of establishing those relevant “facts” that one should know in order to be considered an “educated” person, or in establishing curricula that will ensure solid career opportunities, students end up becoming mere receptacles for information, empty tool-boxes that need filling.

No wonder students get less and less joy out of learning and turn to an ever-increasing variety of quick-fix (and more entertaining) alternatives. As most such entertainment is now the product of the broader marketplace (rather than the intellectual/cultural marketplace of the university) so the university comes increasingly to be viewed and treated by students and their parents as an economic marketplace. One great misfortune then, is that today’s young people who come into the university are from the outset disconnected from the intellectual culture of the university. Young people still have a *joie de vivre* inside the university institution—partying, gaming, carousing, chatting online, having sex—but less and less are their joys and passions connected to what they learn and the larger intellectual environment of which they are a part. It is not that the other “fun” things are without importance. They are, in fact, centrally important to the forming of young people into adults. But such is only a facet of this forming and surely the university must stake its public reputation on more than merely being a funhouse for forming young adults whose intellectual passions are fused by no more than antecedently established career ambitions.

We invite our readership to a consideration of the climate that now dominates our higher (nonvocational) educational environments. As professors of education what do we profess in this marketplace? Enjoy this issue of *Professing Education*.

Induction Program for New Education Professors

Ruth McQuirter Scott

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The process of becoming a professor is complicated, and untenured professors tend to experience significant tensions in their professional lives (Badali, 2004). The primary areas of stress relate to juggling work load and time constraints as well as meeting increasingly high expectations for scholarly output. As seasoned professors retire in larger numbers and are replaced by new hires, these tensions will need to be addressed by universities.

The pre-service department in our faculty of education hired seven new tenure-track faculty members at the beginning of the 2005-2006 aca-

demical year. I was asked to develop an induction program that would ease the adjustment of these young professors to our mid-size, comprehensive university. Early in the fall, I met individually with each new hire to determine specific areas of interests and needs. Based on these findings, I invited staff and faculty from various departments to make presentations during an intensive day-long program. Topics included the following: developing a research agenda; sources of research funding; expectations for tenure and promotion; annual performance reports; committee functions and other service opportunities. Each

new hire was also given a copy of *Advice for New Faculty Members* (Boice, 2000).

In November, both new and experienced faculty members were invited to a workshop where common research interests were shared and potential collaborative projects explored. The Dean of the Faculty of Education subsequently provided funding for groups of faculty that wished to investigate a specific topic or issue.

Throughout the year I worked closely with the Centre for Teaching and Learning and Educational Technology. The director of the centre presented a workshop on developing teaching dossiers, and shared her experiences of mentoring faculty for tenure and promotion. A three-part series on conducting literature searches and reviews was provided by a research officer in the faculty of education.

The seven new hires will continue their induction program in year two, and will be joined by five new tenure-stream faculty members hired for the coming year. A further level of mentoring will be added for these new hires. Each person will be matched with a colleague teaching in his or her subject area. The mentors will provide advice and support in dealing with specific matters related to teaching, student-supervision, and the day-to-day functions of the department.

The experience of working with new faculty has been both gratifying and rejuvenating. It has helped me to reflect on the departmental and university culture and to see the institution through new eyes.

Badali (2004) calls for more targeted mentorship and orientation programs for new faculty. We hope that by committing time and institutional resources to our cadre of young professors, our faculty of education will be strengthened, and the careers of these individuals will be enriched.

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Implications of Equity and Diversity within the Standards Movement

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Recent studies have created enough documentation on the existence of an achievement gap that it seems we should be ready to move toward solutions. The first six years of the 21st Century attest to the growing diversity within our population and schools, as well as the implications for this nation's future successes. Now, more than ever, our educational system must consider all of its clients. This essay looks at the problems of equity in relationship to diversity, by analyzing the recent standards-based movement in U.S. education.

The Achievement Gap

The emotionally charged cost of the achievement gap reality cannot be denied. Citing legal cases that show

our march through time for the cause of equality could prove inspiring if not for the continued inequities made apparent through test scores. Wang and Kovach (1996) noted that the accomplishments of *Brown* "have fallen short of the vision of a universal school system that provides all children with equal access to education." Students are measured against publicly defined standards of achievement rather than being compared to national norms established by test companies. With the support of equity-focused educators like Garcia and Pearson "the setting of standards for all children becomes a completely open process . . . perhaps the hidden biases that have led to low level learning for poor and culturally diverse

student populations may become more visible” (cited in Lachat, 1999, p.4).

Standards-based Reform Movement

In the growing urgency to address the needs of the future, standards-based reform hopes to remove the guesswork of educating students by identifying what students should know and be able to do. An approach based on publicly defined standards of achievement instead of standardized tests has earned the support of equity-focused educators Eke, Garcia and Pearson in that “the setting of standards for all children becomes a completely open process . . . perhaps the hidden biases that have led to low level learning for poor and culturally diverse student populations may become more visible” (cited in Lachat, 1999, p.4).

Standards-based reform is founded on content standards that define what children should know and be able to do, and performance standards that set specific expectations for various levels of proficiency. Product is emphasized over process and skills in reasoning, problem-solving, and communication over accumulation of isolated facts. Assessment focuses on progress instead of failure, and the use of rubrics to identify growth. Utilization of these standards can aide: (a) state education agencies and test developers to design statewide assessment systems; (b) teachers to organize curriculum and instruction; (c) textbook publishers to develop educational resources for schools; (d) teacher pre-service and in-service programs (Lachat, 1999).

Equity and the Standards Movement

Standards could be a step in the right direction to address Slavin’s (1998) desire of building a high floor under the achievement of all children and replacing an *at-risk* label with an *at-promise* mind set. Equity-minded educators see the need to do so as an imperative for the future: “We cannot have a just or peaceful society if major segments of it see little hope for their children” (p. 8). In order to move beyond promise to fulfillment, equity and diversity must play an integral role in development and implementation of standards (Johnson, 1996). Lachat’s (1999) assertion that individuals involved in the standards-based movement are “committed to a vision of society where people of different backgrounds, cultures, and perceived abilities have equal access to a high quality education” offers an indication that such goals are conceivable (p. 3). Supporters like Ravitch believe the standards movement will form an effective alliance between the frequently combative ambitions of excellence and equity (cited in Lachat, 1999).

Educators, who are ready to jump on the reform bandwagon, believing that standards alone will address educational inequities, should heed Gordon’s warning that “it is immoral to begin by measuring outcomes” before we have addressed the inequities in funding, qualified teachers and instruction, and educationally sound environments (cited in Lachat, 1999, p. 9). As with all theoretically sound notions, reality checks are necessary. Lachat (1999) draws on a powerful statement from *Education Watch: The 1996 Education Trust State and National Data Book*:

The problem now is one of will. Experiences from real schools show that poor and minority students can excel if they are taught at high levels. But most schools don’t teach all students at the same high level. . . In fact, we have constructed an educational system so full of inequities that it actually exacerbates the challenges of race and poverty, rather than ameliorates them. Simply put, we take students who have less to begin with and give them less in school too. (p.9)

One has only to read Kozol’s *Savage Inequalities* (1991) and *Amazing Grace* (1995) to understand

the extent of these inequities. And realistically, some equity advocates fear the desire for excellence will leave disadvantaged, minority, and particularly LEP students behind, with justifications that socio-economic realities prevent attainment of the performance standards, followed by the accepted lowering of these standards (McKeon, 1994; Willie, 1997). Such consideration for equity issues prompted the development of a framework for *opportunities-to-learn* (OTL) to function within the standards construct (Stevens, 1996). The framework consists of the following:

1. The quality and availability of curricula, instructional programs, and instructional materials;
2. The extent to which curriculum, instruction, and assessment align with standards that reflect high expectations for students;
3. Teacher capacity to provide high-quality instruction;
4. Financial and programmatic resources that support high levels of learning, including technology, laboratories, and school libraries;
5. Teacher and administrator access to sustained, long-term professional development;
6. A safe and secure learning environment;
7. Parent and community involvement with the schools;
8. Non-discriminatory school policies (Lachat, 1999, p. 9 - 10).

While these opportunity-to-learn standards sound promising, their existence in theory is not tantamount to practice (McKeon, 1994). Compared to other industrialized countries, the United States has proven woefully inadequate in providing the funding necessary to equalize the educational experience for all children (Slavin, 1998). If a reform movement is to prove successful then political, economic, and community leaders will have to assume responsibility for the progress of this nation's future (Lachat, 1999; Slavin, 1998; Stevens, 1996).

Diversity, Teachers, Students, and the Standards Movement

Adopting the standards-based model is not a panacea by itself to address the issues of diversity for educators and students. Educators should continue to engage in the pedagogical dialogue necessary to move beyond the rhetoric of *high expectations for all* toward creating environments conducive to that mission. A correlation does seem to exist between the aims of multicultural education advocates (Banks, 1994; Haberman, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 1990) and the descriptors outlined by Lachat (1999) for students in standards-based learning. These descriptors hope to help students to:

1. Develop reasoning and problem-solving skills through real-world learning tasks;
2. Play an active role in constructing their own understanding of concept;
3. Explore issues and concepts in depth over time;
4. Take increased responsibility for their learning;
5. Use a wide range of resources including manipulatives and computer technology;
6. Participate in collaborative learning activities;
7. Demonstrate their understanding and skills (Lachat, p.13).

Given the realities of our developing population, and the increasing inclusion of the student, especially disadvantaged, minority and/or limited English proficiency students, in the learning process, educators should examine their own perceptions, practices, and policies as they seek to develop their roles in standards-based instruction. As such, they should:

1. Organize learning around what students need to know and be able to do;
2. Enrich their teaching by cultivating students' higher order thinking processes;
3. Guide student inquiry by posing real-life tasks that require reasoning and problem-solving;

4. Emphasize holistic concepts rather than fragmented units of information;
5. Provide a variety of opportunities for students to explore and confront concepts and situations over time;
6. Use multiple sources of information rather than a single text;
7. Work in interdisciplinary teams;
8. Use multiple forms of assessment to gather concrete evidence of student proficiencies (Lachat, 1999, p.13).

Including students as instruments in their own learning and the learning of others requires teachers to discover and utilize the wealth of cultural tools available to them (Delpit, 1995). Understanding and acknowledging the impact cultural diversity has on the educational process can assist educators and school communities in the development of environments equipped to meet high standards for all students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pang, 1994). The essential factor in creating these environments involves the support teachers require. Current research around implementation of standards indicates the need for considerable time and staff development for teachers whose classrooms are culturally diverse (Delpit, 1995; Lachat, 1999).

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Professing through Eulogy, Activity, and Memoriam: When Death Strikes a University Learning Community

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Death is often regarded as an uncomfortable topic in the regular “course curriculums” of the day. Yet death, like life, is an integral part of our *course of life* (Dewey, 1938). Avoiding the topic of death in education, especially when it hits us straight on in our own learning communities, is like avoiding the obvious of what we teach our students about how to live educationally in the course of their lives. That is, we seek to have our students study through inquiry. In this manner we live, as Dewey (1938) implies, a life pursued educationally. As a new assistant professor in the academic community, I write this piece to encourage the discussion of what a death means in educational contexts, of what supports there are in learning communities for students, faculty, and family and on what is involved in getting community involved in a university setting. This includes professors’ actions in the community as, in the examples that follow, writing a eulogy for a student that has passed, involving students in activities to celebrate a peer, and bringing university and family communities together.

When we lost Caitlin

When we lost Caitlin, a third-year student, to a tragic car accident, it significantly shook up our educational community in the teacher pre-service and undergraduate -graduate departments at the Faculty of Education. I was Caitlin’s professor and taught her a curriculum foundation course in the third year of her Concurrent Education Program at Brock University.

Even though I knew Caitlin for a limited time, our foundation class was one where thirty students explored their personal philosophy of education by examining those qualities of teaching that meant most to them - qualities such as integrity, trust, care, respect, authenticity, diversity, and, most of all, relationships in education practices (Ontario College of Teachers Foundations of Professional Practice, 2006). Our class was transformed into a close-knit community as we reflected deeply on our insights into professional and personal teacher knowledge and learning. The effect was powerful, and when the course was completed, students remained connected through their writings in a unique longitudinal project that continues today (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2007a; Ciuffetelli Parker, 2007b). When Caitlin tragically passed away, in the midst of ‘the course of life’, it was obvious that her classmates as well as the larger university community reacted in shock, and it was equally obvious that there was a need for some sort of intervention to support the loss at a university community level.

University support system

As personal messages came through my voice and email from my students, I felt a moral obligation as their professor to support them in a caring, open, honest, and accepting manner, rooted in the integrity and ethical virtues of presence, responsibility, and authenticity (Starratt, 2004). I committed myself to be

present in the grieving process, to be responsible to take action in order to provide comfort for my students and our community, and to be authentic in this process as best as I could.

The Chair of the Pre-service Department, knowing a little about the strong community that was forged in the course described earlier, approached me asking if I would attend the funeral in Ottawa on behalf of the university. I gladly obliged. Attending the funeral, meeting Caitlin's parents in person, and speaking personally with a handful of students - who were lucky enough to be able to make the trip - led me to realize that a formal memorial for Caitlin needed to take place back at Brock University for the many peers, professors and the community of learners that could not be present in Ottawa. I felt that these people still needed to be supported in order that they could start to make sense of the tragedy through their lived community. Caitlin's parents were grateful for any celebration that might take place to honour their daughter in the university setting. Our relationship strengthened throughout this deliberation process as I formed ideas for the memorial, ensuring as well that Caitlin's parents were in approval of such plans throughout all stages of the process.

I approached key people. One was the Director of the Concurrent Education Program. The other was the Chaplain of the University. Both agreed to support and commit to a memorial service on behalf of Caitlin. I became the liaison between family, friends, and community members. Meetings were set up to discuss what activities and ideas best shaped a memorial service for Caitlin and were facilitated by the Chaplain. We met together with students, brainstormed unique writing and presentation ideas to honour Caitlin's life, designed invitations for the memorial, suggested musical interludes performed by Caitlin's own peers, and so on. Caitlin's parents received a formal invitation to attend the memorial from the Dean of Education. The Director of Concurrent Education began a process to inquire about a *posthumous* degree for Caitlin, details of which would be announced at the memorial. I began the process of writing a eulogy, which led me to have much more intimate contact with Caitlin's parents.

Writing the eulogy

When Caitlin died, like everyone else I was in shock. In the fifteen years of being an educator in school systems I had never lost a student before. Immediately, I turned to that with which I felt most comfortable, Caitlin's own writing. Because my students' critical writing pieces were part of a larger research project that began during the course that year, I had their writings as collected data. I re-read all of Caitlin's writings for the course. The pieces affected me profoundly, down to the bones. She had written on topics such as: the meaning of educational life; education as communication and community; and how death matters to education and how it too should be a part of the curriculum particularly when tragedy strikes. Immediately, I knew that I had to incorporate Caitlin's writings into the eulogy and that, more important, the writings would drive the core meaning of her life as her last written expressions. To proceed with such a task as using Caitlin's own words and then contextualizing them for further meaning in a eulogy, I knew I needed to ask permission from her parents. They immediately consented. The consent was made easy, perhaps, because of the close-knit relationship that had already formed. However, my suggestion here to ask consent follows from my ethical duty to care, and the recognition that the eulogy itself is a message both given and received. It mattered that Caitlin's family be informed about the content.

The Memorial

Nel Noddings (2005), in a recent university address, tells us that to know happiness, one must first know what it means to not be happy. Grief, undeniably, is an emotion of great depth of sadness and unhappiness. To come through it, for certain, means that we need to feel the extent of that unhappiness without falling into the abyss of despair. For the university and family community that mourned Caitlin during a memorial on

October 3, 2006 at Brock University, this event became a “rite of passage” to both feel the pain in order to feel the happiness of Caitlin’s life.

Students volunteered for many activities. Some welcomed the congregation as they walked in, giving out programs and directing them to sign the guest book, view the photographs, and read some of Caitlin’s passages which were displayed. Others sat with their own writings in hand, waiting to deliver their last “letter” to Caitlin in an oral presentation during the memorial.

Two students gave of their gift of music. One played the piano as an opening and closing to the celebration. Another played the guitar and sang a harmonic melody that gave further insight into the collegial relations Caitlin had made in our course.

The Chaplain facilitated the memorial, asking key members to approach and speak: the Dean of Education; the Director of the Concurrent Education Program; myself as Caitlin’s professor and reader of the eulogy; Caitlin’s parents. There was a beautiful over-sized urn of sand placed at the center of the room. As each member spoke, they lit a candle and placed the light in the sand.

Key moments came when students were welcomed to read or say anything they wished to or about Caitlin. Many chose, as in the activities of our course, to write a letter to Caitlin. These were type-set and placed in a memorial book for Caitlin’s family to keep.

For me, as a professor who chose to be involved intimately in this process, the greatest moment of honour came when I spoke Caitlin’s own words. I wanted to be able to share Caitlin’s voice. Ultimately, I wanted to make new meaning of our lives as teachers, students, and learners. Caitlin herself wanted the same. I share here an excerpt of her final words:

I think that, if possible, we should try and view death as a learning experience; I know this is really hard to do while you are in the situation or it is occurring around you, but once there has been time to reflect, we can become better for it. . . . My words intertwine the beginning and the ending, as they provide for me not only closure, [but] an opening into a new way of being. . . . I now believe, and know, that there exists a flip side to this equation: one which is faith. And I think that is perhaps the best I can ask for from life. (Caitlin McCracken, 2006)

My hope is that this narrative and example of what happens in university communities when tragedy strikes, in any form, can provide some usefulness to the support system that exists and to the potential of all members of the community gathering together to provide aid towards a healing process. Caitlin’s parents remain in communication with a university that provided significance to their daughter’s life. They have indicated recently that they wish to continue honouring Caitlin in her university community by setting a bursary in her name, to be rewarded to a recipient whose writing, communication, and analysis of ideas excel, as they did with Caitlin. Caitlin McCracken will graduate posthumously with her peers.

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Teaching as Scholarship: Improving Teacher Education Through Self-Study

Julian Kitchen
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When I became a professor, I made a commitment to scholarship, teaching, and service. While all three are important, few would dispute the primacy of scholarship for tenure, promotion, and compensation in comprehensive universities and, yes, even in faculties of education. As an education professor, I am not blind to the irony of making teaching subservient to scholarship in my discipline.

Sometimes I am tempted to leap onto the ramparts in a quixotic effort to usurp scholarship from its throne. Surely it is time for teaching and service to assume their rightful places as equal members of the triumvirate! As an assistant professor, however, I resist the temptation to become an academic martyr to a noble cause. Nor is sacrifice necessary.

Indeed, there is a growing recognition that teaching should be recognized as a form of scholarship. Hutching and Shulman (1999) argue that the scholarship of *teaching* should be recognized as “the fourth of four scholarships” (p. 12), alongside the scholarship of *discovery* (pursuit of new knowledge), the scholarship of *integration* (fitting knowledge into larger patterns and contexts), and the scholarship of *application* (engagement with real world problems). With encouragement from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, many universities are developing the infrastructure to support professors researching their practice. Education professors are particularly well situated to take advantage of the opportunities for scholarship on *teaching*.

What is Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices?

Self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) is a way for teacher educators to apply inquiry skills to reflect on their practices. Self-study allows teacher educators “to maintain a focus on their teaching and on their students’ learning” (Loughran, 2002), while engaging in scholarly practice. Self-study is a methodology characterized by examination of the role of the self in the research project and “the space between self and the practice engaged in” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). According to Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), it is through written reflection and teacher conversations that we negotiate the tensions between ourselves and our contexts, between biography and history. Self-study has proved highly compatible with other research methods as it has “used various qualitative methodologies and has focused on a wide range of substantive issues” (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001, p. 305).

In recent years, collaboration among teacher educators has become one of the defining characteristics of self-study (Lighthall, 2004). While self-study is primarily a personal inquiry, researchers benefit by working with collaborators who help them “step outside” themselves in order to notice patterns and trends in their work (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 14). Collaborative self-studies offer possibilities for connecting across programs and institutions (Loughran, 2002).

Self-study is having an impact on teaching and teacher education. Teacher educators committed to self-study have developed strong networks nationally and internationally. The S-STEP Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research

Association is a venue in which teacher educators share their reflections on practice. The bi-annual International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices at Herstmonceux Castle in England attracts scholars from around the world. There is also an international journal, *Studying Teacher Education*, and a handbook, *International Handbook on Self-study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices*.

Self-Study Scholarship

The possibilities for self-study of teacher education practices are almost limitless. The breadth of possibilities is evident from the papers included in the proceedings of The Sixth International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices titled *Collaboration and Community: Pushing the Boundaries through Self-Study* (Fitzgerald, Heston, & Tidwell, 2006).

Papers include individual reflections on technology-mediated learning, mathematics instruction, assessment practices, preservice teacher knowledge, and the challenges of teacher education reform. My contribution to the volume, titled “Reflecting on the Feedback Loop in Reflective Practice: A Teacher Educator Responds to Reflective Writing by Preservice teachers” (Kitchen, 2006), involved a review of my comments to teacher candidates over seven years as a “seconded” teacher educator working in a one-year teacher education program. In preparing the article, I coded my comments to students and identified eight categories of response. The process of examining my comments “made explicit the tension I experience as I seek to balance personally validating preservice teachers with criticism of their professional practice” (p. 150). In responding to reflective portfolios, I now explicitly review these categories to improve the quality of my feedback to teacher candidates. Similar processes may be helpful to other teacher educators who respond in writing to the reflective portfolios of their students.

More than half the conference papers were co-authored. Collaboration has become a significant trend, as many people find greater meaning when they reflect alongside peers who work immediately alongside them or from half-way around the globe. Collaborative self-studies included two math teachers grappling with dilemmas in teaching algebra, an examination of an institutional accreditation process, dialogue in self-study, and a self-study of a community of learning researchers. For example, after deconstructing the process of teacher education innovation over the past nine years, Martin and Russell (2006) raise important questions about the ways in which institutional cultures act as impediments to meaningful changes in teacher education. Through an examination of their own teaching and a review of focus groups on teacher candidates’ views of reforms, the authors offer insights into the “invisible cultural assumptions” in teacher education (p. 189). For Martin and Russell, self-study offers an alternative critical vantage point on teacher education processes. Kosnik, Samaris, and Freese (2006), who work in three universities thousands of miles apart, examine their emails and dialogues at self-study conferences to consider why their collaboration worked, its limitations, and how this collaboration has influenced their work at their home universities. This article offers interesting insights into the power of collaboration to foster “a sense of intellectual safety in a non-competitive and highly supportive culture” (p. 154). These collaborative experiences were often in stark contrast to their experiences in their home universities.

Conclusion

It is vital that professors engage in scholarship on their own practice. Such scholarship is a means to incrementally restoring the balance among scholarship, teaching, and service. The self-study of teacher education practices, by promoting reflection on the intersection between theory and practice in our own classrooms, can also play a critical role in improving teaching, and, by extension, learning in schools.

In my university, eight tenure-track education faculty have formed a self-study community that supports teaching as scholarship and is committed to improving our pre-service teacher education program.

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Book Review

Full Title: Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future

Author: Gert J. J. Biesta

Publisher: Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers

Paperback 171 pages

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Richard Rorty has pointed out that certain words go to the core of existence for different people at different times. These words represent a nucleus of values that provide coherence for various life stories. Previously, core words such as ‘monarchy’ and ‘honor’ held sway over medieval male court life, while today words such as ‘freedom’ and ‘self’ provide both anchors and movement for many in liberal democratic societies. Getting closer to home, what could be more sacred than core words such as ‘learning’ and ‘democracy’ for professors of education? There are public schools everywhere that proudly say “Student Learning Is Our Number One Goal,” and it would be difficult to find anyone in the foundations of education not willing to express a strong heart-felt commitment to democracy. However, as Daniel Dennett has clearly articulated in his new book, *Breaking the Spell*, holy words can take us to unholy places, whether we realize it or not. In order for us to see where we are going as educators, Gert Biesta, in *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* invites us to look through some key words we are using in terms of their unarticulated assumptions and consequences. In so doing, he points to new places to go and unique ways to get there.

Biesta’s book deals with the “question of how to live with others in a world of plurality and difference” (p. ix). In order to do this he argues that we do not need to posit a common definition of humanity to begin with. Rather, we need to look at the question of what it means to be human as a radically open question “that can only be answered by engaging in education rather than a question that needs to be answered before we can educate” (p. ix). With this in mind we can focus on education rather than socialization, which is the “insertion of newcomers into a pre-existing order of humanity” (p. 7) and can move away from the language of economics that tends to see students as consumers of learning tied to content that needs to be acquired from providers. This move away from an instrumental language of economics to an educational language enables us to focus on unique singular beings who come into presence by way of relationships of responsivity and responsibility. This view of humans as “coming into presence” moves us from a technological attitude that sees education as an instrument for bringing about predetermined ends to an educational attitude that says that “we become somebody through the way in which we engage with what we learn” (p. 94). Biesta says that this educational attitude requires trust without grounds, transcendental violence, and responsibility without knowledge.

Trust without grounds is the recognition that all education involves real risks of learning “things that you couldn’t have imagined that you would learn or that you couldn’t have imagined that you would have wanted to learn” (p. 25). Education involves the risk of finding out things about the world or ourselves that

might confuse or disturb what we presently hold true. Risk-free education is a contradiction in terms. We do not only learn what is prescribed but also what is implied, covered up, or pointed to. Oscar Wilde said that “those who go below the surface do so at their own peril.” This certainly is true of educators who do not try to “cover” material but really try to uncover, discover, and recover meanings.

Building on the risk involved in education, transcendental violence deals with seeing “learning as a disturbance, as an attempt to reorganize and reintegrate as a result of disintegration” (p. 27). This is in contrast to the economic perspective of seeing learning as the painless process of acquiring larger and larger quantities of knowledge and skills that will be useful in the marketplace. As Biesta sees it, “education is a form of violence in that it interferes with the sovereignty of the subject by asking difficult questions and creating difficult encounters” (p. 29). There is no nice and easy approach to authentic responsivity and responsibility. There are only difficult encounters of the educational kind.

Responsibility without knowledge means that an educator cannot know in advance all that is involved in unique, particular educational relationships. Acting without complete knowledge requires a teacher to respond to the subjectivity of the student in a caring and challenging way so that the student can come into the world in a unique and deeper way. As was pointed out earlier, this involves disturbances and risks and runs contrary to the antiseptic outcomes based approaches to learning that are stressed in curriculum guidelines throughout the world.

Creating the conditions that enable our students to responsibly bring their beginnings into a world of plurality and difference is a part of the democratic challenge for educators. Biesta, however, points out that democracy can be seen as individualistic, social, or political. Individualistic democracy builds on the Kantian idea of educating for the production of the rational, autonomous person. Biesta argues that this is objectionable because the outcome focuses on the pre-arranged development of the isolated individual. Social democracy, as stressed by Dewey, recognizes the interactive conception of democratic education but also, according to Biesta, carries instrumentalist tendencies regarding the production of such individuals and thus does not possess a radical openness. It is political democracy, as described by Hannah Arendt, which best fits the approach that Biesta is pointing towards. Political democracy is based on developing the conditions that call forth the performances of democratic subjectivity. The possibilities of these conditions can be used as criteria for judging schools and society. Education is about what people learn in and through their performances of their democratic subjectivities. These performances move us beyond preconceived role playing and script following.

I tend to be suspicious of educational books that have ‘beyond’ in their titles. It seems to me that ‘beyond’ is often a pseudo-Nietzschian hype word that provides more promise and promotion than analysis and insight. Sometimes authors throw out a ‘beyond’ like I throw out an imaginary stick when I walk my dog. My hope is that she will bring something back so we move beyond the imaginary. Occasionally, she brings back a really good stick and we both have a better, more satisfying experience. Biesta, although not throwing out hype or an imaginary idea, throws out an imaginative analysis of, and insight into, how words such as ‘learning’ and ‘democracy’ are taking us on a speedy corporate/consumer path in which we ignore each other and the world. There are more responsive and responsible ways to move, and more educative places we need to go. Biesta deconstructs and reconstructs learning and democracy in the hope that all of us can have more satisfying and responsible educational experiences as we move beyond the controlling assumptions of the current regimes of power. Such hope is a good that needs to be guarded, acted upon, and extended.

There is a saying in education: “Try, try, try to be inspiring. If you cannot be inspiring, at least be methodical.” *Beyond Learning: Democratic Education for a Human Future* is on the side of inspiration and is certainly a good antidote to the current educational mantra that says: “Try, try, try to be methodical. If you cannot be methodical, be even more methodical.” Inspiration is about breathing new life into unique life forms. Biesta’s book has this possibility. It deserves to be discussed and should call forth some new ways of thinking and responding to what goes on in the name of education. Learning and democracy may never be the same.

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