30. Letter from Ma[illegible] n, October 11, 1960, Rec[illegible] Series 6-1.
31. Fred M. Hechin[illegible] to Aid the Gifted Woman," *The New York Times*, November 20, 1960, p. 1. This same phrasing is used repeatedly in early Institute literature.
32. "Oral Memoir," p. 86.
33. *Ibid*, p. 91.
34. Cless in Astin, p. 18.
35. Constance Smith was a former colleague of Bunting's at Douglass/Rutgers where she was a tenured associate professor of government, as well as director of research at Rutgers' Eagleton Institute for Politics. She became director of the Institute in the fall of 1960, and served in that post until her death in 1970.
36. "Oral Memoir," p. 118.
37. The stipend was seen originally as child care support, rather than salary replacement. In the mid-1970s, when the Institute targeted fellows who were working full-time in academe, the stipend more than doubled, and the directors began an ongoing effort to match the stipend more closely to fellows' foregone salaries.
38. Report of the Director, *The Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study*, 1963, unpaginated [p. 9].
39. Mary I. Bunting, "The Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study," *Educational Record* (October 1961), p. 283.
40. Alice Kimball Smith (second Director of the Institute), in *The Radcliffe Institute, 1960 to 1971*, Radcliffe College, 1971, in Radcliffe College Archives.
41. From "The Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study," pamphlet announcing the Institute, November, 1960.
42. Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), table 6, p. 133, and supporting discussion in Chapter 8, pp. 115-140.

The Trouble with Ed Schools

By David F. Labaree

Everyone complains about education schools and their negative influence on American schools, but no one bothers to consider why they became such tempting targets. And few have been willing to acknowledge that these stigmatized institutions are wrestling (however unsuccessfully) with tough issues that the rest of academe tries to ignore.

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This is supposed to be the era of political correctness on American university campuses, a time when speaking ill of oppressed minorities is taboo. While academics have to tiptoe around most topics, however, there is still one subordinate group that can be shelled with impunity, and that is the collection of sad sacks who inhabit the university's education school. There is no need to take aim at this target because it is too big to miss, and there is no need to worry about hitting innocent bystanders because everyone associated with this institution is understood to be guilty as charged.

For academics and the general public alike, ed school bashing has long been an pleasant pastime. It

is so much a part of ordinary conversation that, like talking about the weather, you can bring it up anywhere with the assurance that it will draw a response and offend no one.

Of course, education in general is a source of chronic concern and an object of continuous criticism for most Americans. As the annual Gallup poll of attitudes toward education regularly shows, however, citizens give good grades to their local schools at the same time that they express strong fears about the quality of public education elsewhere in the country (Elam & Rose, 1995). The vision is one of general threats to education that may not have reached the neighborhood school quite yet but may do so in the near future. These threats include everything from multicultural curriculum to the decline in the family, the influence of television, and the consequences of chronic poverty.

One such threat is the hapless and baleful education school, whose incompetence and misguided ideas are seen as both producing poorly prepared teachers and promoting inadequate curriculum. For the public at large, this institution is remote enough to be suspicious (unlike the local school) and accessible enough to be scorned (unlike the more arcane realms of the university). And for the university faculty, it is the ideal scapegoat, which allows blame for problems with schools to fall upon teacher education in particular rather than higher education in general.

There is a vigorous and expanding literature that fortifies the already robust consensus about the negative influence of education schools. One recent example is Rita Kramer's 1991 diatribe, *Ed School Follies: The Miseducation of America's Teachers*, which draws its spirit and its subtitle from James Koerner's 1963 classic in this genre, *The Miseducation of American Teachers*. The latter book defines the basic array of complaints that critics have directed toward education schools over the years. First, there is the faculty: "the inferior quality of the Education faculty is **the** fundamental limitation of the field..." (p. 17) Then there are the students: "Education students still show up poorly on standardized tests and still impress members of the academic faculty as being among their less able students..." (p. 18) And finally, the curriculum: "Course work in Education deserves its ill-repute. It is most often puerile, repetitious, dull, and ambiguous—incontestably" (p. 18).

This kind of complaining about ed schools is as commonplace as griping about the cold in the middle of winter. But there is something new in the defamatory discourse about these beleaguered institutions, and that is the fact that the attacks are now coming from their own leaders. The deans of many of the leading education schools in the country issued a report in 1995 which indicts their own colleges for crimes against education, prescribes a radical regime of rehabilitation, and calls for the death penalty for any institutions that resist.

The new report is the culmination of a process that began ten years ago, when the deans from approximately 100 research-oriented colleges of education in major universities formed themselves into an organization known as the Holmes Group for purposes of promoting educational reform. Since its founding, the

Group has issued reports calling for change in three major areas of American education. It argued for the professionalization of teaching in *Tomorrow's Teachers* (1986), for the development of school-university partnerships (known as professional development schools) in *Tomorrow's Schools* (1990), and for a transformation in ed schools in *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* (1995). The latest report presents a harsh attack on the Holmes Group's own member institutions, those university-based education schools that produce the bulk of the nation's educational research and educational doctorates.

In the report, the deans don what they call "the hair shirt of self-criticism" (p. 5), accusing education schools of "dwell[ing] in a bygone era" (p. 7) and being engaged in practices that "cannot be tolerated and will only exacerbate the problems of public education" (p. 6). The faculty—afflicted with a "negative attitude," "lack of will," and "considerable inertia" (p. 88)—are portrayed as frequently "ill-equipped to help without professional development" or as "diehards who hold the potential to undermine the entire [reform] effort" (p. 92).

Not a pretty picture, certainly, but it gets worse. For the problem goes beyond issues of competence and will, extending into the very ethos of the institution. According to the report, these education schools are so caught up in the futile pursuit of academic credibility within the university that they have chosen to turn their backs on the needs of the students and teachers in America's schools:

> Many [education school] professors go about their teaching and research with hardly a nod toward the public schools, seldom if ever deigning to cross the thresholds of those "lowly" places. Such attitudes transmit an unmistakable message. The people most intimately responsible for children's learning in elementary and secondary schools are not sufficiently valued by the education school. Schoolteachers and young learners, who should be the focus of the education school's concern, are kept at arm's length. They are a sideshow to the performance in the center ring, where professors carry out their work insulated from the messiness and hurly-burly of elementary and secondary education. (p. 17)

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that the report calls for education schools to change their ways "or surrender their franchise" (p. 6).

Therefore it seems that education schools are not only characterized by weak faculty, students, and curriculum—the gist of the standard critique—but they also don't seem to care about teachers and students, and they have chosen to turn their backs on the pressing needs of American education. The difference this time is not only that the critique of these institutions has been enlarged but also that it is coming from their own deans. With friends like these, who needs enemies? One reading of this report suggests that education schools have been the object of ridicule for so long that their own leaders have started joining in—on the theory that it is better to try to lead the opposition to your own institutions than to attempt a defense of the indefensible.

So how did things get this bad? What are the conditions that bring a field to

the point where the victims start joining the victimizers? What **is** the trouble with ed schools anyway, and what are the major sources of this trouble?

No occupational group or subculture acquires a negative label as widely accepted and deeply rooted as this one—to the point where its own leaders accept the label and chime in to confirm its validity—unless there is a long history of status deprivation. Chronic status problems have clearly been the historical norm for the American ed school, but the reasons for this situation are rarely given much consideration by either external or internal critics of these institutions, on the apparently sensible grounds that there is little use in belaboring the obvious: Ed schools are weak and irrelevant because everyone and everything associated with them is inferior, so why look farther?

These truisms mask a more interesting story, however, one that presents a more sympathetic if not much more flattering portrait of the education school, but one that also portrays the rest of academe in a manner that is less self-serving than in the standard account. Part of this story is historical, focusing on the way that American policymakers, taxpayers, students, and universities all ended up collectively producing exactly the kind of education school they wanted. Part of it is structural, focusing on the nature of teaching as a form of social practice and the problems involved in trying to prepare people to pursue this practice.

Ironies abound in this story of American education schools. In part, these institutions may have acquired—and earned—their universal disrepute by successfully adapting themselves to all of the demands that we have placed on them. And in part, this disregard may have come about because of their all-too-frequently unsuccessful efforts to have a positive impact on an area about which Americans care a great deal, their public schools. By way of comparison, it is interesting to note that most of the other academic units in the university maintain their high social standing by studiously avoiding this kind of commitment to social problem-solving, which would put to the test their claims of educational effectiveness.

The result is that by examining the trouble with ed schools, we may be able to gain insight into some of the problems affecting American education at all levels. So let's look at some of the basic elements that define this story and consider the lessons that might emerge from it.

Market Pressures in the Past

Some education schools were created from scratch within existing universities beginning around 1900, but a large number found their origins in the normal schools that emerged in the second half of the 19th century. The latter institutions were founded for the purpose of preparing public school teachers. In their early days, the founders had heady dreams for the normals, seeing them as model institutions that would establish high-quality professional preparation for teachers

along with a strong professional identity. And for a time, some of these schools came close to realizing these dreams.

Before long, however, burgeoning enrollments in the expanding common schools in the United States produced an intense demand for new teachers to fill a growing number of classrooms, and the result was that the normal school began to turn into a **teacher factory**. The challenge it faced was clear. If normals didn't produce a large number of teachers in a short period of time and at a low cost per candidate, the thousands of school districts around the country would just hire teachers without this or perhaps any form of professional preparation. So normal schools adapted by increasingly emphasizing quantity over quality in educating future teachers, establishing a disturbing but durable pattern of weak professional preparation and low academic standards.

As normal schools grew to meet this employer demand, they also had to confront a strong consumer demand from their own students. For many of the latter, normal schools were more attractive as an accessible form of higher education than as a school for educating teachers. Located close to home, unlike the more centrally-located state universities and land grant colleges, the normal schools were also easier to get into and less costly. In short, they acted as true "**people's colleges**," more so than the land grant schools that were traditionally awarded this title.

What happened was that a large number of students enrolled who had little or no interest in teaching but who wanted an advanced educational credential (as a ticket of admission to a variety of attractive white collar positions). They naturally resisted being trapped within a single vocational track—the teacher preparation program—and demanded a wide array of college-level liberal arts classes and programs. Since normal schools were heavily dependent on tuition for their survival (like nearly all American institutions of higher education, both then and now), these institutions had little choice but to comply with the demands of their customers.

One result was to reinforce the already-established tendency toward minimizing the extent and rigor of teacher education. Another was to encourage normal schools to adapt organizationally by transforming themselves into the model of higher education that their customers wanted. By the turn of the century normal schools began to evolve into teachers' colleges (with a variety of baccalaureate programs for nonteachers) and then continued to evolve upward and outward—into state liberal arts colleges in the 1920s and 1930s and into general-purpose regional state universities in the 1970s and 1980s.

As the evolving colleges moved away from being normal schools, teacher education programs became increasingly marginal within their own institutions, which were coming to imitate the multipurpose university by giving pride of place to academic departments, graduate study, and preparation for the more prestigious professions. Under these circumstances, teacher education came to be perceived

as every student's second choice (if more elevated possibilities did not pan out), and the ed school faculty came to be seen as second-class citizens in the academy—not real university professors but just "normalites" who ended up in the university through a quirk of educational history.

The irony of this history is that normal schools did just what both school districts and students asked them to do and suffered mightily for their compliance. At the end of this century-long organizational evolution, teacher educators found themselves perched uncomfortably in their new university home, with a disabling legacy of watered-down programs and marginal status.

Market Pressures in the Present

Market pressures on education schools have changed over the years but they have not markedly declined. Teaching is a very large occupation in the United States, consisting of about three million practitioners in total, and as a result approximately one in every five college graduates every year must enter teaching in order to fill all the available vacancies. If education schools do not prepare a sufficient number of teacher candidates, state legislators are happy to authorize alternative routes into the profession (requiring little or no professional education) and school boards are quite willing to hire such prospects in order to place warm bodies in empty classrooms. Current Republican efforts to promote charter schools and decentralize control over education only serve to reinforce this trend by pushing to let the market deal with issues of teacher quality rather than assigning this responsibility to state certification procedures and formal programs of teacher education.

What this means is that the teacher-factory problem has not gone away. Education schools that try to increase the duration and rigor of teacher preparation, by focusing more intensively on smaller cohorts of students, risk leaving the bulk of teaching in the hands of practitioners who are prepared at less demanding institutions or who have not been prepared at all. In addition, such efforts run into strong opposition from within the university.

Universities may not value education students for the prestige they bring, but they have always valued them for the ways in which they help meet other institutional needs. One big issue is numbers. With public universities receiving their funding primarily on the basis of the number of students—through a combination of tuition payments and per-capita appropriations—these institutions rely on teacher education to help maintain sufficient student numbers by offering students access to a sure-fire postgraduate occupational opportunity. As a result, universities are not at all happy at the prospect of seeing their teacher factories turned into boutique programs for the preparation of a few highly-professionalized teachers. This is particularly the case because traditional mass-production teacher education programs have been so cost-effective, generating a nice surplus which can be

used to subsidize more prestigious but less lucrative areas of university life.

There is also another related source of institutional resistance that arises whenever education schools try to promote quality over quantity. This resistance comes from academic departments, which have traditionally relied on education to provide high school teaching credentials as a practical inducement for students to major in impractical subjects. Departments such as English, history, and music have sold themselves to undergraduates for years with the argument that "you can always teach" these subjects. As a result, these same departments become upset when education starts to talk about moving in the direction of upgrading, downsizing, or limiting access.

Serving Stigmatized Populations

What this suggests is that market pressures have seriously undercut both the status and the role of education schools—that is, both their location in the hierarchy of higher education and their ability to carry out their educational functions effectively. Aggravating these problems still further is the fact that education schools have been asked to serve a wide array of stigmatized populations. One such population is **women**. At the point in American educational history when the goal of universal enrollment first emerged (in the middle of the 19th century), teaching came to be defined as women's work, and it has largely remained so ever since. (Currently, about 70 percent of teachers are women.)

One reason for this was ideological, since nurturing the young and providing moral education were seen as naturally within the female sphere. Another was practical, since women would work for half the pay of men and thus helped subsidize the rapid expansion of school enrollments. But the end result is that teaching, like nursing and secretarial work, has been indelibly identified with women. And this has made the task of educating teachers less prestigious than the task of preparing practitioners for traditionally male-dominated occupations, such as law, medicine, engineering, and business.

Another stigmatized population served by the education school has been the **working class**. Teaching has been and continues to be in many ways the archetypal middle-class job—respectable knowledge-based white-collar work. But at the same time, it has offered modest pay and no career ladder for future advancement. (The starting teacher and the veteran of 30 years both occupy the same position; the only chance for "promotion" is to leave the classroom and enter administration.)

The result is that teaching has often been more attractive to candidates from the working class, for whom it represented an accessible way of attaining middle class standing, than for middle-class women and men (especially men) who had other prospects. This means that the education schools that taught these students have been seen by others in the university as bearing the stigma of the parvenu.

Not only are education schools latecomers to the university (bearing the stigma of their normal school lineage), but also their own students have often come from a lower class background than the average liberal arts student.

A third stigmatized population served by the education school is **children**. The status hierarchy of education is clear in linking the status of the teacher closely with the age and academic stage of the student—from doctoral study at the one end of the scale all the way down to pre-school at the other end. Anyone who doubts the lowly status associated with working with children should only consider the pay and prestige of the child-care worker, who stands at the bottom of this particular age-graded food chain. Part of the problem with education schools, therefore, is that they are indelibly associated with children, in a society that rewards adult-contact work more than child-contact work and in a university setting that is more concerned with serious adult matters than with kid stuff.

Finally, there is the uncertain position of the **teacher** herself in American life. It is not enough that teachers have stigmatized associations of gender, class, and age, but they also suffer from an American bias in favor of doing over thinking. Teachers are the largest and most visible single group of intellectual workers in the United States—that is, people who make their living through the production and transmission of ideas. More accessible than the others in this category, they constitute the street-level intellectuals of our society. In fact, teachers are the only intellectuals with whom most people will ever have close contact.

Therefore teachers take the brunt of the national prejudice against mere book-learning and those pursuits that are scornfully labeled as only "academic." Whereas real professions transplant hearts, prosecute criminals, design skyscrapers, and build businesses, teachers worry about textbooks and tests and homework exercises. Of course the work of the lofty university professor is academic in all senses of the word, but it so thoroughly abstruse as to be out of reach and beyond the experience of the ordinary citizen. The education school professor, however, is associated with the practitioner of what are apparently the most mundane of intellectual tasks, which are seen as neither particularly useful nor especially obscure.

Forms of Knowledge

Another problem facing education schools is the kind of knowledge they must contend with and the way this knowledge is viewed within the university. For example, consider the standard way in which we often categorize knowledge as **hard** versus **soft** and **pure** versus **applied** (Becher, 1989). The academic hierarchy arising from these distinctions is clearly defined. Hard disciplines (which claim to produce findings that are verifiable, definitive, and cumulative) outrank soft disciplines (where interpretation is the central problem and where findings are always subject to debate and reinterpretation by others). Likewise, pure intellectual pursuits (which are theoretically-oriented and abstracted from particular contexts) outrank those that are applied (where work is more practical and more closely connected to context-bound needs). Education, characteristically, lies at the wrong end of both distinctions.

Knowledge about education is necessarily soft. As an extraordinarily complex social activity carried out by quirky and willful actors, education steadfastly resists any efforts to reduce it to causal laws or predictive theories. Researchers cannot even count on being able to build on the foundation of other people's work, since the validity of this work is always only partially established. Instead, they are forced to make the best of a difficult situation, trying to interpret what is going on in education and to make highly contingent claims based on these interpretations. As a result, they are continually rebuilding the intellectual foundations for their work rather than raising lofty towers of knowledge. This situation inevitably undermines the ability of education professors to speak with unclouded authority about their area of expertise or to respond definitively when this authority is challenged. And outsiders find it child's play to demonstrate the weaknesses of educational research and hold it up for ridicule for being inexact, contradictory, and impotent.

Knowledge about education is also necessarily applied. Education is not a discipline, defined by a theoretical apparatus and a research methodology, but an institutional area. As a result, education schools must focus their energies on the issues that arise from this area and respond to the practical concerns that currently confront educational practitioners in the field. Unlike researchers in the pure-knowledge disciplines, they do not have the luxury of pursuing an intellectual construct wherever it may lead, nor can they choose to focus on those issues that are methodologically most accessible or theoretically most stimulating. Instead, they generally have their work cut out for them in the realm of practice, even if this leads them to carry out inquiry in areas where their constructs are less effective and their chances for success are less promising. This situation unavoidably undermines the effectiveness and the intellectual coherence of the educational research effort and thus also calls into question the academic stature of the education faculty members who produce this effort.

Valuing Knowledge

There is another related knowledge-based problem facing the education school. A good case can be made for the proposition that American education—particularly higher education—has long placed a greater emphasis on the **exchange value** of the educational experience than on its **use value**. That is, what consumers have sought and universities have sold in the educational marketplace is not the **content** of the education received at the university (what the student actually learns there) but the **form** of this education (what the student can buy with

a university degree). From this perspective, the key educational product is usable credentials rather than usable knowledge (Collins, 1975; Labaree, 1995).

The evidence supporting this conclusion is strong. Schools and colleges award degrees based on credit hours that students have accumulated (seat time) rather than on the particular quantity of knowledge that these students actually acquired along the way. (American education has always been reluctant to demand that students prove what they have learned in order to be awarded a diploma.) Employers screen potential employees based on what degrees they have earned rather than on what they know or what they can do, blandly assuming that credentials certify competence without ever trying to validate this assumption. (How many employers ask, or care, about what a student learned in a tenth-grade plane geometry class? Or what a B+ in a college course on colonial history shows about a candidate's ability to be an effective mid-level manager?) And students, knowing both of these facts, tend to focus their energy less on learning content than on acquiring the necessary educational commodities (grades, credits, degrees) that can be cashed in for a good job.

One result of this is that universities have a strong incentive to promote research more than teaching, for publications raise the visibility and prestige of the institution much more effectively than does instruction (which is less visible and more difficult to measure). And a prestigious faculty raises the exchange value of the university's diploma, independently of whatever is learned in the process of acquiring this diploma.

The process of marketing the university degree is not one that leaves an honored role for the education school. Since the latter's primary form of knowledge production is focused on soft knowledge about practical problems—the production of nonauthoritative use value—it is not in a good position to contribute to the university's marketing effort (which relies heavily on the more prestigious work in hard pure fields). This problem is sharply exacerbated by the lowly status of the education school in the eyes of the university faculty and the public.

From this perspective, then, there is little that the education school can do that will boost the marketability of the university degree, but instead it seems to exert a steady downward drag on this degree's exchange value. As a result, the ed school is useful to have around, as a way of increasing numbers and supporting academic departments, but it is also somewhat embarrassing, because of the way it potentially undercuts the university's reputation for high academic standards and high-status knowledge.

A Losing Status, but a Winning Role?

What all of this suggests is that education schools are not at all well positioned to play the university status game. They are in a true no-win situation: Education schools serve the wrong clientele and produce the wrong knowledge; they bear the

mark of their modest origins and their traditionally weak programs; and yet they are pressured by everyone from their graduates' employers to their university colleagues to stay the way they are. If we didn't have education schools, we would probably want to invent them in much their current form, since they fulfill so many needs for so many constituencies.

But consider for a moment what would happen if we decide to abandon the status perspective in establishing the value of higher education, the perspective that American universities and their customers cling to so obsessively. What if we choose to focus on the social role of the education school rather than its social position in the academic firmament? What if we examine what these institutions do rather than how they are viewed? What if we consider the possibility that education schools—toiling away in the dark basement of academic ignominy—in an odd way have actually been liberated by this condition from the constraints of academic status attainment? Is it possible that ed schools may have actually stumbled on a form of academic practice that could serve as a useful model for the rest of the university?

Perhaps not, given the continuing all-too-obvious weaknesses of these institutions. But what does seem to be true is that education schools, through the peculiar contingencies of their history, occupy a unique position within American higher education from which we can gain insight into some of the key problems facing the university in the 1990s. They are useful constructs in a kind of discrepant case analysis—something on the order of an anti-college—which allow us to think about what a university college might look like that was not obsessed with the status game and the marketing of exchange value. Such an institution might well decide to do a lot of what education schools currently try to do. Ironically, in light of the chronic "trouble with ed schools," these schools may in some ways (even if by accident) be better positioned to meet the environmental demands of this decade than are many of those other colleges that so despise them. Let me explain.

First a disclaimer: The university status game is as American as the dream of getting ahead, so raw credentialism—the pursuit of university degrees as a form of cultural currency that can be exchanged for social position—is not likely to go away soon. Neither is it likely that the university will stop selling these degrees on the basis of institutional prestige or grounding this prestige in the production of abstract research rather than instruction in usable knowledge. In the current political and fiscal environment, however, there is an increasing danger that someone will stand up and make a persuasive case that the emperor is wearing no clothes: that there is no necessary connection between university degrees and student knowledge or between professorial production and public benefit; that students need to learn something when they are in the university; that the content of what they learn should have some form of intrinsic value; that professors need to work on developing ideas that have a degree of practical significance; and that the whole university enterprise needs to find ways to justify the huge public and

private investment that it currently requires.

There is an element of the confidence game in the market-based pattern of academic life, since the whole structure depends on a network of interlocking beliefs that are tenuous at best: the belief that graduates of prestigious universities know more and can do more than other graduates; the belief that prestigious faculty make for a good university; and the belief that prestigious research makes for a good faculty. The problem is, of course, that when confidence in any of these beliefs is shaken, the whole structure can come tumbling down. And when it does, the only recourse is to rebuild on the basis of substance rather than reputation, demonstrations of competence rather than symbols of merit.

By all accounts, this dreaded moment is at hand. There are currently a large number of looming challenges to the credibility of the current pattern of university life, and not all are coming from conservatives. While the latter are primarily concerned about radical professors and multicultural curriculum, the kind of challenges I am referring to derive from sources that are more structural than ideological. One such source is the current fiscal crisis of the state. Another is the growing political demand for accountability and utility. A third is the intensification of competition in higher education.

With the relentless demand for lower taxes and reduced public services that characterizes political life in the United States in the 1990s, the university is hard-pressed to justify a high level of public funding on grounds of prestige alone. Instead, it is increasingly being asked to demonstrate the dividends that it returns on the public funds invested in it. State governments are demanding that universities produce measurable beneficial outcomes for students, businesses, and other taxpaying members of the community. And, by withholding higher state subsidies, states are throwing universities into a highly competitive situation in which they vie with other institutions in their market area to see who can attract the most student tuition dollars and the most outside research grants and who can keep the tightest control over internal costs.

In this kind of environment, education schools actually have a certain advantage over many other colleges and departments in the university. Unlike their competitors across campus, they offer traditionally low-cost programs that are explicitly designed to be useful, both to students and to the community. They give students practical preparation for and access to a large sector of employment opportunities. Their research focuses on the problems and needs of education, an area about which Americans worry a great deal. They offer consulting services and policy advice to teachers, schools, and school systems trying to work their way through the array of pressing problems facing them. In short, their teaching, research, and service activities are all potentially useful to students and community alike. How many colleges of arts and letters can say the same? In fact, in the current climate, some of the biggest problems facing education schools come from libertarian legislators who want to eliminate teacher certification and teacher

education so that local schools can be free to hire anyone they want as a teacher—and from their own deans, who chose this astonishingly inopportune time to issue a report that trashes education schools for being incapable of meeting the needs of schools.

However, before we get carried away with the counterintuitive notion that ed schools might serve as a model for a university under fire, we need to consider that these brow-beaten institutions are still not likely to have much success or gain much credit for their efforts to serve useful social purposes, in spite of the current political saliency of such efforts. One reason for this is the peculiar nature of the occupations—especially teaching—for which ed schools are obliged to prepare candidates. Teaching is an enormously complex job that looks easy, which is a devastating combination for the stature and credibility of the professional school charged with preparing them. Another reason is the difficulty that faces any units within the university that try to walk the border between theory and practice, and the punishments that fall on the heads of those who manage this feat successfully.

Preparing a Peculiar Kind of Professional

Teaching is an extraordinarily complex job. Researchers have estimated that the average teacher makes upward of 150 conscious instructional decisions during the course of the day, each of which has potentially significant consequences for the students involved (Clark & Peterson, 1986). These decisions revolve around a number of big issues and also around little issues with big implications. For example, there are the chronic problems of what to teach, when to teach it, how to do this effectively, and how to adapt these instructional decisions to the needs of a particular group of students or of a particular individual. Often these major concerns come together around the smallest of passing events, such as how to respond to one student's question or another's behavior. From the standpoint of public relations, however, the key difficulty is that for the outsider teaching looks all too easy. And this means that ed schools gain very little credit for preparing people to carry out this role, even if they do so effectively. The reason that teaching looks easy is because its work is so visible, the skills required to do it seem so ordinary, and the knowledge it seeks to transmit is so generic.

Visible Practice

Students spend a long time observing teachers at work. If you figure that the average student spends six hours a day in school for 180 days a year over 12 years, this means that a high school graduate will have logged about 13,000 hours watching teachers do their thing. There is no other social role (with the possible exception of parent) which is so well known to the general public. And there is certainly no other form of paid employment that is this well understood by prospective practitioners, before they take their first day of formal professional education.

By comparison, consider other occupations that require professional preparation in the university. Before they enter medical, law, or business school, students are lucky if they have spent a dozen hours in close observation of a doctor, lawyer, or businessperson at work. For these students, professional school provides an introduction to the mysteries of an arcane and remote field. For prospective teachers, the education school seems to offer at best a gloss on a familiar topic and at worst an unnecessary hurdle for 12-year apprentices who already know their stuff. Under these circumstances, as legislators regularly say, why not speed candidates through the teacher education process or skip this step entirely?

Ordinary Skill

Not only have teacher candidates put in a long "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975), but they have also noted during this apprenticeship that the skills required to be a teacher are no big deal. For one thing, the subject matter that elementary and secondary teachers seek to pass along to their students seems all too commonplace. In fact, what teachers teach is what ordinary adult citizens already know—how to read and write and calculate, basic information about history and science and literature, and so on. There is nothing obscure about these kinds of capacities; the very nature of universal public education makes them as ordinary as can be. As a result, teaching seems to have nothing about it that can match the mystery and opaqueness of legal contracts, medical diagnoses, or business accounting.

Of course, this perception by the prospective teacher and the public about the skills involved in teaching leaves out the crucial problem of **how** a teacher goes about teaching ordinary subjects to particular students. Reading is one thing, but knowing how to teach reading is another thing altogether, especially when you are teaching someone whose social situation and learning facility are very different from what yours were at that stage in your own education. This question of how a teacher teaches the subject is often invisible to the student at the time, and therefore the apprenticeship of observation is strikingly incomplete. Ed schools seek to fill this gap in learning how to teach by focusing in particular on the pedagogy of teaching particular subjects to particular students, but they do so over the resistance of teacher candidates who feel they already know how to teach and a public that fails to see pedagogy as a meaningful skill.

Compounding this resistance to the notion that teachers have special pedagogical skills is the student's general experience (at least in retrospect) that learning is not that hard—and therefore, by extension, that teaching is not hard either. Once again, however, teaching is in this way quite unlike other forms of social practice. Doctors, lawyers, and accountants use their arcane expertise for the benefit of the client, but they don't pass along the expertise itself. The last thing they are trying to do is make their own job look easy or to empower clients to

handle these matters themselves the next time.

Teachers, on the other hand, are in the business of giving away their expertise. Their goal is to empower the student to the point where the teacher is no longer needed and the student can function effectively without outside help. The best teachers make learning seem easy and make their own role in the learning process seem marginal. "I learned it on my own" is the preferred reaction from the student, not "I can't do it without my teacher." The result is that it is easy to underestimate the difficulty of being a good teacher—and of preparing people to become good teachers. Therefore teacher education, like teaching itself, seems a breeze to the outsider. Neither really is.

Generic Knowledge

One final characteristic of teaching that undercuts teacher education is the fact that the education school does not have exclusive rights to the subject matter that teachers teach. Ed schools are held accountable for the quality of the teachers and other educators that they produce, but the only part of the teacher's knowledge over which they have some control is the knowledge about how to teach. (And even this knowledge is layered on top of the lore about pedagogical practices that teacher candidates pick up as observers during their student years.) Teachers learn about English, history, math, biology, music, art, and other subjects from the various academic departments at the university that are in charge of these areas of knowledge.

In this sense, the preparation of teachers is unique among programs of professional development, in that responsibility for carrying out this program is shared across the entire university. What this also means, however, is that ed schools, as the visible agents of teacher preparation, often take the blame for teacher deficiencies that are actually the fault of an inadequate university education. And given the way in which universities tend to emphasize credentials over learning, an inadequate education is a rather common outcome.

Working the Border Between Theory and Practice

So preparing teachers is a daunting task, which is made even more difficult and thankless for ed schools because so much of this preparation occurs outside of their control and because most people assume there is so little that needs to be learned. This is the instructional problem facing these institutions. At the same time, ed schools must wrestle with an equally daunting intellectual problem. For the territory in which they are expected to do research is the mine-strewn border between theory and practice.

Traditionally, the university's peculiar area of expertise is theory. Removed from the press of events and from the concern for the particular, the university professor's intellectual contribution arises from the ongoing effort to generalize

and explain, to construct theory. In contrast, the public school is a realm of practice. Confronted with a relentless demand to do something right now to meet the special needs of a particular group of students, teachers have to focus on constructing an effective mode of practice in the classroom. The situation, however, is more complicated than this. For the university is also a realm of social practice, as faculty members work at developing their professorial craft, and instructional practice in the school in turn is guided by theory, since teaching without theoretical backing would be nothing but mindless activity. So the difference between the two institutional realms is more a matter of emphasis (with the university focusing more on theory and the school on practice) and of context (with the university leaning toward the universal and the school toward the particular).

A primary function of the education school is to provide a border crossing between these two countries, each with its own distinctive language and culture and with its own peculiar social structure. When an ed school is working well, it presents a model of fluid interaction between university and school and encourages others on both sides of the divide to follow suit. What this means intellectually is that an ed school must be proficient at developing both theoretical and practical understandings of education and must work vigorously to establish viable links between the two. The ideal is to encourage the development of teachers and other educators who are truly "reflective practitioners" (Schon, 1983), able to draw on theory to inform their instructional practice. The flip side of this aim is to encourage university professors to become practice-oriented theoreticians, able to draw on issues from practice in their theory-building and to produce theories with potential use value.

That is the ideal. But no one would argue that education schools (or any other groups, for that matter) come close to meeting this ideal. The natural tendency is to fall on one side of the border or the other with only weak crossover ability, rather than to hold the middle ground and retain the ability to work well in both domains. The ed school deans who make up the Holmes Group have given lip service to the ideal spelled out here, but in practice they have expressed total confusion on the subject. In the group's first report (*Tomorrow's Schools*), they argued that the ed school should ground itself thoroughly in the prestige and the scientific knowledge-building of the university and then seek to export both to the schools. But in the third and most recent report (*Tomorrow's Schools of Education*), they reversed themselves by arguing that the ed school should turn its back on the academic life of the university and bury itself in the world of daily practice within the public school classroom. So in less than a decade, the deans shifted from a position of intellectual imperialism to one of anti-intellectual populism.

At one level, this zigzagging course adopted by the Holmes Group just reinforces the standard view that ed schools really don't know what they are doing or where they are going. But at another level, it only serves to demonstrate just how difficult it is for an institution to position itself on the border between theory and

practice, between the university and the world outside. Life is much more comfortable and responsibilities are much more clear-cut on one side or the other.

Because of their location in the university and their identification with the schools, ed schools have had no real choice over the years but to keep working along the border, but this has meant that they have continued to draw unrelenting fire from both sides. Professors dismiss them as unscholarly and untheoretical while school people dismiss them as impractical and irrelevant. From the university's perspective, colleges of education are nothing but trade schools, which supply vocational training but no academic curriculum; however, students complain that ed school courses are too abstract and academic, and they demand more field experience and fewer course requirements. On the one side, ed school research is seen as too soft, too applied, and totally lacking in academic rigor; but on the other side, it is seen as serving only a university agenda and being largely useless to the schools.

Of course, it may be that both sides are right. After years of making and attending paper presentations at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, I am willing to concede that more often than not the work produced by educational researchers is lacking in both intellectual merit and practical application. But I would also argue that there is something noble and necessary about the way that the denizens of ed schools continue their quixotic quest for a workable balance between theory and practice. If only others in the academy would try this vigorously (and, one can only hope, more successfully) to accomplish the marriage of academic elegance and social impact.

The Trouble with Ed Schools Revisited

So where does this leave us in thinking about the poor beleaguered ed school? And what lessons, if any, can be learned from its checkered history?

(1) Guilty, as Requested

One lesson is that these institutions really are weak in a number of ways but that much of this weakness is the result of the way ed schools did what was demanded of them. They provided mass programs of teacher preparation that did not cost much money or require much time. They put teachers in empty classrooms and drew students into the university. They tried to serve the needs of practitioners in the field. And for all this, they have been soundly punished—by academics and educators and the public alike.

Of course, while the historical adaptability of the ed school is understandable, it is not exactly honorable. Giving in to all of the pressures placed on it allowed the ed school to establish itself as the central institution for preparing the country's teachers and to secure itself a place within the hallowed halls of the university. These outcomes, however, were achieved at considerable cost. Instructionally, ed

schools too often provide an academically thin and professionally ineffective form of preparation for teachers, which is not adequate to the urgent needs of American education. And intellectually, they too often provide a form of knowledge production that is neither scholarly nor useful.

(2) Status Matters

Another lesson is that it doesn't pay to be a parvenu in the university status order. A key to the trouble with ed schools is that history assigned them a lowly location in the academic hierarchy, and this means that no one is willing to cut them a break. As Joanies-come-lately to the university, ed schools carry the indelible stigma of the normal school and of the working class women who have entered the semi-profession of teaching about which Americans are so ambivalent. Much of the scorn that has rained on the ed school is the result of its lowly status rather than any demonstrable deficiencies in the actual educational role it has played.

But much of this scorn has been well grounded. Institutional status has a circular quality about it, which means that predictions of high or low institutional quality become self fulfilling. The high standing of the university provides it with a protective cover beneath which excellent teaching and research **can** incubate and prosper (even if this opportunity is often sacrificed on the altar of credentialism). The umbrella of high status allows institutions the time and space to work things out in relative privacy, without being subjected to unwanted interventions or corrosive criticism. At the same time, however, the education school is clearly lacking such an umbrella. Its low social standing denies the education school adequate protection and therefore subjects its programs and research to an acid rain of extramural criticism and meddling intervention that never gives it the chance to turn itself around.

(3) Being Right Is No Excuse

In some ways, ed schools have been doing things right. They have wrestled vigorously (if not always to good effect) with the problems of public education, an area that is of deep concern to most citizens. This has meant tackling social problems of great complexity and great practical importance, but unfortunately the university does not place much value on the production of this kind of messy, indeterminate, soft, and applied knowledge. It has taken on the difficult task of trying to prepare people for a remarkably complex job that most people consider easy, without even being granted adequate control over the preparation process.

Oddly enough, the rest of the university could learn a lot from the example of the ed school. The question, however, is whether they will see this example as positive or negative. If academics consider this story in light of the current political and fiscal climate, then the ed school could serve as a model, which illustrates how the university can meet growing public expectations for it to teach things that

students need to know and to generate knowledge that produces benefits for the community.

But it seems more likely that academics will consider this story a cautionary tale about how risky and unrewarding such a strategy can be. After all, education schools have demonstrated that they are neither very successful at accomplishing the marriage of theory and practice nor well-rewarded for trying. In fact, the odor of failure and disrespect continues to linger in the air around these institutions. In light of such considerations, academics are likely to feel more comfortable placing their chips in the university's traditional confidence game, continuing to pursue academic status and market educational credentials. And from this perspective, the example of the ed school is one they should avoid like the plague.

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