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## The Role of the Foundational Studies In The Preparation of Elementary Teachers\*

I shall begin the discussion of the role of the foundational studies in the preparation of elementary teachers by registering some dissatisfaction with the terms "foundation" and "foundational." A brave band of professors at Columbia Teachers College deserve our gratitude for the idea of foundational studies, but not for the term.

Inevitably the word makes one think of the building trades, or those great philanthropic geese that lay the golden eggs for educational reform, or the art of corsetry. All these connotations have their roots in the notion of a beginning. The foundation of the edifice is the first layer of the building, and when one founds an establishment he institutes or originates it; presumably an establishment is called a foundation when its goal is to assist in the founding of other enterprises. As for the foundation garments worn by women, they too are supposed to be the first layer of clothing, as well as the means of establishing a basic contour for the figure's subsequent adornment.

Along with the connotation of initiation or beginning goes the idea of importance. What is foundational is supposed to be fundamental, basic, supportive. Without foundations, one is led to believe, there can be no buildings, no fashionable figures, no research, no first-class trips on jet airplanes to esoteric conferences, and no innovations in education, especially in teacher education.

These images and their penumbral meanings are quite unsatisfactory. To begin with, the foundational studies are rarely first in order of instruction. For the most part, they are reserved for the later phases of teacher preparation. Some schools — as a matter of fact, theory, or convenience — reserve these studies for in-service training or postpone them until after student teaching. The delay is urged on the ground that the student will be more mature and consequently more ready for the history, philosophy, and the sociology of education. The psychology of

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education (or the psychological foundations of education) is an exception, because one expects (overoptimistically) it to be applied immediately to problems of the classroom, and therefore should precede practice teaching.

In the second place, the metaphor of a foundation as holding something up, as something on which one builds, fails badly when used in connection with educational history and philosophy, and limps even with regard to the psychology and sociology of education. Their placement at various stages of the training indicates that they are not uniformly thought of as prerequisites for later studies that incorporate them as elements. On the contrary, they themselves require (or should require) the study of the parent disciplines of history, psychology, sociology, and philosophy as prerequisites. However, the sciences of education, if we ever develop them, might well qualify as prerequisites for large segments of the teacher-preparation curriculum.

Distracting as foundational imagery may be, it is less damaging than the unrealistic expectations it spawns in the teacher, and the hostility to the foundational studies that results when the expectations are not fulfilled. Two sorts of expectations come to mind. One is that study of the philosophy, history, psychology, and sociology of education will equip the teacher with technical solutions to classroom problems. The other is that these courses or studies will build into the teacher a set of values that will keep her headed in the right direction regardless of the pressures and turmoil of time and circumstance. I regret to report that foundational studies will do neither. They will not provide tricks for evading classroom predicaments, because they do not deal with particular cases, whereas teaching always does. And they will not provide firm guides for morality because, for the most part, the philosophy of education, which is expected to do this, examines the validity of values and usually ends up by questioning all of them. So the prospective teacher is more likely to be less sure of her values after the course than before. To be sure, she will be able to discuss her unsureness with greater precision, but that is not, I take it, what has been expected or even promised.

Now there may come a time when the psychology of education, the sociology of education, and perhaps the anthropology and economics of education will be so well developed as sciences that we can milk them for important empirical generalizations. These may, in turn, help us create a technology that will be applicable to the everyday problems of the teacher. When that happy day arrives, these subjects will not be called "foundational"; they will be taught to prospective teachers as methods, i.e., as rules for applying the generalizations of educational science. Some aspects of educational psychology are already in this phase, e.g., when we use tests of various sorts, or when we change the curriculum to accommodate the mentally retarded. The philosophy and history of education, however, will never give this sort of help, and even the other behavioral sciences are still a long way from doing so in any substantial way.

On what grounds then can we reasonably ask prospective elementary school teachers to devote time to what seems so remote from their immediate needs? How can we avoid their reporting the foundational courses as the ones that have helped them least in their teaching career?

First of all, it is quite possible that foundational studies can be dispensed with altogether. This is especially plausible if one conceives of elementary teaching as a craft in which the teacher is a person who loves children and treats them humanely while teaching them how to read, spell, write, and do arithmetic while introducing them to the subject matter fields. As a craftsman all the teacher really needs is a set of rules and the techniques for applying them in more or less standard situations. The untypical situation can be referred to the supervisor or the principal. If this is so, one can understand why so many "good" teachers do so "well" with so little theory; why the prospective teacher is so impatient with theory, and why student teaching is the heart of teacher preparation, both elementary and secondary. (It is to be noted that all prospective professions — not merely teachers but also doctors, lawyers and engineers — are impatient with theory precisely because it is the craft aspect of their work that excites them, that will confront them first and trouble them most. The difference is that in the established professions the impatience of the students is not taken seriously by those in charge of their training.)

The recent wave of teacher strikes in the United States demonstrates the ambiguous status of classroom teachers. On the one hand, they behaved as craftspeople unsatisfied with their pay and working conditions. Their leaders "jeered" at remonstrances that this direct defiance of the "authorities" was unprofessional and smacked of proletarianism. On the other hand, at least in New York City, the striking union insisted that teachers have a voice in the making of educational policy. But by virtue of what do teachers claim this right? By virtue of their skill as craftspeople? But are matters of policy simply matters of technical skill? Are the issues of schooling for the disadvantaged simply matters of technique? Or do the teachers claim the right to share in the determination of educational policy by virtue of their being citizens of the community in which they teach? Certainly nobody would deny their rights as citizens, but the mechanism for registering citizen opinion on matters of community policy is not, as a rule, a strike. I would think that the teachers should claim this right by virtue of their thorough understanding of the problems of the school in all their social and philosophical ramifications, as well as on their experience in the classroom. In other words, they presumably have studied what schooling ought to be, what the relation between teacher and pupil, teacher and administrator, school and community ought to be. And one would like to believe that they not only have beliefs on these issues, but that they would also be willing and able to defend these views, rationally.

What in their formal preparation for teaching provided them with the conceptual tools for such an understanding, an understanding superior presumably to that of the craftsman and the ordinary well-intentioned citizen? I submit that the foundational studies, or their equivalent, can take some of the credit (or blame), for this is precisely the proper content of these studies. Philosophy of education studies the problems of education — the problems of aims, curriculum, organization, teaching-learning — in the light of the concepts of philosophy; the history of education is the history of these educational problems; the psychology of education concentrates on this same set of problems in their psychological aspects, while other behavioral sciences study these problems in their anthropological, economic, and sociological dimensions.

Perhaps teacher strikes will force teachers, the public, the self-appointed critics, and saviors of education to choose. Either the teachers are to have a craft training only, in which case their right to a share in policy making is no better than that of any other citizen; or the preparation of the teacher has to become *genuinely professional*, which means more foundational study, not less than is now prescribed.

One of the major obstacles to understanding these alternatives is that classroom teachers, at least in the United States, believe that they have had a professional training. Partly they believe it because college catalogues told them so; their training, insofar as it is not general education or the study of the subject they are to teach, is often called "professional preparation." They also believe it because they are not blue collar workers, and because they have had more general education, as a rule, than the electrician or the plumber. Moreover, they are working with human beings in a very important human enterprise. The last point certainly makes it reasonable to argue that they ought to be professionally trained, but wearing white collars and having some general education do not prove that they are so trained. Scanning the requirements for the teaching certificate in most states, one is led to the conclusion that the majority of classroom teachers have less theoretical training than the graduate of a good school of nursing and far less technical training than that of a master electrician or carpenter. Most of the schools preparing teachers are, so to speak, schools of nursing masquerading as medical schools.

To become genuinely professional, the curriculum for teacher education will have to become more theoretical, so that teachers can rationalize techniques and rules of procedures, just as the engineer and physician use theory to understand why a rule of practice applies. Knowing the theory behind the rule gives the professional the right to depart from the rule, and perhaps even to formulate new rules. This right and freedom are not accorded to the craftsman who merely knows the rules and uses the techniques.

Two uses of theory are involved in the preparation of teachers at the professional level: applicative use and interpretive use. The first, if

well developed, furnishes the basis for a rational technology to solve our problems of practice; the second enables us to conceptualize and thereby to understand these problems, and to evaluate the technology itself. Sociology, economics, and other behavioral sciences of education may have both an applicative and an interpretive use; history and philosophy of education are restricted to the interpretive use.

What then is this interpretive use of knowledge and how does it function in the work of an elementary teacher?<sup>1</sup>

Let us take, first, a problem that is not educational at all and note the difference between the applicative use of knowledge and the interpretive. Suppose on a frosty morning your automobile does not start. What use can you make of knowledge to help you get it started? Did you take a course in physics in high school or college? Do you know the principles of the internal combustion engine? Can you apply this knowledge to vitalizing your cold automobile? Do you know how a carburetor is put together or how the ignition system of an automobile works? If you know all this you have all the theoretical knowledge needed to start your car. But like many motorists who have all this knowledge you probably will not apply it. For one thing, you may not know what *your car's* carburetor looks like nor where it is in the metal jungle under the hood. If you could identify it, could you tell what parts operate in what ways to make it work? And even if you can pass this test, do you have the tools and skill to do what knowledge indicates might be necessary?

Your automobile mechanic may know little or much about physics and the theory of internal combustion engines, but one can rightfully expect him to know the anatomy of your automobile and the rules of procedure well enough so that with the appropriate tools he can do the proper things to get the car started. As a matter of plain fact, the knowledge that most motorists, with or without the benefit of courses in physics, do *apply* is that which enables them to look up the telephone number of the nearest automobile mechanic.

Much of our knowledge of automobiles — especially that which we remember from the general science course — is strictly for interpretive use. It enables us to understand how and why an internal combustion engine works and to discuss it with others who have the same sort of knowledge; but in and of itself it does not enable us to cure ailing

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<sup>1</sup>For a more thorough and technical discussion of the applicative, replicative, associative and interpretive uses of knowledge and schooling the reader may wish to consult H. S. Broudy, B. O. Smith, and Joe R. Burnett, *Democracy and Excellence in American Secondary Education* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), Chaps. 3 and 4; "Philosophy and the Curriculum," in *Philosophy and Education — Proceedings, International Seminar, March 23-25, 1966* (Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Monograph Series, No. 3, 1967), pp. 59-71; also "The Role of the Foundational Studies in the Preparation of Teachers," in *Improving Teacher Education in the United States*, Stanley Elam, editor (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa, 1967), pp. 1-35.

automobiles. For this one needs to translate the theory of the internal combustion engine into the principles of automobile design and construction. One needs intimate familiarity with many instances of automobiles and their troubles, and above all, one needs to know the techniques used to manipulate automobile engines. It is this type of professional knowledge that entitles its possessor to be called an expert within a given domain of practice.

Yet the more developed the profession and the more its domain of practice is linked with other domains, the more does the professional need to know the total field of which his speciality is a part. But because he cannot possibly have applicative knowledge of the total field, he must make do with interpretive knowledge in all fields outside of his speciality. He cannot *solve* problems in these adjacent fields, but he can understand them and know what knowledge is relevant to them. It is precisely this type of *interpretive professional* knowledge that the foundational studies, especially the humanistic ones, supply to the professional worker in education.

Professional interpretive knowledge is especially necessary in education, because education finds it virtually impossible to dismiss any field of knowledge as wholly irrelevant to its own problems. Can we become expert even in one related field, such as psychology, not to speak of all the behavioral sciences that seem to have something important to say about teaching? And ought we to become experts in electronics in order to understand the technology of teaching instruments, of which we are promised more and more esoteric models each year? If by becoming expert we mean knowing how to apply this knowledge, the answer is obvious. However, if we mean interpretive knowledge, the answer is not so obvious, for there is a possibility that we can get this sort of knowledge, or at least some of it, as part of teacher preparation.

To make more concrete what I have in mind, let us take the problem of teaching the disadvantaged. It is a problem that affects all levels of schooling and all phases of schooling, and it certainly concerns the elementary teacher. What sort of applicative knowledge do we have in solving this problem? What sort of interpretive knowledge might we have for understanding and structuring this problem?

I think you will agree that the social psychologists, together with the sociologists, have made it clear that a great many factors that have little to do with formal schooling, make the problem of teaching the disadvantaged almost hopelessly complex. Consider, for example, how the family structure, economic conditions, low level of aspiration, and restricted verbal environment all combine to make the strategically crucial teaching of reading a special problem.

Can we *apply* this knowledge to handling a mixed classroom of nine-year-olds? Can the teacher change these conditions? Can she use it to change the level of aspiration, the dirty and deprived home? No,

we do not as yet have either the scientific theory or the technology to effect such changes. We are accumulating experience and conducting a few experiments. Not long ago *The Educational Forum* published an article by a man experienced in teaching the disadvantaged.<sup>2</sup> The article was a mixture of sociological and psychological principles plus sets of very detailed rules for teaching in a disadvantaged classroom. The author claimed that these rules work, but these rules follow no more necessarily from current psychological and sociological theories than do a half dozen other sets of rules that perhaps work equally well. In other words, in this area the elementary teacher may profit from experience, but one can hardly say that there is scientific knowledge that can be applied with the confidence of the expert.

Yet even in the absence of applicative knowledge, is the knowledge we do have useless? Is understanding the class structure of our society, its economic system, the role of schooling in economic life useless? Would the teaching of the disadvantaged be possible or even tolerable without such understanding? How would one guide the search for applicable knowledge, if one did not first conceptualize these problems? So the interpretive knowledge is not useless. Without it the teacher is reduced to desperate trial and error. Often this results in intolerable frustration and a general reluctance to teach in schools for the disadvantaged. To fill the vacuum, messianic, high-minded amateurs rush in with every conceivable variety of project to redeem the disadvantaged. In time, one might hope, the interpretive knowledge we do have will be supplemented by applicative knowledge. When that comes to pass, we shall be on the way to making the teaching of the disadvantaged a professional speciality. Professional knowledge and skill will then replace some of the missionary zeal and the evangelism that now are needed to sustain it. This will make the work less exciting, perhaps, but far more effective.

Is then the interpretive knowledge furnished by foundational studies merely a stop-gap until the behavioral sciences provide us with knowledge that one can apply to solve the problems of schooling? Will educational science one day solve all educational problems, pretty much as medical science will solve all problems of health and disease?

Unfortunately, or fortunately, to define education is to define human life itself, and not all solutions are equally human. Suppose, for example, it could be shown that taking all disadvantaged children from their homes at the age of two and having them brought up in government nurseries according to the rules laid down by the psychologists and social workers would do the trick. There is some reason to believe that this would be a very efficient way not only of solving the problem but perhaps even of getting rid of it altogether. However, even a

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<sup>2</sup>A. O. Ornstein, "Teaching the Disadvantaged," *The Educational Forum* 31 (January, 1967), pp. 215-223.

rudimentary understanding of the value system to which citizens of the United States seem to be committed will indicate why the scientists had better seek other ways of solving the problem.

The value system of a multi-culture society cannot be understood by reading the weekly opinion polls. Defining standards of value and justifying them are the most puzzling problems in philosophy, and yet they are rehearsed every time the movies, television, long hair, and miniskirts come up for discussion. Some understanding of the value problem teachers do acquire in their general studies, and there are those who argue that the study of value questions in the general courses in literature, philosophy, and history is all the classroom teacher will need. But if so, why do the daring remarks of the young college professor of literature sound so strange in the mouth of a high school teacher? Why do the clever comments that sound so deliciously bold at the ladies' literary club become frightening if uttered by a teacher to one's own offspring? The answer, of course, is that values of prime importance to parents are the welfare of their child, not the learning of the professor or his academic freedom. What, then, is the appropriate perspective for the classroom teacher, who mediates between the world of learned opinion and that of the parent? Perhaps this difference of context accounts for the disappointingly meager contributions to the solution of educational problems emanating from the mouths of liberal arts professors. Unless they become educationalists in the non-prestigious sense of that word, they are more valuable as *agents provocateurs* than as front line troops.

There are, of course, many other problems facing the elementary teacher that could have been used as examples of the usefulness of interpretive knowledge. One is that of innovation, especially the kind of innovation that is connected with programmed instruction and teaching machines. The relation between the elementary school teacher and the pupil has not yet been reduced to that between a sender and a receiver of information. Every elementary teacher knows that it takes all sorts of maneuvering to get a live human pupil to play the role of a receiver. He persists in being something else. Inevitably, the young child will try to establish a personal relationship to the teacher; he can be distracted from this only momentarily and perhaps never completely. Will automated instruction be an aid or a hindrance to this relation? If the teacher's instructional role can be decreased, will the personal relationship gain or suffer? Is individualized instruction the same as personalized instruction? Is this difference important or not?

I shall in all charity refrain from saying anything about the antics of schoolmen who are innocent of history in general and of the history of education in particular. The word "innovative" at the moment is the magic word. The U.S. government through its Office of Education has decreed that the schools shall be innovative. It has put researchers in battalion strength to work not only to find innovations, but also to find

out how to get these disseminated. The search for innovation has become a large-scale industry.

Now the charisma of innovation, if one may so speak, lies in the supposition that the new is bound to be better than the old. In a country where obsolescence is planned for, the one absolute value is to be up to date. In a culture where all values are challenged as being relative, subjective, or classbound, the word innovation divides the world into two clearly differentiated camps: the good guys who are willing to try anything, and the bad guys who drag their feet.

Such idolatry of the innovative is possible only with people who have kept away from the study of history, of society, and of the school itself. As a result, the Dalton Plan and fairly ancient variations of the activity-programs are being rediscovered and promulgated as imaginative innovations. In a field where the applicative knowledge is ample, as in engineering and medicine, the new is likely to be really an advance and not merely different. In a field where applicative knowledge is still meager, only teachers with rich interpretive knowledge can distinguish the merely innovative from genuine advances.

For a long time to come, therefore, teachers can profit from extensive study of the history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology of education — what have been called the foundational studies. I would also like to suggest, in passing, a possible answer to those who say, "But teachers report that these courses were of the least use and often of the least interest in their teaching-preparation curriculum."

I would suggest, first of all, that interpretive knowledge gets used quite often without the person being aware of either its use or its source. For it is the virtue of interpretive knowledge that it becomes so integral a part of our perceiving, thinking, and feeling that we do not consciously think of when and how we learned it. In the case of the foundational studies, as in that of general education, it is easier to discern the man who lacks it than to justify the trouble of getting it.

In the second place, we tend to value most that which relieves our most immediate difficulties — and these are, of course, those of daily practice.

Thirdly, not all courses labeled "Philosophy of Education" or "History of Education" are equally good as to content and presentation. This prompts one to urge schools of education that unless they can afford to hire well-trained specialists to teach these courses, they would be well advised not to offer them at all.

There is one other way of evading the conclusion that foundational study is essential to the elementary school teacher. This is to say that economic conditions and the shortage of teachers make it unlikely, and perhaps impossible, that all elementary teachers will be trained to a genuinely professional level; that, therefore, the training time had better

be spent on student teaching, methods, techniques, and as much general education as one can manage.

This is a cogent argument because it so closely describes the reality. It may be that the United States can afford to have only one out of fifteen of its elementary teachers trained to the professional level, just as it can manage to have only so many physicians on a hospital staff. If this is the case, it would be wise to face this possibility and to differentiate between two classes of school personnel. There is nothing mean or lowly about being a nurse. On the contrary, much of the effectiveness of modern medicine depends on the existence of a large corps of competent nurses. But it does no one any good to make believe that all the nurses are physicians, and calling them by the same name only compounds the confusion.

The theoretical studies—both the scientific ones that can yield rules for practice and the humanistic ones that can only help us interpret educational problems — are indispensable only for those elementary teachers who hope to operate at the professional level; for the large cadre of craftspeople who have to be turned out in a minimum of time and with a minimum of cognitive strain, neither type of theory is indispensable; rules, techniques, and apprenticeship are sufficient. Like good nurses they are invaluable, but only as adjuncts of a strong albeit fairly small core of professionals.

This may have to be the solution, but if it is, the public will not be happy with it, especially in the elementary grades. Rightly or not the public has more faith in the elementary school than in the secondary one. Why this is so, is not clear, but if I were to speculate I would attribute it to the fact that the public respects the elementary school teacher as more of a specialist than the high school teacher of history or mathematics. Mistakenly or not the public believes that anyone who has studied history or mathematics can teach it. A college graduate who might not be averse to taking a fling at teaching in a high school would be scared witless at the prospect of substituting for even a day in the second grade. How many educated parents would be willing to teach their own children to read, write, or spell?

The respect for the elementary school teacher goes well beyond the acknowledgment of esoteric craftsmanship — of knowing how to do something one cannot do himself. Parents also appreciate the importance of childhood, and when they entrust a young child to the school they do so with the confidence that the teacher is not merely a mother substitute, but an ideal mother substitute — a substitute who loves children not only well but wisely. In this sense, the public attributes to the elementary teacher a degree of professionalism that she may not always deserve, but in expecting it the public is well ahead of many schools of education which are willing to settle for something less.