Presidential Address

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

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Most presidential addresses for meetings of learned societies follow a typical pattern. The speaker describes the state of the field in such a way that it leads the members of the organization to see a direction for their future efforts. I would like to offer a variation of this model. Instead of surveying the work of philosophers of education, I will describe some important reforms that educators have made during the twentieth century. In these descriptions, there are two points that should be of interest to philosophers. One is that the reformers sought to reform schools in the direction of making our society more democratic. The other is that the direction of these innovations changed during the mid-century. From 1918 until 1963, the educators sought to meet what they described as the students' needs. But from 1963 to 2000, the educators sought to satisfy or affirm what they claimed were the students' and the parents' rights. The problem was that each of these slogans, meeting students' needs and affirming people's rights, could distract the reformers from thinking about the complexities involved in any democratic society or a democratic way of thinking.

How did educators reform education in the first part of the twentieth century?

In 1893, the National Educational Association (NEA) sponsored the Committee of Ten, and, in 1895, the NEA sponsored the Committee of Fifteen. Together, these committees tried to build a system of education for all people based on what they considered to be the best of traditional education. In the report of the Committee of Ten, for example, the committee members asserted that all students whether they were going to work or to college or professional school should study the same college preparatory courses because these recommended subjects would train the powers of observation, memory, expression, and reasoning (National Education Association 1894, 51-52).

In 1918, the NEA sponsored the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE) that reversed the conclusions of the Committee of Ten. Instead of requiring all students to pursue the same academic courses, the CRSE report urged high schools to diversify the curricula and allow students to pursue activities more in line with their interests, abilities, and vocational aspirations. The CRSE thought the aim of education should be to advance democracy. To do this, the CRSE urged school people to analyze the activities of individuals in society and determine what they needed to find their places in

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society and shape themselves and the society toward nobler ends (Department of the Interior 1918, 9-11).

After the CRSE report, educators tended to think about the curriculum as somehow meeting the needs of the children. The idea of meeting the children's needs grew to such prominence that, in 1938, Boyd Bode warned that the concept of meeting the students' needs could distract educators from thinking deeply about the complex and contradictory relationships that make up a democracy (62-72). Despite Bode's warning, the NEA's Educational Policies Commission published reports in 1944 and in 1952 urging high schools to meet what the reports called the ten needs that all youth had in common. The list was similar to the list of cardinal principles that the CRSE had published in 1918. However, in 1944, placing increased urgency on the concept, the EPC warned that if educators ignored these needs, the federal government might take over all local schools (Educational Policies Commission 1-10).

By 1957, with the Sputnik crisis, newspapers and public commentators ridiculed the concept of meeting students' needs. Nonetheless, the concept persisted as people turned to James Conant's report, *The American high school today*, to provide a recipe for reform. Conant was a member of the EPC in 1944 and its chairperson in 1954. As a result, he retained the rationale of meeting the students' needs.

Ironically, in 1961, B. Paul Komisar argued the ideal of meeting children's needs persisted because it could not provide intelligent direction for reform. That is, Komisar contended the slogan was popular because it lacked clear meaning. As a result, Komisar noted, school administrators could use the slogan to defend their actions against antagonistic audiences by claiming their schools met the children's needs.

Despite the prevalence of the idea of meeting students' needs, another rationale became important after 1963. It was the view that schools had to satisfy the students' rights.

How did educators justify efforts to reform education in the second part of the twentieth century?

In 1963, African Americans and civil rights activists mounted protests in places such as Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; and Nashville, Tennessee. To unite these sporadic demonstrations, nearly 250,000 people journeyed to Washington D.C. to hear Martin Luther King, Jr. tell of his dream for a better United States. In his speech, Martin Luther King offered his hope as a repeated refrain: "When we let freedom ring, . . . we will be able to speed up the day when all God's children, Black men and White men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of

that old Negro spiritual. 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'" As several commentators noted, this speech expressed the aspirations of the civil rights movement; it called all citizens to engage in social action to ensure that all people enjoyed the same human rights (Bellah et al. 1985, 213,249).

While King's speech called for social justice, it pointed to a change of ideals. In the first half of the twentieth century, the NAACP had sought racial integration because it was fueled by the progressive drive for democracy. Although such hopes continued after 1963, words of freedom and human rights became more important and groups separated themselves to cement their identities rather than seek values that all people could share. Ironically, although King built coalitions among divergent groups in all his campaigns, he offered a metaphor in his speech for this shift. When he used gospel hymns to evoke images of different people singing about freedom, he offered a contradictory picture. The people join hands singing about a value, such as freedom, that could pull them apart rather than about an emotion, such as love, that could pull them together.

Building on the momentum that the March on Washington generated, Congress passed the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 giving federal officials the power to racially desegregate schools without a trial. Other groups, such as advocates for special education, began to seek similar legislation empowering federal officials to force local schools to adopt approved methods of curriculum planning. One year later, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) sending more than $1 billion to help children called educationally disadvantaged. In response, organizations advancing the education of children who are disabled and other minorities began using similar aggressive language and taking part in political demonstrations to acquire some of those resources for their ends.

How did special educators come to imitate the strategies of the NAACP?

In 1962, the U.S. President's Panel on Mental Retardation cautioned against using legal means to force communities to provide adequate care. Instead, the Panel's report urged agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to provide leadership in developing educational services for children they called retarded (President's Panel 1962, 149, 178-180).

In 1965, organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) cooperated with the National Education Association to pass the ESEA. However, the U.S. Office of Education decided not to direct any of the money to children with disabilities. When the ESEA came back for renewal in 1966, the CEC

lobbied along with such organizations as the American Psychological Association and the National Association of Mental Health for federal funds for states to educate children with handicaps. In addition, they wanted a specific bureau in the U.S. Office of Education to administer programs for the handicapped. Most important, they claimed these changes on the grounds that each child deserved a free, appropriate education. With surprisingly little debate, the U.S. Congress and President Johnson signed Title VI authorizing $50 billion in 1967 and $150 billion in 1968 for the education of children considered disabled. In keeping with the basis of their claims, in 1968, the International League of Societies for the Mentally Handicapped adopted a Declaration of General and Specific Rights of the Mentally Retarded. According to the declaration, each child who was considered mentally retarded had a right to proper medical care and to an education that enable him or her to the fullest (Levine and Wexler 1981, 20-33; Lippman and Goldberg 1973, 7).

In order to make effective appeals to the U.S. Congress, advocates for special education argued that local school districts ignored the rights of their children. To demonstrate this was the case, they sued in federal courts on the grounds that then current educational conditions violated the fourteenth amendment of the U.S. Constitution and they hired lawyers that had worked with the NAACP making similar pleas about racially segregated schools. In cases such as *PARC v. Commonwealth* and *Mills v. Board of Education,* it was no contest. The district courts recognized the rights of the children and ordered schools to change. Interestingly, these cases almost never went onto appeals. By 1994, the U.S. Supreme Court had heard at least seven cases involving special education. However, from 1954 until 1994, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered decisions in more than three-dozen cases involving racial desegregation in the public schools (Russo 1994, 297-309).

From those cases, special educators created a procedure that teachers should follow when creating the curriculum for children who are disabled. In 1975, U.S. President Gerald Ford signed Public law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This law drew upon the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 in that it required schools to follow the procedures outlined in the law or suffer withdrawal of federal funds. The rules did not outline any curriculum nor define the aims of any education. Instead, it set up a process in which parents, teachers, and specialists were to confer and decide among themselves what the goals might be for a child, what methods might be used to achieve them, and how the child's progress could be evaluated. Although the specific activities might differ for each child depending on his or her disability, the process was to be the same for all children. The problem is that under this model a teacher could teach anything providing the parents and a consultant agreed. Special educators claim this model is democratic because parents and teachers work together to help the children with handicaps learn as many skills as they can to

function in the society. But if most educational plans devised under this process serve to help children who are disabled adjust to the wider society, this represents a narrow conception of democracy.

How did advocates of bilingual education and supporters of gay and lesbian youth frame their claims?

In a short period of time, advocates of other groups used strategies similar to those of special educators to advance their causes. For example, advocates of bilingual education pushed for special treatment for students who did not speak English as a native language. Political organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and professional educational organizations such as the national Education Association complained that many schools did not help such children. During testimony to renew ESEA in 1967, the year following the successful lobbying by special educators, witnesses complained to the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and labor that schools were unable to help the many children from linguistic minorities. As a result, with little controversy, in 1968, the U.S. Congress approved and President Johnson passed Title VII that authorized $117.9 million to support bilingual education from 1969 to 1973 (Marquez 1989, 15-17; Committee on Education and Labor 1978, 521; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1975, 171-172).

Advocates of bilingual education sued in federal courts on the grounds that schools without such programs violated the rights of the children. The biggest victory came in January 1974 in Lau v. Nichols. In writing the opinion, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas noted that the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. It was clear to the justices that the 3,457 Chinese-speaking children enrolled in San Francisco schools received little benefit from the schools. Consequently, they ordered the district to take affirmative action to remedy the language deficiencies.

Despite this court victory, controversies remained whether bilingual education should establish a bilingual society, whether it should include instruction in the cultural heritage of the children, or whether its aim was to act as a bridge to help students who did not speak English to succeed in schools. Unfortunately, the critics of bilingual education used simple characterizations of the controversies to defeat the programs and the U.S. Congress reduced the funds allocated to bilingual education in 1985 and again in 1988. William Bennett, U.S. Secretary of Education urged these reductions on two grounds. First, bilingual education had not proven effective in helping children master academic subjects. Second, he urged that school districts be allowed more flexibility in determining how they wanted to deal with the problems represented by bilingual education (Schneider 128, 146-147; Bennett 1992, 359-362).

The point is that bilingual education offered an opportunity to think about the role of language in a democratic society. On the one hand, people within a democratic community have to communicate with each other. But, on the other hand, the people who speak different languages often think differently, and these differences can be the source of new ideas that would strengthen the democracy. Unfortunately, these complexities were not ones that educational leaders, such as Bennett explored. Instead, they used the concept of the right of local control to gloss over the complex questions about the nature of a democratic society.

Another group, supporters of gay and lesbian youth, argued that schools did not serve the rights of their constituents claiming that schools ignored these children's experiences. For example, in 1979, Joseph A. DeVito urged that administrators and teachers accord equal rights to gay and lesbian students. DeVito's view became a popular perspective as many organizations supported calls to affirm the rights of these students. In 1987, the president of the Association of Curriculum and Supervision endorsed James Sears' plea that educators promote the civil rights of all students and seek the passage of gay rights legislation. In 1996, the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) rejected arguments that homosexuality was too controversial for the classroom and proclaimed that all multicultural educators had an obligation to fight for the rights of gay and lesbian students. Similarly, in 1999, the National Association of School Psychologists adopted a position statement committing the organization to equal opportunity for education and mental health services for gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth (Sears 1987, 89-95; Pohan and Bailey 1997, 12-15).

Some gay activists thought schools should go beyond teaching tolerance and acceptance of homosexual and bisexual youth. For example, in 1989, Eric Rofes complimented gay and lesbian students who forced schools to attend to their needs. However, he called for activists to imitate Project 10 in San Francisco or the Harvey Milk School in New York where children learned the many benefits of homosexuality (Rofes 1989, 444-450).

The point is that many advocates for homosexual and bisexual youth argued for different but overly simple interpretations of people's rights. That is, they usually asserted a simple formula of tolerance or acceptance to oppose what they characterized as prejudice and discrimination. While tolerance is a part of any democracy, the society requires some agreement to core values that offers more direction than a simple openness to differences.

Did conservative politicians employ a similar model of affirming people's rights?

In 1980, Ronald Reagan waged a campaign for the U.S. presidency arguing against excessive federal efforts to make education egalitarian. When Reagan

took office, he avoided political negotiations with congressional representatives and aimed his legislative appeals directly at the voters through such media as television (Urban and Wagoner 2000, 341-348). Following his example, conservative politicians appealed to voters to change local schools. They claimed professional educators had forgotten the best ways to teach, and they asserted the parents' rights' to select the best education for their children. Further, since the conservatives rejected the idea of federal intervention into local school affairs, they mixed this idea with an economic model of a free market to encourage school effectiveness. Thus, they sought to expand the role of standardized testing, to encourage teachers to use conservative methods of instruction, and to further the idea of choice in schools.

When Reagan was elected, inflation had risen to 12 percent and unemployment rose to 7.5 percent. Although he had promised to reduce these economic difficulties, he could not. As a result, he appointed a committee whose members blamed public schools for the economic problems. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) released its report entitled *A nation at risk*. Complaining that public schools had lost sight of the purpose of schooling, the NCEE called for such things as a common core of subjects for all students, use of standardized tests to certify students' accomplishments, and more time on academic affairs. The NCEE did not offer more federal funds to help schools to adopt these measures. Instead, the NCEE report appealed to parents arguing that parents have the right to demand the best that schools and colleges can provide for their children (NCEE 1994, 411).

Officials within the U.S. Department of Education continued the appeals of the NCEE report by claiming that professional educators had ignored common sense and traditional approaches. They appealed to parents to assert their rights to control the schools their children attended. For example, in 1986, then U.S. Secretary of Education, William Bennett, addressed his department's report, *What works: research about teaching and learning,* to the parents of school children. He claimed the task of the federal government was to give them information with which they could act together and improve schools. Complaining that professional educators had ignored common sense, Bennett noted that the federal government restricted its interventions to disbursing research that confirmed what most people thought was proper about education. However, he asserted that, when parents were armed with this information, they could fix their own schools (Bennett 1986, v-vi).

Ten years after the publication of *A nation at risk*, Bennett assessed the progress since 1983 in meeting the goals set by the NCEE. He complained that the hardest goal was getting all schools to adopt a rigorous core curriculum, and he added that complaints arose from the fear that such a curriculum would arbitrarily exclude particular ideas and traditions. Although Bennett praised the

diversity and traditions of local control found in U.S. schools, he justified the creation of a core curriculum by stating that all children have a right to know the books and authors most Americans agree to be the most compelling. He cited the English program described in the U.S. Department of Education's monograph, *James Madison High School*, as an example of a list of such works (Bennett 1988, 25).

How did conservatives utilize the idea of choice in education?

By 1986, conservative politicians acknowledged the failure of their appeals to parents and rejected the complexities involved in managing educational reform. Instead, they turned to standardized testing. According to Chester Finn, Bennett's assistant secretary of education, the initial recommendations of the NCEE, offering more academic courses, extending the school day, and reducing class size, did not seem to improve academic performance. As a result, conservatives chose to regulate less and hold teachers accountable through school testing programs. According to Finn, this proposal depended on schools having clear goals and reliable tests to measure students' achievement. Although U.S. President George Bush had the opportunity to set such goals, he did not. Finn blamed this failure on the resistance from civil rights groups, from political conservatives protecting private schools, and from competing testing companies (Finn 124-138).

As a result of these political failures, Finn and other conservatives shifted the idea of school choice as the means to improve schools. In 1990, John E. Chubb and Terry Moe argued that public schools could not satisfy parents because school officials had to follow the policies set by the elected representatives of the voters. Chubb and Moe noted that parents had a right to participate in the process; they did not have the right to win. While Chubb and Moe noted problems with a free market system, they claimed that choice was the panacea because the competition would force schools to be more effective (1990, 5, 23, 215-221).

Two questions remained. The first was what mechanisms would bring about this parental choice to which parents had a right. The second was how to measure the effectiveness of the schools to which they also had a right. In 1981, Reagan suggested that parents receive some form of tuition tax credits allowing them to deduct the cost of private school education from their income taxes. Other politicians suggested vouchers that would allow parents to take the tax money used in a public school to any school in which their children enrolled. Neither plan experienced much success. However, in 1991, the Minnesota legislature, with the approval of the Minnesota Federation of Teachers, accepted a proposal that created the first charter school. Other states followed rapidly. By

1998, thirty-four states and the District of Columbia passed legislation permitting charter schools. These laws allowed citizens to start new public schools or convert existing ones that were free from many existing state and district requirements but were accountable for some results and subject to customer satisfaction (Nathan 1996, 61-69; Hassel 1999, 1,8).

Once people supported the idea of charter schools, the question of measuring the charter schools' effectiveness rose to prominence. Most charter schools cost less to operate, which had been an important conservative goal. In most cases, the curriculum covered what might be called basic instruction, which had been another conservative aim. However, charter schools did not seem to improve students' performance on standardized tests although this had been an important conservative point. Parents were unconcerned. For example, one study of charter schools in Texas, Massachusetts, California, and Louisiana found that parents believed that charter schools tested the students less frequently than did public schools. These parents interpreted this to mean the charter schools were better for the children (Ascher et al. 2000).

If the aim of charter schools was to satisfy parents, most studies acknowledged that they accomplished this goal. And, in any democracy, parents should have a right to select the education of their children and to be satisfied with the results. But, this is a weak aim especially since the parents of children in charter schools seemed to care more about the cordial manner in which officials received them than they did about their children's achievement.

Were efforts to satisfy the rights of children superior to efforts to meet the children's needs?

As I noted earlier, Boyd Bode warned that concern about meeting the needs of the children could distract educators from thinking about the complex and contradictory nature of a democratic society. Bode did not live long enough to see the ways the concept of satisfying the students' rights replaced the idea of meeting the children's needs as an organizing idea for curriculum development. But he might argue that the idea of satisfying the students' rights distracted educators from thinking about the complex and contradictory nature of democracy. And he might add, as he did in 1938, that since the reformers lacked a sense of an adequate social ideal, they became absorbed by trivialities and errors (Bode 1938, 113).

Bode thought the way out of educational confusion was through the philosophy of education because such thinking enabled educators to develop adequate ideas of what constituted a social ideal. Unfortunately, many contemporary philosophers of education do not share Bode's faith. Two examples illustrate this point.

First, in his 1980 monograph published by the U.S. Department of Education, *A design for a school of pedagogy*, B. Othanel Smith argues that prospective teachers cannot learn how to teach from the explication of concepts found in philosophy of education courses. While Smith acknowledges that such knowledge could help administrators in drafting policies, he says that it will not help students learn to control classrooms nor to confer with parents. Thus, instead of conceptual analysis, Smith concludes that prospective teachers should learn the clinical knowledge to help them improve their practical teaching skills (1980, 73-77).

Second, in *Caring: a feminine approach to ethics and moral education*, Nel Noddings suggests that all professional education training is unnecessary. If elementary and secondary schools were organized for caring, she believes, the prospective teachers could engage in some sort of extended apprenticeship with a master teacher for three years instead of taking professional courses that lead to a teaching credential. In this way, they could learn what she calls the skills of caring by practicing them. In professional teacher education, she fears that the prospective teachers learn skills of classroom management or some form of specialized knowledge. This reduces caring, she adds, because it makes teachers appear professional and thereby separates them from the children's parents (Noddings 1984, 197-198).

Smith implies that teachers should be technicians who can do something adequately without any deeper understanding of how their work improves society. Noddings wants teachers to practice what she calls the skills of caring by working as apprentices. In both cases, these philosophers contend that the deeper insights offered by philosophy courses have no beneficial, practical effect for prospective teachers. As prominent philosophers of education took such views, programs of teacher preparation became more practical and less theoretical.

Recently, the senior editor in charge of foundations texts for a large publishing house told me that he has noticed a steady decline in the number of courses marked foundations of education or philosophy of education in college catalogues. Whether the editor is correct or not, accrediting agencies require fewer foundations courses than they did. In 1986, the Council of Social Foundations of Education (CSFE), formerly known as the Council of Learned Societies in Education, required that programs of initial teacher certification or licensure contain two courses in the foundations of education. In the 1996 revision of those standards, the CFSE required only one course in the foundations of education and did not specify any particular organization or format for these studies.

People who agree with Smith's and Noddings that prospective teachers do not need to study the philosophy of education to become good teachers may point out that discussions of the aims of education do not illuminate the needed

practices. After all, they might add, Dewey pointed out in *Democracy and education* that people have aims; education does not. But, Bode warned against following Dewey's words to closely. Every institution has a purpose that distinguished it from other institutions, he explained. The purpose of the school is to make people aware of the guiding purpose of our society. In this regard, he complimented the progressives who sought to meet the students' needs because they recognized democracy represents the fullest development of the individual. The problem was that they took on this idea of meeting needs so strongly that they rejected the openness to many views that democracy required (Bode 1938, 110-112).

Today, Bode might add, educators try to extend the ideal of democracy by affirming students' rights. In this way, they prevent a narrow conformity from overpowering all differences among people. But, based on the earlier explanations about such reforms as special education and bilingual education, Bode could point out that each group among the contemporary educators holds to some aspect of the ideal of rights so strongly that they make it into an absolute.

Although Bode was not able to tell people how they could make the schools democratic, his books and articles stand as examples of how courses in the philosophy of education might advance this goal. When Bode examined curriculum plans for trivialities and errors, he spread the belief that social improvement comes from a general diffusion of knowledge. Perhaps the most that philosophers of education can do is to criticize what they see as trivialities and errors. If they make their criticisms from the basis of a need for a general diffusion of knowledge and abilities, the courses they teach will make the guiding principles of the society clearer and fuller for everyone.

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