
UNDER THE WHEELS OF A JUGGERNAUT:
EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN THE MIDST OF A MORAL QUANDARY

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As an introduction to the essay, we offer two events from our liberal arts institution.

From an Opening Convocation in 1967:

Awaken in our minds, O God, the memories of our heritage,
to recall the toil of brave souls who journeyed through the
woods to seek the light.

Let us remember the transformations of heart and mind that
have taken place on this blessed patch of earth—as young
pioneers and old sages have shared in the great conversation
and common life.

Let us celebrate the smiling spirits, the compelling questions,
the loud laughter, and shared tears of our classmates and
colleagues—as we carry them with us on future sojourns.

Let us never forget that this community is only valuable
insofar as all of its actions are directed toward higher values—
as this is the light we must pass on.

Take this company, O God, and make it a college;

Let it be bound together by more than registration as students
or employment as faculty or staff, by accidents of time and
space.

Let it be bound together by mutual trust, integrity, tolerance—
even love, one for another.

Let there be the binding stuff of curiosity, diligence, high
adventure, and deep commitment, as we strive together for
understandings, meanings, and values.

Let there be the persistent awareness that we are a college,
members one of another, called to high and necessary
endeavors here, and that we belong to you.

—Benjamin F. Burns, Dean of the Chapel, September 1967.

From an Accreditation Visit in 2014:

In 2014, our education program had its NCATE/CAEP¹ accreditation visit. During the team interview, one reviewer asked a question about how program faculty teach education students to use technology in P–12 schools. I, Jennifer, teach a course that explicitly addresses technology and P–12 standards in the classroom, so I responded: “Students research technologies, such as software programs, applications, or specific devices that could enhance teaching in his or her specific discipline. I tell students to ask themselves, ‘What technology might help me teach a particular concept in, say, language arts?’ I encourage students to think about how to use technology with intention, not just for the sake of using it. So I require them to create a specific learning scenario for its use, including writing learning goals, selecting standards, and so forth. If the technology does not make sense for the lesson goal, they shouldn’t use it.” I added: “They read articles about technology use in schools from a variety of perspectives. I want them to be critical practitioners of technology and ask deep questions about the advantages and disadvantages of technology use. Questions like, ‘How does increased technology use positively and negatively shape human relationships, including classroom community?’”

The reviewer nodded as I answered, but asked: “What specific programs do they use?” I scrambled to remember specific names. As I rattled off examples, I asked myself: “*Why do the specific names of programs/applications, that may or may not exist in a year’s time, matter? Why is this the question? Why do they continue to ask such technocratic and reductive questions? Earlier they wanted to know how we reduce the whole of a student’s disposition—the ability to care for students, act with integrity, show tolerance, teach with cultural responsiveness, and reflect on practice—to a number on a chart. So far, they have questioned the qualitative data we use for such “measures.” Now they want a list of specific technology programs. Does what I said about teaching students to be critical practitioners of technology matter at all?*”

These two episodes are shared in order to contrast major differences in the ways university experiences have been thought about in the past compared to the

¹ NCATE and CAEP stand for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, which have since been consolidated into CAEP. <http://www.ncate.org/>.

neoliberal manner in which they are now conceived. An often-used and multifaceted term, neoliberalism generally refers to a mind-set that values free market economics, extreme individualism, data-driven decisions, accountability, and corporate terminologies and policies. Henry A. Giroux, perhaps one of the most well-known educational thinkers currently speaking about and defining neoliberalism,² views neoliberalism as more than an economically, free-market focused political system. In fact, Giroux defines neoliberalism as a cultural system. In the system, Giroux claims that money influences politics, and competition is highly valued. He states: “Neoliberalism’s ideology of competition now dominates policies that define public spheres such as schools, allowing them to be stripped of a civic and democratic project and handed over to the logic of the market.”³

Comparing the past to the neoliberally-influenced present is not a clear-cut task. Certainly the past was not a totally “good” situation as compared to a “bad” present (neoliberal) time, but it cannot be denied that the language related to higher education and the rationale given for attending college has changed since our school’s 1967 convocation, especially in the last twenty years. Language and rhetoric have moved away from having, at least at times, those who “worried” about the role of the academy in such things as the well-being of the community and the development of thinking individuals, or of viewing the university as a site where contested ideas could be verbalized, to now mainly stressing job acquisition and accountability. In this change, corporate language carries the message and curricular cuts narrow educational conversation and possibilities. These changes result, at least in a large measure, from what is identified in this essay as the neoliberal influence on schooling philosophy and practices. The neoliberal language and policies build upon themselves, constantly begetting stricter policies and calls for more data and standards, thus forming a destructive force, a juggernaut, that pushes out other ways of thinking about and forming policies for educational institutions.

In this paper, then, neoliberalism refers to the current cultural and social penchant to privilege corporate power and language in political, economic, and social institutions, such as schools. This way of life values free-market economics, capitalism, corporate language, wealth, surveillance, competitiveness, and rugged individualism, all of which eschew participatory processes and a sense of a civic collective that works for a better life for all, not just a privileged few. Oversight, accountability, and corporate values⁴ function

² Giroux writes on neoliberalism in numerous texts. See especially *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); and *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

³ Henry A. Giroux, *America’s Education Deficit and the War on Youth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013), 11.

⁴ By corporate values, we refer to the importance of data, accountability, oversight, profit, standardization, and competition, among others. These are enumerated in many sources but especially in Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education*.

as the grounding for this system, which is under constant surveillance. This neoliberal ethos, when moved into schools, turns students into products on an assembly-line monitored by teachers who prepare students to obey authority and memorize factual information, especially in preparation for standardized exams. In addition, students are conditioned to resist forming critical questions. William Ayers, in worrying about the corporate, neoliberal model describes the situation in the following manner: “the whole range of school change strategies driven by a market model threaten to undermine the structures and principles of public education . . . The imposition of a market metaphor on a public enterprise such as schooling is infused with disingenuousness, beginning with the fact that no salable product is produced in schools.”⁵ Ayers further claims that this model asks, “teachers to act as clerks and functionaries—interchangeable parts in a vast and gleaming and highly rationalized production line.”⁶

Neoliberal policies, when moved into educational institutions, then, change the vocabulary used in mission statements and institutional policies to that of the corporate world, with the “bottom line” always a touchstone. Hence, neoliberalism affects school budgets and allocation of funds, moving more monies toward administration, “quality control,” and technology. Incentives are offered as a way to have schools compete for funds and students.⁷ As these policies move into colleges and universities, members of academic programs find themselves having to justify their existences with numerical data (instead of philosophically). Programs also compete for faculty lines and the ability to offer courses based on student enrollment instead of the intrinsic value of the course content.⁸ This practice pits the members of universities and colleges against one another instead of encouraging the formation of relationships and collaborative projects for the benefit of ideas, students, and connected learning. All of these competitive, combative measures form a loop which begets more corporate measures, competition, and data sets; hence the juggernaut crushes and grows.

This neoliberal juggernaut, utilizing and fueling on corporate language, standardization, and auditing measures, has slowly gained steam over the past twenty years, commencing with the accountability movement in P–12 schools. That first step of installing the corporate language and audit culture into P–12 schools and moving their purpose to successful completion of standardized exams has been accomplished, especially through the use of standardized test scores and other related numerical data to evaluate and rank P–12 schools and

⁵ William Ayers, *Teaching Toward Freedom: Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷ See, for example, the writings of Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools* (New York: Knopf Press, 2013); and Alfie Kohn, *What Does It Mean to Be Well Educated? And More Essays on Standards, Grading, and Other Follies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

⁸ We give this example from our own small institution where now class enrollments must meet a minimum number of students in order to remain on the schedule.

teacher effectiveness and to distribute funding. Responding to the pressure placed on schooling administrators and teachers for their students to score well on standardized exams, administrators have elected to set up data collection rooms in their buildings and to monitor the progress being made in each classroom toward test preparation, among other measures. Such preparation for exams is now commonplace in P–12 schools even though a plethora of negative criticism against these policies is extant.⁹

Those of us in higher education currently experience step two: the installation of neoliberal policies into universities and colleges. These policies narrow higher education's role in providing sites for conversations about the public good and humanity in general. Marc Spooner argues that this audit culture in higher education "has now crept from being a method of financial verification to a general model or technology of governance (Shore) and is reshaping almost every aspect of the very notion of higher education."¹⁰ Indeed, Shore argues that the audit culture "confuses accountability with accountancy."¹¹

Included in this step two, then, is the pressure on education programs from accrediting agencies, such as CAEP, to conform to the neoliberal model, especially in the preparation of P–12 teachers. Therefore, in this essay, we argue that faculty in education programs are in the throes of a moral quandary, one that forces them to not only recognize the faults of the audit, accountability/accountancy culture that now shapes their discipline but also one that places before education faculty the importance of the choices they now must make in designing instruction and interacting with their students. These choices hinge on the purpose(s) professors give for their work, and these choices result from the questions educators raise and answer. The quandary rests on the following question: what type of experience will the education program provide its students? Will it be a technical experience filled mainly with "how to" strategies that appear to be demanded by corporate policies, or will education programs offer a holistic curriculum that contains a strong philosophic base combined with opportunities to wrestle with controversial questions and

⁹ Many authors who write about the effects of NCLB and other standardization measures on current schooling policies and practices could be cited here. Among them are Michael B. Katz and Mike Rose, eds. *Public Education Under Siege* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); and Elliot W. Eisner, *Reimagining Schools: The Selected Works of Elliot W. Eisner* (New York: Routledge, 2005); along with Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (New York: Perseus Books, 2010), and *Reign of Error*.

¹⁰ Marc Spooner, "The Deleterious Personal and Societal Effects of the 'Audit Culture' and a Domesticated Academy: Another Way is Possible," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 8, no. 2 (2015): 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

criticisms of the in-place P–12 policies?¹² The problem of whether to offer technical or philosophical curriculum experiences is convoluted: if programs only offer one of these two options, then have the students been disadvantaged by not knowing both positions? If the program is a blend of both options, does it set the students up for a conflicted view of the field and their own purpose as educators? Therefore, education faculty members who thoughtfully prepare experiences for their students find themselves in a moral quandary.

To contextualize and argue for the position that a holistic curriculum is the better one for education students, this essay examines three main ideas commencing with the assaults education programs now endure from neoliberal policies that precipitate the troubling moral position in which education programs now find themselves, followed by examining the importance of questions to the schooling process and the wider culture, and concluding with possible suggestions for transforming the current situation.

ASSAULTS ON EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Neoliberal methods and technologies of control, masked as quality assurance measures, reflect what Paulo Freire called the “dominant ideology of our time . . . that it is possible for education to be neutral.”¹³ Yet, such an uncritical interpretation dulls and obfuscates the ways in which these measures shape curriculum, drown out dissenting voices, and undermine the pursuit of education as a process to develop critical conscience, wholeness, and agency. Education programs, as programmatic extensions of the larger institutional system, struggle to ground curriculum in deep epistemological and ontological questions. What’s more, education programs, in particular, are accountable to state teacher licensure policies, professional teaching standards, and accrediting bodies. Influenced by the same neoliberal/marketization ideology shaping the culture of higher education, standardization with increased focus on method and technique over theory and philosophy and the outcome-based evidence required by accreditation bodies place education programs in a constant moral struggle as education professors weigh the ethical costs of compliance and the potentially professional cost of critique.

At the heart of the moral quandary is whether education programs like ours can continue to structure around a conceptual framework grounded in theory and philosophy rather than technocracy. At the center of our program’s conceptual framework is Giroux’s notion of “the public intellectual who cares.” A portion of our framework states:

¹² One could even argue that education faculty might find it difficult to teach the strategies that corroborate the neoliberal policies of data management and accountability measures, especially standardization and testing at all. Is there an obligation to teach these strategies?

¹³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 1998), 90.

Effective teachers constantly evaluate and affect policies and ideas put forward by their communities and actively serve as leaders in their schools and larger professional and civic communities. As Henry Giroux advocates, teachers prepare learners to be active and critical citizens who are capable of reflective judgment which also enhances their roles as public intellectuals (See Henry Giroux's *Teachers as Intellectuals*).¹⁴ Serving in this way, teachers as public intellectuals are "engaged in activity requiring the creative use of the intellect."¹⁵

Yet, a conceptual framework based on the ideals of being a "public intellectual" is increasingly difficult to enact during what Lilia Bartolomé calls the era of a "methods fetish."¹⁶ That is, when education as a discipline is defined as a technical and vocational pursuit. The dominant technocratic view among policymakers, textbook makers, and other influential players, asserts that with enough "technical expertise, mastery of content knowledge, and methodology,"¹⁷ teachers will be able to close the "achievement gap" and reach all students. Such a technical orientation replaces critical questions about and analysis of socioeconomic and sociocultural inequalities that research has shown time and again to influence differences in student achievement. Ardent faith in the "one size fits all"¹⁸ tool kit of instructional strategies erases a deep understanding of the epistemological foundations from which these instructional strategies come.

As our program's conceptual framework states, being a "public intellectual who cares" means questioning and challenging the very "policies and ideas put forward by their communities"—namely, a "methods fetish" that is part of a neoliberal framework of education. Thus, raising critical questions based in grounding philosophical and theoretical ideas is at the very core of our program's practice. Yet, such questions and practices are often deemed irrelevant. For example, a graduate of our education program, now a practicing elementary school teacher, chose to pursue a Masters in Foundations of Education for her continuing education and recertification process. However, the state denied her recertification points because it did not recognize foundations as applicable to her work in the classroom. As a program that offers two majors in our education program—one in teacher certification and one in educational studies—we take

¹⁴ Henry Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1988), 7.

¹⁵ This quote is from Merriam-Webster's definition of "intellectual," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectual>.

¹⁶ Lilia Bartolomé, "Beyond the Methods Fetish: Toward a Humanizing Pedagogy," in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (2nd edition), eds. Antonia Darder, Marta P. Baltodano, and Rodolfo D. Torres (New York: Routledge, 2009), 338.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

professional and personal offense at the assertion that educational foundations is not applicable to what one does in the classroom. On the contrary, we assert that a theoretical/philosophical grounding has everything to do with the classroom and is critical for developing a humane education; while passing scores on the Praxis 1, a state requirement to even major in teacher certification in our state, tell us very little about how a teacher will be in the classroom.

Accrediting bodies, such as CAEP, also focus, sometimes myopically, on techniques taught in education courses, as the opening vignette demonstrates, as well as on quantitative and quantifiable outcomes related to teacher dispositions, skills, and knowledge. The recent CAEP mandate to establish positivist/scientific “content validity” for all instruments that measure a student’s¹⁹ ability to lesson plan, demonstrate an appropriate disposition for teaching, and so on illustrates the desire for quantifiable approaches to assessment. To further the neoliberal marketization turn, Pearson now creates CAEP approved assessment instruments that have content validity. Thus, education programs need not fuss with creating assessments that align with conceptual frameworks or rely on their own expertise in creating assessments that fairly and appropriately assess students; they simply need to place their programs in the faith and “expertise” of the free market. CAEP further invalidates the importance of a program’s theory and philosophy as the new standards have eliminated conceptual frameworks as an assessment requirement for reaccreditation.

An additional assault is that, under CAEP, teacher education programs are now called “providers,” removing the tradition, expertise, and validity of the university in order to make room for for-profit entities.²⁰ The new CAEP standards ramp up the emphasis on quantifiable outcomes further as now teacher education programs must provide their graduates’ K–12 student performance data as evidence of the quality of the teacher education program. Such a measure assumes a false notion of causation, and demonstrates a striking fallacy of reasoning. Again, despite research problematizing and even discrediting the use of student test scores as evidence of student learning, and even less so evidence of good or bad teaching,²¹ education programs now must comply with policy that they find empirically and philosophically unsound or critique such policies and risk losing accreditation.

¹⁹ CAEP refers to students as candidates. Such a reference is part of the neoliberal discourse, so we refrain from its use.

²⁰ Note that this paragraph alone references neoliberal terminology and practices—“content validity” (i.e. quality control), “providers,” “candidates,” and “evidence”—that are now considered standard vocabulary for education programs.

²¹ See, for example, W. James Popham, *The Truth About Testing: An Educator’s Call to Action* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001); and John Kuhn, *Fear and Learning in America: Bad Data, Good Teachers* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014).

Therefore, those in the discipline of education who oppose current, neoliberal policies find themselves under the wheels of a juggernaut with a moral situation pressing upon them. As the neoliberal culture occasions budget cuts and program eliminations in their universities, education professors currently experience pressure from two directions in the neoliberal assault: that is, not only are their colleges and universities being harmed through downsizing measures and hiring freezes (the bottom line), their own discipline, housed in those institutions, is also under attack, sometimes from the neoliberal policies being adopted by their own universities but frequently from advocates for the perpetuation of neoliberal policies in P–12 schools and from the mandates that emanate from those practices and from accrediting bodies, such as CAEP. Education programs are expected to put the curriculum in place that aligns with the current P–12 schooling policies. How do professors, then, remain faithful to the principles of formal education that honor the development of thinking, compassionate human beings, who know how to examine moral and ethical issues, while at the same time answer the demands of accrediting bodies and P–12 administrators to conform to the neoliberal audit culture? Hence, a moral quandary exists for those who do not ascribe to the neoliberal view, a view, according to Giroux, in which “the language of authority, power, and command is divorced from ethics, social responsibility, critical analysis, and social costs”²² and neoliberal policies currently being exacted upon schools. Those of us who hold a holistic view of schooling do so because of a felt moral obligation to open possibilities for students and not to narrow schooling experiences to a set curriculum designed to prepare students for standardized exams. Truncating curriculum limits opportunities for students to grow in their intellectual and moral lives, a main purpose of schooling, according to John Dewey.²³

Dewey’s work cautions that educating is a moral activity that should be scrutinized. As Dewey writes: “The business of the educator—whether parent or teacher—is to see to it that the greatest possible number of ideas acquired by children and youth are acquired in such a vital way that they become *moving* ideas, motive-forces in the guidance of conduct.”²⁴ This notion is related to Dewey’s argument that morals are learned and interwoven as a part of schooling curricula, and that they are not a set of principles “added on” or thought about only on occasion, after the “academic work” is learned. In addition, Dewey ties morals to judgment. As he states: “We must also test our school work by finding whether it affords the conditions necessary for the formation of good judgment.

²² Henry A. Giroux, *The Violence of Organized Forgetting: Thinking Beyond American’s Disimagination Machine* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2014), 26.

²³ Many of John Dewey’s works could be cited here, but perhaps this idea is stated most clearly in *Moral Principles in Education* (London: Feffer & Simmons, 1975).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, emphasis original.

Judgment as the sense of relative values involves ability to select, to discriminate. Acquiring information can never develop the power of judgment.”²⁵

Dewey locates opportunities to form judgment and discernment through literature, history, the arts, and other aesthetic experiences. Unfortunately, current neoliberal rhetoric and policies are instrumental in dismantling robust programs in areas such as the arts and humanities that engage students in critical thinking about humanity, replacing such inquiry with an overemphasis on the acquisition of disconnected skills.²⁶ These practices are harming students’ abilities to learn how to consider, contemplate, and form judgments. Dewey advocates for an education that values ideas and morals that are vibrant and positive for the good and growth of the civic community. As he states: “We need to translate the moral into the conditions and forces of our community life, and into the impulses and habits of the individual.”²⁷ The ability to do so, at least partially, is inculcated through schooling experiences. Currently students through “neoliberal policies” are being directed toward an individualized rather than a collective focus, mainly through testing and competition.

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONS

A vital component of the type of schooling Dewey supports rests with the ability of students and teachers to learn how to ask critical questions. Without interrogating the narratives in which one lives, both as an individual and as a collective, individuals are curtailed in their ability to form judgments and to make moral decisions. Philosopher Maxine Greene’s work is filled with the admonition to “ask the questions!”²⁸ To be existentially aware, Greene argues that individuals must be able to form and reform questions about the things that matter. Likewise, Giroux argues that institutions of higher education are “one of the few public spheres left where educators and students can create the conditions for critical thinking, informed dialogues and a culture of questioning.”²⁹ Learning how to question is vital for the preparation of individuals who can deal with the problems of a culture or a society. Compelling questions about race, social justice, the environment, government, and economics form the basis for developing the ability to discern among options and to think about the effects of those answers upon the web of human relationships and collectives.

The moral quandary education professors now face is exacerbated by the questions now asked about education; that is, questions inform the way the discipline is approached and conceptualized. Neoliberal questions focus on standards, data, content validity/quality control, competition, and money. The

²⁵ Ibid., 54.

²⁶ See especially Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*; and Ayers, *Teaching Toward Freedom*.

²⁷ Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education*, 58.

²⁸ See especially Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988).

²⁹ Giroux, *The Violence of Organized Forgetting*, 221.

appeal of providing a program fitting this neoliberal, corporate model perhaps lies with its ease of implementation and with its congruence with current P–12 schooling policies and political rhetoric. Funding (especially in the form of grants) for programs that fit the neoliberal pattern may also be more readily available than for programs that do not concur with that model. Fear of losing accreditation also may very well lead program leaders to structure a program around this model. Thus, these reasons in many ways make the corporate model the “easy” way to structure a program. In contrast, holistic, humanistic questions relate to community, peace, cooperation, agency, value, morals, liberation, human flourishing, and beauty. Therefore, the questions asked, or those that are stifled, matter. The language and content of questions direct the depth and scope of the answer. Far from being a “cut and dry” way to structure a program, holistic, humanistic programs are dense, multilayered, and at times contentious to structure. However, those choosing to form holistic programs appear to view the preparation of teachers as a moral responsibility because, as Ayers posits, “Teaching is intellectual and ethical work; it takes a thoughtful, reflective, and caring person to do it well.”³⁰

Currently the main questions asked and answered in relation to P–12 schools, however, refer in some way to accountability, data, testing, standards, and academic achievement. These particular sets of questions, all related to auditing performance, have pushed aside all other queries. In fact, the focus on accountability as measured by tests has become “THE” focusing question rather than “A” question among many, and it holds a position of hegemony over educational policy makers, many citizens, and politicians.

Unfortunately, then, auditing questions currently hold power over the discipline of education. As Parker Palmer notes, “every discipline has a gestalt, an internal logic, a patterned way of relating to the great things at its core.”³¹ This pattern of great things that involve the total person and make education a public good should form the heart of education as an academic discipline. For, as Dewey claimed in relation to ideas, all questions have a moral quality in that the answers to them have consequences that impact how individuals may or may not locate meaning in their lives and find ways to take action.³²

However, by truncating the guiding question of teacher education programs to the utilitarian one of how to prepare future teachers to use data, close the achievement gap, and raise test scores instead of asking the question of how to provide a program grounded in conceptual information related to history, philosophy, and the seminal questions of education, educational policy makers are eviscerating the depth and meaning from their discipline. The field of

³⁰ Ayers, *Teaching Toward Freedom*, 142.

³¹ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 122.

³² On this interpretation of Dewey's thinking, please see David T. Hansen, ed. *Ethical Visions of Education: Philosophies in Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007), 3–6.

education has a history that reaches back to ancient thinkers and moves to current time, where philosophers have worried with questions such as: What is knowledge? How can it be known? What knowledge is worth knowing and why? How do ideas relate to one another? What is of moral value? During modernity, the discipline of education has asked questions related to the ways that the intersections of identity such as gender, race, and class shape teaching and learning. The discipline asks questions about power and privilege, such as whose knowledge counts? Thinkers in the field have come from a variety of standpoints and perspectives, making the conversation lively. That is, the conversation was lively until lately, as policies following neoliberal practices have pushed these questions aside.³³

The discipline of education is an angle of vision on the world and on what can be known, and it is diminished in quality and depth when the focusing question is one that truncates conversation and moves the curriculum to a reductionist set of techniques. Many people controlling the discipline of education have moved away from their responsibility to provide an authentic academic discipline in which education students engage in a curriculum grounded in historical, philosophical, and critical learning investigations. Instead, current education students too often are provided a “technical” experience that skims on the surface and emphasizes skills rather than in-depth, meaningful learning opportunities.

In a word, future teachers, in too many cases, currently are being prepared to be technicians, instead of having the opportunities to learn to think and question and to cultivate their own good judgments and understandings. Most current practices do not prepare individuals to be teachers who know why they are doing what they do in classrooms, nor do they encourage deep thinking, creativity, and understanding of their own humanity. Controversial issues that were a part of the discipline in many programs in the past rarely are considered, and opportunities for students to have engaged learning experiences with the big questions of life are becoming nonexistent.³⁴ These practices respond to the wrong grounding questions for a discipline that has as one of its purposes the preparation of intelligent, caring future P–12 teachers and which additionally, on some campuses, enroll students who are interested in learning about educational concepts purely for the sake of studying the ideas that should be a part of the academic discipline.

Important grounding questions are more than ones related to technique. Grounding questions are those that prepare individuals to figure out how to locate their own meaning as human beings and also how to be in diverse public spaces

³³ Joel Spring, *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2010), 135–37.

³⁴ Again, Ravitch’s recent work lends support to this claim as does Eisner’s collection of essays in *Reimagining Schools*.

in moral discussions with others.³⁵ In her work, Greene describes the process of being educated as one in which critical questions are posed and young people are given opportunities “to seek out openings in their lived situations, to tolerate disruptions of the taken-for-granted, to try consciously to become different than they are.”³⁶ Questions enable individuals to form a sense of self and other, and consequently, to consider the moral aspects of situations. Without the ability to question, as Ayers writes, “the moral and the ethical are ignored, obscured, and obfuscated, also without much thought.”³⁷ Questions, thus, serve as the “prodding sticks” to move individuals and groups out of their complacency and stultified positions so that growth can occur and problems can perhaps be ameliorated. Questions encourage individuals to see lived situations in a new or different light.

Greene especially thought it necessary for those who have selected teaching as their vocation to be able to question their lived experiences. Greene also places value on the arts and the imagination in being able to question and think of new realities or possibilities.³⁸ Being able to question and imagine requires a different type of mindset and educational situation than do the behaviorist/corporate types of schools now being fashioned in the neoliberal hegemony. Questions allow members of education programs to find ways in which to challenge the policies, language, and practices of neoliberalism surveillance and the valuing of data rather than human beings.

The question, then, becomes one of how education programs can locate ways to offer a curriculum that provides space for young people to learn how to be robust-thinking human beings in the atmosphere of the neoliberal, audit culture that demands the preparation of future teachers to fit into and reproduce the current test-oriented, curriculum-truncated public schools.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR TRANSFORMING THE CURRENT SITUATION

Dewey’s insistence that moral principles are not a separate entity from what individuals do but rather are an integral part of human agency and action gives rise to this concluding section of the paper. Dewey argues that there is a morality to educating children, youth, and young people, and he names a quality—*moral courage*—that educators must exercise. As Sidney Hook describes Dewey’s thought on this matter, “The moral person or individual, according to Dewey himself, ‘must have the power to stand up and count for

³⁵ See Mordechai Gordon, ed. *Hannah Arendt and Education* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), especially Maxine Greene’s *Foreword*, for an examination of this point.

³⁶ Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 17.

³⁷ Ayers, *Teaching Toward Freedom*, 17.

³⁸ See especially Maxine Greene, “The Passions of Pluralism: Multiculturalism and the Expanding Community,” in Steven M. Cahn, ed. *Classic and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 420–27.

something in the actual conflicts in life.”³⁹ Given the neoliberal juggernaut explored in this essay, we offer the following suggestions to members of education programs who also find themselves morally uneasy with or opposed to current reductive policies and practices. Perhaps these suggestions can provide a nudge for programs and individual educators to use their moral courage as they negotiate the neoliberal juggernaut pressing down upon them and their programs.

- Thoroughly examine current policies, initiate conversations about them in public groups. Be bold: say what we, as educators know, but tend to remain quiet about. As Isaiah Berlin stated: we “are enslaved by despots—institutions or beliefs or neuroses—which can be removed only by being analyzed and understood.”⁴⁰
- Change the questions used to form the discipline. Ask questions such as: What can we do in formal schooling experiences that will enable children and youth of differing gifts and abilities to grow in their academic learning and in their moral and emotional lives? What can we do in formal schooling experiences that will enable children and youth to understand social systems that shape their lives in positive and negative ways? How can they learn to recognize and, ultimately, transform social inequalities? Asking such questions provokes quite a different response than does asking how to raise test scores.
- Insist on integrating the study of care, humaneness, and compassion into the discipline of education as key components rather than as elective topics or not at all.
- Make the importance of understanding and sense-making salient features of the discipline.
- Problematize concepts and slogans from the dominant discourse, such as achievement *gap*, *accountability*, and *all children can learn*. Insist that leaders and students have serious conversations about these.
- Practice civil disobedience. Refuse to eliminate philosophic, sociological, and historical based courses from the curriculum.
- Collectively refuse to serve on accrediting agencies’ boards of examiners until the agencies move away from neoliberal policies.

With questions and actions such as these, education programs could possibly be transformed. These suggestions, if implemented, would perhaps move education programs toward a more balanced position that would fulfill the definition of an

³⁹ Sidney Hook, *Preface to John Dewey, Moral Principles in Education*, XV.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 4.

academic discipline and foster the development of thoughtful, reasoned teachers who will enrich the lives of P-12 students.
