

ESSAYS ON TEACHING EDUCATION
AND THE INNER DRAMA OF
TEACHING

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ADVANCES IN RESEARCH ON TEACHING VOLUME 32

**ESSAYS ON TEACHING
EDUCATION AND THE
INNER DRAMA OF
TEACHING: WHERE
TROUBLES MEET ISSUES**

BY

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INTRODUCTION

At the conclusion of *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills (1959) wrote:

Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. Within that range of life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and with that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time. (p. 226)

It is from this quote of Mills that the subtitle of the present volume originated, “*Where Troubles Meet Issues*.” Although it has been many years since I first read Mills’ work, this quote stuck and gradually sunk into a secure place in my thinking.

Among my earliest writings are biographical pieces, sometimes more scraps than finished works, within which I tried to make sense of the lives of various educators in relationship to their times, hoping to see where, as Mills wrote, troubles and issues and biography and history meet. Over the decades of my work in education and teacher education, I have often puzzled over what has seemed to be a necessity to choose sides: practice or theory; people or institutions; generalization (quantitative research) or particularization (qualitative research); humanities or social science. Since such choices have social, political, and personal implications, setting conditions of affiliation and membership, and therefore identity, no surprise, a good deal of scholarly activity signals the choice that has been made. As a student in the 1970s, my graduate chair, Paul Klohr, revealing his roots in the pragmatism of Dewey and Boyd Bode, sought a middle position, which he often described as “middle range theorizing,” a place where educators – being neither fish nor fowl – lived and worked. Dewey (1929) explored this terrain in his *Sources of a Science of Education*. Currently, the oft-used concepts of micro-, meso-, and macro-focused analyses, each representing in ascending order a different level and type of social analysis, seem to suggest the desirability of locating meeting places somewhere at the points inbetween.

In the 1970s, I sought what I then called a “persons-centered history” of education. I argued, quoting Maxine Greene (1967, p. 186), “What often is missing in educational histories is a focus upon ‘the continuing, sometimes desperate efforts of men to choose, shape, and maintain what they consider to be a proper human way of life’” (Bullough, 1979/1989, p. 33). Reading Erik Erikson’s (1958) study of Martin Luther helped deepen a sense that turned into a foundational insight, “that individuals are victims, vehicles and, in a sense, ultimately

resolutions to the cultural dilemmas they experience – dilemmas which run through and around them” (Bullough, 1979/1989, p. 33). As Erikson (1958) wrote: “Man never lives entirely in his time, even though he can never live outside it; sometimes his identity gets along with his time’s ideology, and sometimes it has to fight for its life” (p. 221). Socialization is never one way; we live in tension and that tension shapes identity and the social surround – which is often simply assumed, like water to fish, as given.

The givenness of life, described by Paul Feyerabend (1994) as involving “natural interpretations” that need shaking, elevates *issues* and *history over troubles* and *biography*. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and his colleague Leonidas Donskis (2013) wrote of this one-sidedness as manifesting what they called TINA (There Is No Alternative), a malady that infects social policy and slips unannounced into political speech, characterizing it as perhaps the greatest evil of our time. “Nowadays, you say, ‘we find ourselves in the world of TINA disguised as a world of the rational choice, profit-enhancing and pleasure-maximizing forces of the free market.’ [...] A condition of the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’ merging and no longer [being] distinguishable – let alone in conflict” (pp. 150–151). They continued, “The world has probably never been so inundated with fatalistic and deterministic beliefs as it is today” (p. 162). Their concern was the dominance of neoliberalism (see Chapter 1) with the result, as Bauman (with Mazzeo 2012) wrote:

The link between the public agenda and private worries, the very hub of the democratic process, has been broken – each of the two spheres now rotating in mutually isolated spaces and set in motion by mutually unconnected and non-communicating (though certainly not independent!) factors and mechanisms. (p. 97)

Essays on Teaching Education and the Inner Drama of Teaching: Where Troubles and Issues Meet is composed of 11 essays separated as Part I, “On Teaching Education,” and Part II, “The Inner Drama of Teaching.” While each essay seeks to illuminate the place where troubles and issues and biography and history meet, those contained in Part I are most directly concerned with the institutional, ideational, and social context within which educators live, work, and strive to make sense of their experience. The essays in Part II primarily address specific aspects of the experience of teaching, emphasizing troubles. Hence, the intent of the chapters in the second part of the book is to explore troubles while seeking to elevate them as issues. Taken as a whole, the essays seek to expose assumptions and ideas that enjoy taken-for-granted status in educational thought and practice. By seeking to locate tensions between troubles and issues and biography and history, the intent is to honor the life experience of educators (and of students) by recognizing that within that experience reside seeds of a potentially powerful and compelling, because life-affirming, criticism. Such criticism is life-affirming when it opens imagination to alternative possibilities for living. Where there is tension, there resides hope. The hope is that TINA will be recognized for what it is, privileged and harmful ideology.

ESSAYS IN PART I

Chapter 1, “Place, Fast Time, and Identity: University Teaching and the Neoliberal Threat,” explores neoliberalism in relationship to troubles and issues, thereby serving as a contextual backdrop for the essays that follow. The chapter includes a detailed description of what neoliberalism is and how it broadly and variously affects education, including its effects on the lives of those who live and work within higher education, including teacher education.

Chapter 2, “Looking Back on 40 Years of Teaching Education: A Personal Essay,” describes the evolution of the purposes and practices of teacher education under neoliberal policy priorities and includes discussion of shifting federal policies in teacher education.

Chapter 3, “Toward Reconstructing the Narrative of Teacher Education: A Rhetorical Analysis of *Preparing Teachers*,” offers a Burkian rhetorical analysis of the National Academy of Sciences publication *Preparing Teachers*. The chapter reveals the ideology, biases, and intentions embedded in this influential publication of the best thinking of significant scholars on the practice and reform of teacher education.

Chapter 4, “Against Best Practice: Uncertainty, Outliers and Local Studies in Educational Research,” critically analyzes best practice, a celebrated and rarely criticized aim of teacher education. Representing a phrase that easily slips off the tongue of teacher educators interested in diffusing criticism while making a case for possessing distinctive knowledge, “best practice” proves to be a mischievous aim.

ESSAYS IN PART II

Chapter 5, “Getting Motivation Right: The Call to Teach and Teacher Hopefulness,” refutes the punishing psychology that has characterized the past few decades of educational reform. Drawing on data from a study of teacher beliefs and commitments related to feelings of being called and remaining hopeful about teaching, this chapter argues for the importance of getting motivation right with all efforts at educational improvement. The chapter provides background for the chapters that follow by reminding readers of the values, beliefs, and commitments that motivate teachers to teach, especially the depth of their service ethic and their concern for the well-being of young people.

Chapter 6, “Theorizing Teacher Identity: Exploring Self-narratives and Finding Place in an Audit Society,” picks up and extends the argument in Chapter 5 with an approach to the study of identity formation that draws on life course research and psycho-social constructivist methods and concepts to analyze the work of a head teacher, Mr Kent. The analysis reveals the relationship between issues of teaching within a neoliberal audit culture and the difficulties experienced by Mr Kent – his troubles – that affect his identity as a teacher and administrator.

Chapter 7, “Teaching and Learning with Parables: Reimagining the Self and the World,” begins with a discussion of the centrality of storytelling in teacher education and teaching. In teacher education, stories are typically used to describe instructors’ views of best practice. Parables are an alternative form of narrative, one that provides means for revealing and perhaps reconsidering embedded meaning, working assumptions about teaching and about themselves as teachers – foundational experiences for exploring identity.

Chapter 8, “Teachability and Vulnerability,” explores the vulnerability always present in teaching. Vulnerability is commonly considered a weakness to be overcome or avoided. This chapter draws on a case study of two interns and their mentor to illustrate the role of vulnerability in learning and teacher development.

Chapter 9, “An Inquiry into Empathy and Teaching: Is Empathy All it Is Cracked Up to Be?” provides an extensive review of the extant research on empathy, including a brief study of a preschool teacher’s struggles to connect with her students. Empathy is widely taken as an inherent good, a source of hope for teaching across differences, among other expectations. This chapter problematizes the concept to argue that efforts to elevate empathy to a teaching disposition are misguided, perhaps potentially harmful. The concept is in need of reconsideration, including its relationship to the realization of the social justice aspirations that hold such a prominent place in teacher education.

Chapter 10, “Light and Dark Humor and the Inner Drama of Teaching,” describes dangers as well as benefits of this widely touted component of teaching: considered by some as an essential quality of good teaching and an unquestioned good. Humor may be harmful, even as some researchers are arguing that it should become an important focus for professional development. This chapter explores light and dark humor, suggesting that the kind and quality of educator humor provide an important gauge of institutional health and well-being.

Chapter 11, “Hope, Happiness and Seeking Eudaimonia,” explores the well-being of teachers, an important yet seldom considered condition essential to sustaining quality education for the young. Within policy circles, the strong link between student and teacher well-being is seldom considered. This chapter reviews studies of teacher happiness and hope, with an eye toward establishing Eudaimonia – flourishing – as perhaps the most compelling and consequential cultural aim for educational improvement.

A postscript composed of eight propositions concludes the collection.

PART I
NEOLIBERALISM AND TEACHING
EDUCATION

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CHAPTER 1

PLACE, FAST TIME, AND IDENTITY: UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND THE NEOLIBERAL THREAT

INTRODUCTION

Reviewing the history of teacher education, Fraser (2007) argued that among the reasons for university involvement was that administrators and some faculty acknowledged,

Public schools, especially high schools, were growth industries and that the university ought to seize the leadership of the movement, especially in preparation of those slated for “higher positions in the public school system,” which could include future high school teachers, superintendents, and normal school professors. (p. 140)

But, not everyone involved in teacher education was pleased by this development, especially normal school educators dedicated to the idea that preparation to teach was best done in separate institutions dedicated to the study and practice of teaching.

[They] were reluctant to adopt the “standards” of the academic world or, from a somewhat different point of view, to renounce their provincialism and freedom to adjust curricular offerings and other practices to the exigencies of their clientele and local situations. (Monroe, 1952, p. 296)

For some early teacher educators, concern about the possibility of universities moving into teacher education was more principled than self-serving. As Fraser (2007) observed, there was tension “between university desires for academic respectability, which often meant greater focus on theoretical research than on practical applications, and the need felt by leaders of schools and states for well-prepared educators” (p. 139). Some teacher educators were double-minded: wanting to elevate the status and respectability of the study of teaching by affiliating with colleges and universities, but fearing that the practice of teaching would be short-changed by the move, both as an arena of inquiry and as a craft or art form (see Clifford & Guthrie, 1988). University faculty and normal school faculty both understood that dramatic changes would follow when teacher education entered the academy.

Normal schools evolved into teachers’ colleges and teachers’ colleges into universities, and in the process, the future and fate of teacher education and its

faculty became inextricably joined to higher education. This chapter explores the neoliberal university, including what life is like within it as troubles and issues, biography and history, meet.

THE SOCIAL LOCATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Like all university faculty, teacher educators' lives are shaped by how work is defined, organized, and rewarded. The social location of teacher educators, however, is somewhat unique. Education schools, like other professional schools including social work and nursing, engineering, architecture, law, theology, and medicine, have established vocational expectations and responsibilities associated with licensure. Teaching, school psychology, and educational administration, like social work, occupational therapy, and nursing, are on the lower occupational rungs. Similarly, within higher education institutions, those who educate educators are widely viewed as lower status than those who teach in business, law, and medical schools. Moreover, within schools of education, teachers of teachers work in the shadow of those who educate administrators and school psychologists. Thus, teacher educators are constantly challenged to prove their worth within the academy; they have to defend the value of the questions and forms of inquiry that characterize their field and work; and they live in a state of persistent "status deprivation" (Goodlad, 1999, p. 29). After all, is it not true, as is commonly believed, that "anyone can teach?" Seeking higher status, many university-based teacher educators have distanced themselves from the practice of teaching, just as early normal school faculty feared, while delegating responsibility for fieldwork of various kinds to lower-paid and sometimes part-time clinical and teaching faculty (Bullough, Hobbs, Kauchak, Crow, & Stokes, 1997).

Despite the uncomfortable fit of teacher education within higher education, teacher educators are typically held to expectations and standards similar to other higher education faculty: service, teaching, and scholarship. As program quality within most professional schools depends on labor-intensive clinical work, teacher educators, like many others, must endure a double life: one foot planted within the schools and the other planted in the academy. Under such conditions, scholarship, the academy's chosen evidence for the value of one's work and worth, is inconsistent with what counts as valuable knowledge in the schools.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION

Universities are changing, with resulting changes in the lives of those who work and live within them. No historical change has been more consequential than higher education's embrace of neoliberalism as a dominating attitude and policy framework. Assumed to be an inevitable consequence of globalism, with its proliferation of markets worldwide, neoliberalism is rooted in neoclassical economics and brings with it a "thorough-going" and profoundly self-serving and competitive individualism (Fredman & Doughney, 2012, p. 44). While