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Volume 6

Number 1 *Fifth Anniversary Edition, The Education  
and Schools Our Children Deserve*

Article 1

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2012

# The Future of Colleges of Education

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### Recommended Citation

Rios, Francisco (2012) "The Future of Colleges of Education," *Journal of Educational Controversy*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 1.  
Available at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/jec/vol6/iss1/1>

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# ARTICLE

## **The Future of Colleges of Education**

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## **The Future of Colleges of Education**

This is a particularly challenging time for public education. There has been a coordinated, incessant attack on public education on just about every front, including challenges to its public purposes. Those who subscribe to neo-liberalism seek purposes associated with free-market reforms, such as viewing students as customers and for-pay educational services. The attacks on public education include a national narrative challenging educational professionalism, creativity, and responsiveness to the tasks educators undertake and issues they address, advocating instead for research-based and scripted curricula and controlled instruction with direction to maintain fidelity to what is prescribed. These attacks also include an over-reliance on standardized assessments as the final and most important arbiter of what constitutes evidence of student learning.

It is also a challenging time for colleges of education. Like their public-school counterparts, questions are being raised about the quality of teacher preparation that is being provided. Proponents argue for a shorter, faster, and easier path for teacher preparation, one that minimizes the value of pedagogical, content-based knowledge (i.e., the knowledge associated with the broad purposes of schooling) as well as the instructional approaches specific to teaching mathematics, science, art, music, and the other subjects.

I use this opportunity to share my thoughts about how a college of education might advance in pursuit of its unique purposes so that it can continue to be both valuable and, thereby, valued to our public school partners and the communities we represent.

But considering what colleges of education might do differently raises a set of corollary questions about the broad purposes of education. These include. What does it mean to be educated? What does it mean to be an educational professional? It even asks, what does it mean to be educated in a democratic citizenry? How we answer these questions sets the foundation for the kind of vision we have for both public education and colleges of education in the future. But as important, the future of the nation rests on how we answer these questions.

### **What Does It Mean to be Educated?**

The first question asks, What does it mean to be educated? The answer from the mainstream national narrative focuses on narrow sets of knowledge and skills evidenced in a narrow curriculum as measured on narrow assessments. Much of this mainstream national narrative also focuses on that knowledge and those skills oriented toward preparing workers for the marketplace, most specifically associated with job training. Math and science are privileged in this narrative since, we are told, it will help the United States achieve and maintain technological superiority. Literacy is privileged as well, though it sometimes take the form of decontextualized, isolated skills training embodied in phonics, which works for some but not all learners, as well as exposure to a very narrow range of narratives.

John Goodlad's work (1990), confirmed by the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2011) of what people in the U.S. most want from schools, has demonstrated that the public wants much more from education. Adding to the academic aims for math, science, and literacy described above, caregivers and community leaders want students to be exposed to a broader range of the curriculum, including the fine arts, as well as the development of problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Caregivers and community leaders also desire those aims associated with personal or self-development, which include attention to the personal development of young people as ethical and moral individuals. Professional development, another aim, focuses on the preparation of our youth for college and/or careers. The final aim, social development, has two levels. One is helping students to develop the social skills to interact and communicate positively and productively with those around them as well as working collaboratively as a good team member. The other level of social development includes the importance of being an active citizen, capable of caring for and about those one does not know personally, and being a well-informed, active, and contributing member of a democratic society.

I find Ken Sirotnik's (1990) seminal framework most useful in considering the broad aims of education. The students in our charge need to both acquire *knowledge* itself and learn the means for acquiring it. They need to develop a habit of *inquiry* and the critical thinking and discourse skills associated with asking and answering questions. They need to attain professional *competence*, the knowledge, skills and dispositions associated with work, which includes analytical skills, creativity, practical intelligence, and wisdom. They need to garner a sensibility associated with *care and empathy* for those they know and those they do not know. Finally, the students in our charge need to care about the nation, which includes the value and pursuit of *freedom, well-being and social justice* for the nation. This is the vision of democracy that serves as the foundation for this country; it calls upon an educated citizenry who recognize their roles as active members of our society and who push us closer to realizing our democratic ideals.

### **What Does It Mean to be an Educational Professional?**

The second question asks what it means to be an educational professional. Educational professionals need to be knowledgeable and skilled in all the ways described above. Even beginning educational professionals need to have a coherent set of core ideas, a repertoire of professional practices, and a set of specific intentions that they deliberately aim to pursue in their initial professional practicum experiences (Kosnik & Beck, 2009).

But it also includes some additional elements associated with professional competence. Because educational professionals help to shape the culture of the educational institutions, most often public ones of which they are a part, they must be prepared to serve as team members in the development of democratic communities within the schools or agencies. This includes preparing educational professionals who are prepared to actively nurture the development of communal life both inside and outside of the school or service organization.

All educational professionals must also be prepared for the varied leadership opportunities that are available to them. *Teaching 2030* (Barnett, 2011), a teacher education initiative, describes the roles educational professionals must play as teacher educators, policy researchers, community organizers, and stewards of schools and social service agencies. In addition, teachers must also be educational researchers, engaging in inquiry centered on both oneself and the collective in pursuit of continual improvement. They must be social justice advocates, especially given that education in the U.S. has all too often been an instrument of social reproduction rather than social transformation.

### **What Does It Mean to be a Citizen?**

Mike Rose's (2009) book *Why Schools?* is an important reminder that all leaders, in every nation—those that are the most democratic and those that are the most totalitarian—share a common desire to have students who can read, write, and compute. In democratic nations, however, there is another purpose associated with educating the next generation to understand and adopt their roles as members of communities and the nation-state: the development of a cosmopolitan identity, understood in its most classic sense as an appeal to universal humanity, human rights, and world citizenship (Todd, 2009; see also Spector's 2011 review of several other books that challenge and extend this classic notion of cosmopolitanism).

Informing my thinking is Walter Parker's (2003) description of three dimensions of a deep democracy. For him *participatory democracy* asks us to consider our roles as citizens beyond those associated with voting rights, religious freedoms, and freedom of speech—all essential elements of a democracy. But it goes beyond these to include working alongside those people most affected by pressing social problems to understand these challenges as they experience and understand them and believe they should be resolved. We need to engage in this level of participatory democracy out of a recognition that salient and sustaining social problems are the real threats to any democracy

*Creative democracy* is the second aspect of a deep democracy. It is based on recognizing that this nation's democracy is not finished, nor has it realized fully its ideal; we still have more work to do. The nation has made great strides, often by the activism of the common, everyday people who helped abolish slavery, garnered the rights of women to vote, and advanced a civil rights agenda. But we are still not there yet: Recognizing the need to move the nation more fully toward its democratic ideal gives all of us a sense of purpose and the need for agency.

The third dimension, *multicultural democracy*, asks of participatory democracy, Who is participating and who is not, and on what terms do we seek their participation? It asks of creative democracy, How wide can we make the path? Multicultural democracy sees diversity as an essential asset in the development of democracy. The diversity of the nation-state moves us away from mono-vocalism, an arm of totalitarianism, and helps us to see things from multiple

perspectives and, thereby, to understand them more fully. It even seeks dissent as a central democratic feature<sup>[1]</sup>.

## Critical Challenges Facing Colleges of Education

Despite what we know and believe, there are powerful forces seeking to limit, if not end, colleges of education as we know them. Consider the ways in which states increasingly extend privilege to alternative teacher credential pathways via funding and deregulation of state requirements. Consider that even a director of teacher education, Katherine Merseth of Harvard Graduate School, asserted that only about 100 teacher education programs are worthwhile (Ramirez, 2009).

Clearly, colleges of education need to demonstrate their value. From my perspective, colleges of education must play a critical role, along with other stakeholders, in addressing the following five challenges. In addition, the answer to one pressing question can potentially shape or reshape the context of the work in colleges of education.

### Five Pressing Challenges and One Pressing Question

The first pressing challenge for those who value education as a public interest is responding in a strong, complete, and robust way to the national discourse asserting that education is a private commodity to be bought and sold. In other words, how do we address neo-liberalism: *unfettered capitalism*, or what McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) call "capitalism with the gloves off" (p. 15)?

Stan Karp's (2011) sharp article, "Who's bashing teachers and public schools and what can we do about it?" in *Rethinking Schools*, asserts that neoliberalism is the real threat to our democracy. Karp asserts that corporate managers want education that is cheap, businesspeople look at education as a new way to make a profit, and billionaires play with educational reform as if it is a hobby. Consider what unfettered capitalism has done to the housing market, health care, and the economy broadly. Indeed, we ought to be worried if we continue down this path. At the heart of this challenge is the following question: Is free, public education as a fundamental democratic principle going to diminish?

The second challenge is the nearly schizophrenic initiatives driving reform in teacher education programs. At one end are those efforts aimed at reducing the requirements for those who wish to teach, what Ken Zeichner (2006) calls teacher credential deregulation. At the other end are those university-based teacher education programs that are being more fiercely over-regulated when they view teaching as a professional endeavor. At the core of these two responses to teacher education reform are alternative visions of being an educational profession. The teacher credential deregulation view sees teaching as a technical act which requires that an individual's only pre-requisite to teaching is academic content knowledge measured via a standardized examination or university major. Teaching strategies can then be imposed on these individuals based on what has been identified as research-based best practices to create decontextualized, unresponsive, and scripted teaching and curricula.

Conversely, the professional vision recognizes teaching as both an art and science. It recognizes that teachers are guided by theories of action, and that teachers must be professionals who understand the dynamic, complex, and uncertain realities of teaching and learning. Educational professionals adjust their instruction and curriculum to meet the realities of the students and classrooms in their charge. Unfortunately, continual scrutiny of those pursuing this vision of teaching is coupled with additional, not fewer, regulations.

A third challenge, related to the second, is the national attack on educational professionals. The national ideology, embedded in the broader national narrative, attacks educational professionals themselves as THE problem. The unfortunate aspect of this is that very little attention is paid to the conditions of education as a profession. Linda Darling-Hammond (2011) described the first international summit on teaching of the top 16 nations to share what was working for them in terms of the education profession and "showed perhaps more clearly than ever that the United States has been pursuing an approach to teaching almost diametrically opposed to that pursued by the highest-achieving nations."

Darling-Hammond recounts that in the U.S., graduates of colleges of education earn 60% of what most other college graduates receive. Many teachers, especially those in urban schools, go into debt to provide educational resources for their students because those resources are not covered by the schools' budgets. Unfortunately, those who come to the profession via teacher credential deregulation routes enter with little to no professional preparation. Problems are compounded because too few districts provide opportunities for new teachers to be mentored into the profession, and professional development is too often characterized by short presentations with very little follow-through and minimal opportunities for sustained, meaningful collaboration. Add the recent attack on collective bargaining, as in Wisconsin,

and we should not be surprised that one-third of all teachers leave the teaching profession within five years.

By contrast, consider how the teacher profession is viewed by much of the rest of the world, but most especially by those nations whose students are out-performing students in the U.S. As described by Darling-Hammond, several of these involve teacher preparation programs, generally at the master's-degree level, where students receive a salary while learning to teach. These students train with experts in model schools that are often attached to their universities, and they enter a well-paid profession: In Singapore, for example, teachers earn as much as beginning doctors. Teachers are provided 15 or more hours a week to work and learn together, engaging in shared planning, action research, lesson study, and observations in each other's classrooms. Teachers find themselves in schools that are equitably funded and well resourced with the latest technology and materials. Teachers are encouraged to pursue career ladders to become master teachers, curriculum specialists, and principals. Teachers unions work with their governments to further enrich teachers' and school leaders' learning opportunities and to strengthen their skills. Singapore's teacher evaluation system focuses on how well teachers develop the whole child, contribute to each other's efforts, and advance the welfare of the whole school.

A fourth challenge is the increasing expectation that education and educational professionals are THE answer to all social ills. This challenge assumes teachers, administrators, and counselors are the only people who matter when considering broad social inequalities. This situation is ironic, especially given the increasing de-professionalism, the downgrading of teacher training, and the haphazard nature of advanced professional development. It is similarly ironic to believe that teachers are the most important variable affecting student learning, on the one hand, while at the same time, districts are raising class sizes, cutting salaries, and dismantling collective bargaining, on the other hand.

Concomitantly, the focus of the teacher as the most central factor impacting student learning deflects attention away from broader social inequities, such as racism, poverty, homelessness, homophobia, unemployment or underemployment. To be sure, we must not allow educators to use these broader social inequalities as excuses for low student academic achievement, but we must also recognize that schools cannot do this alone. The nation must pursue broader social supports and political initiatives aimed at institutional and structural policies and practices that robustly address these inequalities.

The last challenge I describe is education's slow and limited response to addressing educational inequalities in access and achievement. David Berliner's work continues to remind us that much of what schools are doing is working for most students (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Nichols & Berliner, 2007). But he is also clear that education has not been successful in providing the best quality experience for specific social groups: students in urban settings, newcomer students, English language learners, and economically poor students.

Importantly, we know what these students need. Garcia and Garcia (2010) describe schools and educational services for students from these social groups that are respectful of them and their families, regarding them as purveyors of important cultural, linguistic, and social assets that advance academic achievement. These schools and related services are culturally and linguistically responsive; these schools engage in continual improvement and enact reasonable policies and practices.

There remains one question, at the time of this writing, that must be considered in all of this: What role will the federal government play in the near future when we consider public education and colleges of education? In the mid-1900s, the federal government played a vital role in helping promote school integration, assisting struggling students and securing funding for high-poverty schools. More recently, government efforts have focused on standardized testing and using the resulting test scores to close schools, fire staffs, punish schools with low test performance, and reward those with high test scores.

At the time of this writing, the prospects are not promising (Karp, 2011). Programs aimed at addressing educational inequalities have been cut, such as TEACH grants, which prepare teachers for high-needs schools. In addition, other programs in jeopardy of being cut are Teacher Quality Partnership Grants, the National Writing Project, Striving Readers, and the National Board for Professional Teaching.

With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, I cannot help but wonder, what will be reauthorized? Will competition or cooperation be the hallmark of future education funding? What role will colleges of education have in terms of funding both research and educational program development initiatives?

### **Sustaining Colleges of Education**

I now turn attention to the question of what will sustain colleges of education through these uncertain and complicated

times. From my perspective, colleges of education need to be anchored to broad purposes, most often expressed in core mission and vision statements with corresponding values. Like a weathervane blown in different directions depending upon the winds, the ideas expressed in these statements pivot around a core anchor. While colleges of education commonly identify such statements and beliefs, it is equally important that efforts be placed in identifying the tangible and concrete roles they play within the day-to-day work of a college and how these are integrated across all programs. For these mission statements to have value, they have to be lived out every day, exemplified in what colleges actively strive to accomplish. But they also must include what colleges accomplish both within the larger institution and beyond the institution.

Related to internal accomplishments, colleges of education need to address broad educational inequalities with focus, determination, and innovation, which should be the primary core of our work. In engaging in this struggle, colleges of education would benefit from understanding the ideologies and related discourses used to discuss educational inequalities, mindful of the creeping threat of deficit thinking that often accompanies these discussions. I believe we also benefit when we look at the policies and practices that we enact aimed at addressing equity issues within the colleges of education themselves. As scholars and educational professionals, we must strive to create the most productive practices we can employ aimed at reducing inequalities. And we must continually hold ourselves accountable for our efforts.

To be sure, there are important lessons we can learn from alternative educational programs and charter and private schools, but these must also be held accountable. As Karp (2011) argued, we should advocate for allowing what is working for them, but we can go further than this: Why not eliminate bureaucracy in all schools and allow them the curricular decision-making currently allowed in charter schools? And since low salaries and lack of training are leading one-quarter of all teachers in charter schools to leave, let us learn from their experiences to raise salaries and increase professional education requirements.

Next, we need to ensure that we are invaluable to our stakeholders. To accomplish this, colleges of education need greater involvement in schools and social service agencies, and we need to welcome their reciprocal involvement within the colleges. I add to the chorus of those advocating for broad and sustained field-based experiences in which students are given opportunities to be apprenticed into the best of what it means to be a professional member of a professional community. But there should also be faculty involvement in these organizations, first as learners and then as colleagues. We would benefit by inviting the best K-12 educational professionals to teach alongside our faculties and to work, side-by-side, with our colleagues in colleges of arts, humanities, and sciences.

Finally, we will be sustained by the ways we create—for colleges of education, for public schools, and for social service agencies—deep pockets of hope. This should include creating a context where we believe in each other, where we believe in the programs we have developed, where we believe in the partnerships we have created, and where we believe in the broad purposes that engage our work.

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## Notes

- [1] In a recent article (Rios & Marcus, in press), we explore more fully the connection of diversity and multicultural education to human rights principles.