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An Argument for Re-positioning the Social Foundations

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Abstract

With the rise of teacher testing, foundations scholars need to work together to ensure their courses remain a part of initial teacher credentialing.

Many foundations people distrust teacher qualifying exams and accrediting organizations. Some scholars complain that the teacher tests discriminate against members of minority groups. Other professors claim that accrediting agencies ask faculty members to adopt an administrative mind-set that frustrates an evaluative stance toward education. While these views may be correct, problems arise when foundations scholars decide that they do not want to have anything to do with teacher tests or accreditation.

In this paper based on my address to the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, I want to argue that the future of foundations depends on the ways teacher tests and accrediting organizations require Schools and Colleges of Education to attend to the foundations of education. At the present, foundations scholars have no connections with Praxis, NCATE, or TEAC. Worse, none of these organizations requires that prospective teachers study foundations of education with scholars trained in foundations. The result is that programs of teacher preparation can present the history of education, philosophy, or social foundations in inadequate ways. For example, these subjects could appear in modules in courses carrying names such as introduction to teaching taught by professors whose special interests may be in social studies, curriculum, or secondary education.

Teacher Tests

The growth of teacher testing was rapid and vast. In 1977, sixteen states required candidates to take some form of teacher testing. By 2002, the number had grown to forty-four. According to a group of test makers, this growth of teacher tests came from the move toward accountability. As legislatures enforced quality controls on schools, teachers unions sought protection from oversight. In response, the legislatures expanded demands on prospective teachers to ensure they could perform independently (Rubinstein, McDonough, & Allen, 1986).

In the 1970s companies such as the Educational Testing Service (ETS) had extensive legal problems because tests such as the National Teacher Exam (NTE) seemed to discriminate against the graduates of traditionally Black colleges. The decisions in these cases opened routes by which ETS could strengthen its role in hiring processes. As a result, in 1988, a company official announced that ETS was creating three new tests to replace the NTE. The first test covered enabling skills such as the ability to read and write.

The second test covered knowledge of subject matter and professional teaching skills. The third was to be a measure of performance. ETS called this new formulation PRAXIS (Dwyer, 1989).

The important part of this story for foundations is the process ETS followed in making the tests. The company used a system of job analysis that the courts accepted. In addition, organizations such as the American Psychological Association approved of using job analysis in determining how to select applications for positions. The U.S. Air Force had used job analysis to create job descriptions, methods of selecting recruits, and ways to evaluate performance. The steps of job analysis were simple. Researchers surveyed published literature and interviewed teachers to determine the duties and skills the teachers needed. The researchers constructed questionnaires that they sent to many other respondents to determine what beginning teachers should know and how they could learn it. In these processes, ETS collected information from thousands of teachers, administrators, and university professors. When the researchers analyzed the results, they found two areas, philosophy of education and history of education, were unrelated to any job that beginning teachers would do. As a result, they recommended that these areas not appear on the PRAXIS tests (Rosenfeld, n.d.).

While other researchers for ETS repeated the suggestion that foundations classes did not impart essential teaching skills, ETS did not remove foundations questions entirely from their tests. Focus groups with university scholars contended that the critical, evaluative, and normative insights from foundations courses could help beginning teachers understand their roles.

Program Accreditation

Although ETS may employ teacher-training professionals, the company protects its independence and the items on the tests. For example, external evaluators have never validated the questions that appear on the various tests. Although university scholars may have advanced the place of foundations on PRAXIS tests, there may be no way for foundations scholars to influence the teacher tests in the future. On the other hand, the accrediting agency, NCATE, invites professional educators to join its ranks. As one advocate said, we are NCATE.

In 1974, a group of foundations scholars formed the Council of Learned Societies in Education (CLSE) to set

up standards for instruction in the foundations. In 1980, the CLSE became the organizing agency for a wide range of foundations groups such as the American Educational Studies Association, the History of Education Society, and the Comparative and International Education Society. CLSE joined NCATE in 1980 when NCATE officials requested assistance in revising standards for accreditation. Following the suggestions from the CLSE representatives, NCATE adopted many of the ideas found in the CLSE standards. Most important, they required that professors in teacher training institutions hold doctorates in the areas they taught (Dottin, 2005).

At first, the CLSE paid a few hundred dollars each year in membership fees to belong to NCATE. These funds came from dues paid by the various groups that made up CLSE. In return, the NCATE standards referred Schools and Colleges of Education to the standards of the CLSE to explain what the candidates had to know about the social, historical, and philosophical foundations of education. Although the NCATE standards retained this directive after the CLSE changed its name to the Council for the Social Foundations in Education (CSFE), the membership fees increased dramatically. By 2004, the NCATE dues for CSFE reached \$15,000. At that time, the president of CSFE told NCATE that it appeared likely the member organizations of CSFE would resist paying the increased fees. Consequently, in the fall of 2004, NCATE dropped the CSFE from its list of affiliated organizations (Dottin, 2005).

Nonetheless, by 2006 NCATE retained concern for foundations of education. For example, in Standard One, Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions, NCATE suggested that foundations of education an essential aspect of the broad professional knowledge that beginning teachers should have. Unfortunately, they balanced this call for understanding foundations by not demanding that professors hold degrees in the subjects they teach. Standard Five, Faculty Qualifications, requires that faculty members hold terminal degrees or significant expertise in the area they teach. This means that a person with a doctorate in social studies education or curriculum would qualify for teaching a foundations course.

Social Foundations and Standards

The CSFE continues to exist. It has a web site that offers to help Schools and Colleges of Education pass NCATE and

TEAC accreditation visits with a series of papers explaining how to arrange programs. The web site claims the papers accommodate the insights of foundations and meets those accreditation standards. Unfortunately, no matter how well written those papers are, they remain as suggestions. There is no requirement for anyone to study the foundations of education in preparation for teaching.

In a recent paper, Alan Jones offered a solution to the problem. He suggested that CSFE become an independent organization. He wanted CSFE to recruit about three thousand members, to hold conferences, and to raise funds. At conferences, scholars could explore ways to enable foundations improve teacher training. With the independent source of funds, the CSFE could rejoin NCATE (Dottin, 2005).

While there are other possibilities, foundations scholars should cooperate to make their courses required aspects of teacher preparation. There is little doubt that Schools and Colleges of Education have to employ scholars in fields that PRAXIS and NCATE require candidates to study.

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