Importations by Alan Wilikinson
Being able to see the wood from the trees in courses of teacher education

Être capable de voir «et l’arbre et la forêt» dans les cours de pédagogie

Ser capaces de ver el bosque entre los árboles en los cursos de formación de maestros

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ABSTRACT
When cogitating developments in education, it is important from time to time to stand back from the mainstream of developments and try to re-capture “the big picture.” Such a time now exists in relation to teacher education. This paper is a response to this situation. It makes the case for three principles which, it is held, should guide the design and development of programmes on how classroom practitioners at the pre-service and on-going teacher-development levels should be prepared for, and guided in, their work. These are as follows: teachers should have a very good command of the subject matter in their teaching areas; teachers should know how to teach; teachers, along with students of education studies and policy makers, should engage in reflection not only on work at the classroom level, but also on education more broadly.

Keywords: teacher education, classroom practitioners, policy makers, disciplines of education.

RÉSUMÉ
En réfléchissant sur les développements en éducation, il est important de temps à autre de prendre un recul face aux développements du courant dominant et d’essayer de retrouver «le grand portrait». Le temps est venu de le faire au sujet de la pédagogie. L’article veut répondre à cette situation. L’auteur présente des arguments en faveur de trois principes qui devraient guider le design et le développement de programmes sur la manière dont les praticiens de la salle de classe, aux niveaux du pré-service et de la formation continue, devraient être préparés pour leur tâche et guidés dans son accomplissement. Voici ce que cela comprend: les enseignants devraient posséder une bonne maîtrise de la matière de leur domaine d’enseignement; ils devraient savoir comment enseigner; les enseignants ainsi que
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In making the case for these principles, this paper draws upon some of the most powerful related ideas of the last 50 years. This is because they are as relevant now as they were at the time when they were first advocated. The overall position is that all three principles should underpin programmes of pre-service and on-going teacher preparation in order for teaching to be considered a profession and for teachers to be considered professionals. It is also held that students of education studies, student teachers, practising teachers, and others, including parents, politicians, education leaders and policy makers could benefit from understanding this view, from embracing it, from supporting teacher educators in their efforts to produce teachers educated in accordance with it, and from supporting teachers who are the product of it.

Teachers should have a very good command of the subject matter in their teaching area
Back in 1968, Stanley (1968) could state with confidence that there can be no argument with the proposition that teachers should have a good general education and that they should be

Mots-clés: la pédagogie, les praticiens de la salle de classe, les auteurs des politiques, les disciplines de l’éducation.

RESUMEN
Cuando se piensan desarrollos en educación, es importante cada cierto tiempo apartarse de la corriente principal de estos desarrollos y retomar el análisis desde una visión general. Esta situación actualmente acontece en el caso de la formación de maestros. Este artículo es una respuesta a esta situación. Se presta atención a tres principios los cuales, se sostiene, tendrían que guiar el diseño y desarrollo de programas sobre cómo los estudiantes en prácticas en el aula y en los diferentes desarrollos que se suceden en los niveles de la carrera docente debería prepararse, y ser guiados, en su trabajo. Los cuales son los siguientes: los maestros deberían tener un muy buen dominio del contenido de las asignaturas de sus áreas de enseñanza; los maestros deberían saber cómo enseñar; los profesores, junto con los estudiantes de estudios de educación y los que diseñan políticas educativas, debería participar en la reflexión no sólo del trabajo en el aula, sino también sobre la educación en un sentido más amplio.

Palabras clave: formación de profesores, prácticas en en aula, responsables políticos, disciplinas educativas.
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thoroughly grounded in the subject or subjects they are expected to teach. At the time, there was little contestation of this position. Indeed, there were growing calls for an increase in academic studies for future teachers (Bloom, 1987; Hirsch, 1987). The countries that were loudest in their advocacy in this regard were those that were most concerned about, and critical of, the education standards in their schools, and the perceived lack of basic knowledge and skills on the part of their teachers. In the USA, for example, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983, p. 5) had this to say about standards in the nation's schools:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.

The Holmes Group (1986, p. 4) took the same line when it stated that “America cannot afford any more teachers who fail a twelfth grade competency test,” as did the Carnegie Task Force (Carnegie Corporation, 1986), which was concerned that people who were unable to spell, write, speak in a grammatically correct manner, and/or solve arithmetical word problems were graduating from college and becoming teachers.

The concerns expressed in the USA in the 1980s and early 1990s continue to be voiced in other parts of the world today. This is not surprising since, in many, though certainly not all, countries the academic calibre of recruits to teaching has presented challenges (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner, 2009). The problem is that many are drawn from the lower half or even the lower quarter of the range of achievement of all students in higher education. This is unfortunate because both common sense and empirical evidence reveal that teachers’ knowledge of their subject matter has a major influence on student achievement (Cochran-Smith, 2005). Some authorities in many countries continue to advocate for high academic standards for those entering teacher preparation courses. By contrast, however, what is alarming is that there are others who argue that we can settle for the status quo as long as applicants display a love of children, a desire to teach and an aptitude for teaching. This, rather disturbingly, is like saying that those with lower levels of academic achievement on graduation from high school could become good doctors if they could indicate that they would be likely to have a good bedside manner, or could become good lawyers if they could indicate they would be likely to have a commitment to social justice.

Anyone in a position of power and authority arguing against the need for high academic achievement for those entering programmes of teacher preparation is indicating either an ignorance of, or an ulterior motive regarding, the results of decades of research conducted by those embracing the “effective schools’ movement” (Calman, 2010). Because effective schools establish clearly defined goals for academic achievement and set high expectations for work (Ainscow, 2006), it follows that teachers themselves need to be of a high academic calibre. It is also arguable that both primary and secondary school teacher preparation should take place in institutions which are an integral part of the university.
system so that student teachers can not only be brought to an undergraduate degree-level of achievement in their teaching areas, they can also be exposed to, rub shoulders with, and benefit from engaging with undergraduate peers intent on other career paths.

There is also a significant body of literature arising out of research focused on the “subject-matter knowledge” (SMK) of the subject disciplines or learning areas one teaches (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005; OECD, 2008). Since the mid-1980s, there have been a growing number of studies on the SMK of teachers in such subject disciplines as mathematics, English literature, history, biology and social science. Overall, the conclusion has been that a depth of SMK is needed to help shape and orientate teachers’ planning, selection of teaching materials, classroom teaching and assessment of student learning (Kind, 2009).

The evidence from the comparative education literature on the need for teachers to have a solid grasp of the subject matter they teach is also compelling. Finland is a good example of a country that produces extremely high-achieving students academically. Simola (2005) has pointed out that this outcome is related to the relatively high image of schooling in the country. This image can be seen in the popularity of the teaching profession among Finnish students year after year (Kansanen, 2003). More recently, Sahlberg (2011) has recorded that, due to the popularity of teaching and becoming a teacher, only Finland’s best students in terms of achieving high scores on their matriculation examinations are able to gain a place in a teacher preparation programme.

Teachers should know how to teach

The second main principle underlying the thinking upon which this paper is based is that teachers should know how to teach. In other words, not only do teachers need to be competent in the subject matter they teach, they also need a range of pedagogical skills to implement the curriculum (Roehrig, 2015). At the broadest level, these skills include classroom management and organisation, appreciation of each student’s characteristics and preconceptions, and formal and informal evaluation of students, along with personal reflection and critical self-analysis. On the more specific matter of knowledge transmission, there is a clear connection between knowledge of one’s subject and how one needs to think about it from a pedagogical point of view. Lockheed and Verspoor (1991, p. 98) summarized Shulman’s (1986, 1987) position on this as follows:

Teachers must understand the subject matter for themselves and be able to elucidate that knowledge in new ways, recognize and partition it, and clothe it in activities, emotions, metaphors, exercises, examples, and demonstrations so that it can be grasped by the students. Coupled with this is the argument that it is important not to try to impose pre-ordained teaching approaches uncritically without considering the cultural context of the school, the pupils and the wider socio-economic environment.
The latter point takes on major significance when one considers the extent to which, over the past two decades, with greater centralization in many countries of various aspects of education than has hitherto been the case, not only have there been calls for the invention and discovery of sure-fire prescriptive approaches to teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006), great credence has also been given to exponents of these calls by education policy makers, administrators and leaders at the school level (Luke et al., 2013). Associated with this is the expectation that teachers should be “trained” appropriately in order to ensure successful implementation of the prescribed approaches.

To adopt the latter position is to ignore the wisdom of the past, including that of William James, one of the most famous psychologists of the modern era. Back in the 1890s, when considering the function of the study of psychology for educationists, he stated that a great mistake is made in thinking that the discipline can provide definite programmes, schemes and methods of instruction for specific classroom contexts. Rather, he went on:

Psychology is a science, and teaching is an art. An intermediary inventive mind must make the application, by using its originality. The science of logic never made a man reason rightly, the science of ethics never made a man behave rightly. The most such sciences can do is to help us catch ourselves up, check ourselves, if we start to reason or behave wrongly; and to criticise ourselves more articulately if we make mistakes. A science only lays down lines within which the rules of the art must fall, laws which the follower of the art must not transgress; but what particular thing he shall positively do within those lines is left exclusively to his own genius... and so while everywhere the teaching must agree with the psychology, it may not necessarily be the only kind of teaching that would so agree; for many diverse methods of teaching may equally well agree with the psychological laws (James, 1958, p. 15).

For many decades, this position was overlooked as educationists sought, rather misguided, to identify "best practice" in relation to a variety of areas, find "the one best way" to proceed, and seek to "train" leaders at the individual school level to make sure their teaching staff acted in accordance with prescribed pedagogical approaches.

Eisner (1983) was one of the key players to question this view over thirty years ago. Like James, he highlighted the importance of considering context. His argument was that because of the changing uniqueness of the practical situations that make up the education domain, only a portion of professional practice can be usefully treated in the manner of a prescriptive science. Filling the gap between general prescriptive frameworks and successful practice is, he held, dependent more on the reflective intuition, the craft, and the art of the professional practitioner than on any particular prescriptive theory, method, or model. The implication for teachers is that they should be cognisant of this view and be guided by it in making decisions on teaching and learning.

Certain psychologists, as O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) have pointed out, have lent support to this position. Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010), for example, have criticised the quest in psychological research for generalizations about human nature, as well as the
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neglect of the actual diversity of humankind. In a similar vein, Bridges (2007) argued as follows: “You cannot logically derive lessons for a single specific instance from such generalizations. They always have to be linked to consideration of local conditions, which might well point to a different recommendation.” In other words, a teacher or school may test out different teaching strategies in their own environment and find out “what works” for them. The fact that this enquiry is small scale and local does not invalidate it as a reliable basis for local practice even if it might be regarded as an unreliable basis for national policy without some further work (Bridges, 2007, p. 2). Thus, he concluded, teachers need to be introduced both to a multitude of evidence-based teaching and learning theories and to associated practices as “tools” for thinking intelligently about their work.

This is a very different view to one that holds that instructions issued from central education bureaucracies should be put into practice with total fidelity at the appropriate level lower down in the organisation. The latter approach, in the view of Horn and Evans (2013), tends to equate schools to factories which operate on a rational input-output basis, with pupils as raw materials, teachers as mechanics, the curriculum as the productive process, and the school leaders as factory managers. What is required instead, as Hopkins (1993) argued over 20 years ago, is that teachers acquire a wide range of curriculum and pedagogical approaches so that they can test them out in their classrooms to see if they work for them, with their pupils, and in their particular circumstances.

Education studies relates to being able to reflect on education at the broad societal level

Historically, teacher preparation was for a long time undertaken in accord with the first two principles already considered in this paper, in that it included preparation in one’s teaching subject area(s) and teaching practice. Slowly, however, student teachers became exposed in their courses to some history of education and psychology of education. Both subjects were offered to place teaching on a more professional footing, with the former being aimed at locating it within a great tradition and the latter as providing a scientific basis for pedagogical approaches. Little by little, various other theoretical strands were added to courses (Gardiner, O’Donoghue and O’Neill, 2011; Rohstock and Trohler, 2014). These included the study of the progressive education movement, child development, and the antecedents of what we now term philosophy of education and sociology of education, while a practical focus was also maintained at all times. In this way, a third strand developed in teacher preparation courses, namely, one aimed at producing teachers able to reflect on education at the broad societal level. While this strand became known by a variety of terms, “education studies” emerged as the most common and neutral of them.

By the 1980s, however, this approach was being criticised as the preparation of teachers throughout much of the developed English-speaking world came under intense scrutiny. Initial attacks relied heavily on stereotypes, with references increasingly being
made to “the remoteness of schools from the real world” and “the vacuousness and subversiveness of education theory” (Lawn and Furlong, 2011). Particularly controversial were criticisms that education studies, which provided students with understandings of such matters as the role of education in society, consisted of pseudo-disciplines irrelevant to the practical world of the classroom and the preaching of a spurious gospel of equality. This created a fear-based mentality around schools and universities being the cause of deepening social and economic crises around the world.

The call went out for a dramatic upgrading of the quality of teacher preparation. Some aspects of this were laudable. These included an insistence that teachers should have a high standard of subject content knowledge in their teaching areas and that there should be considerable improvement in practicum-clinical experiences (Price, 1989). The agenda was taken to an extreme in some parts of the world, and especially in England and Wales, where there were calls for a return to an apprenticeship model, with teacher preparation taking place under the control of schools. The view was that it is for political masters to decide on matters to do with content and pedagogy, and that teachers are paid simply to carry out changing dictates as they arise. Sutherland (1985, p. 223) succinctly portrayed the mood of the day when she stated:

There seems little impetus to serious consideration of central and general aims. Fashions succeed each other, and teachers – theirs not to reason why – are expected to change content and methods of their work in due conformity, following and climbing on each bandwagon as it comes along.

Little, however, has changed in the intervening years. In other words, most public debate continues to be about how to achieve pre-ordained outcomes in the most cost-effective manner, but very little debate is about the value of pursuing such outcomes in the first instance, and whether or not they are in the best interest of the child.

What is required is a clear exposition of the criteria that need to be fulfilled for teaching to be considered to be a profession. On this, McKernan (2004) has identified a number of criteria that denote a professional, from which eight can be distilled. These are as follows: “qualifications,” “theoretical knowledge,” “commitment to a code of ethics,” “commitment to service,” “self-autonomy,” “commitment to recurrent teacher development,” “membership of a professional group,” and “commitment to reflection.” The first seven of these can be seen as relating to the first of the two principles stated at the outset as being essential to guiding the design and development of programmes that address how classroom practitioners at the pre-service and on-going teacher-development levels should be prepared for, and guided in, their work. However, it is the eighth criterion, namely, “commitment to reflection,” which relates to the third principle, that teachers should engage in reflection not only on work at the classroom level, but also on education more broadly.

“Commitment to reflection” is a matter that, for quite some time, has been dealt with to some extent in relation to considerations on the role of theoretical knowledge in helping teachers to consider the adequacy and appropriateness of any prescribed pedagogical
practices for the particular contexts in which they work. This particular aspect of reflection is promoted to a great extent in many teacher preparation programmes and is often justified by referring to the views of Schon (1983, 1987). Indeed, many institutions still outline what they do in such Schonian terms as “promoting the wisdom of practice,” “reflection-in-action,” and “reflection-on-action” (Russell, 2014). The general concern of advocates is that teacher preparation should go beyond drawing upon deterministic models of teaching and learning, which are often technocratic, routine, and recipe-oriented, and produce teachers with utilitarian perspectives. Rather, they argue, what is needed is an approach that promotes the reflective capacities of student teachers and serving teachers.

The position being adopted here, while in harmony with the position of Schon (1983), also goes beyond it as it subscribes to the importance of promoting reflection amongst pre-service and serving teachers to assist them in reflecting on education more broadly than just at the classroom level. The argument for this approach was made convincingly back in 1968 by Stanley (1968), who argued that, for teachers to be professionals, they need to be involved through genuine participation, not just in the teaching of their subject specialties, but in the planning and determination of both the school and nation’s total programme. This is important, Stanley argued, so that practitioners’ views, as well as those of central level bureaucrats and leaders, can inform decision-making. It is also important, he held, in order to minimize the possibility that plans worked out at the top level are skewed and altered in their application because teachers have not shared in their formulation and a shared understanding of what is involved may not exist.

The argument, then, is that teachers must be able to reflect intelligently on issues that involve the relationship of the school to the social order, as well as on education policy, the curriculum, teaching and learning, leadership, and teacher preparation. One problem, however, is that a cursory look at the literature on “reflection" reveals that it is a term which has a great range of meanings. A good starting point in cogitating this is to recall Dewey’s (1933) argument that there is a need to move teachers away from a perception of everyday reality as given, as clearly defined, and as being in need of no further verification beyond its simple presence. In contrast to "routine action," namely, action that is prompted by tradition, authority, official pronouncements, and circumstances, “reflective action” incorporates active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads (Dewey, 1933). In addition, reflection involves a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, and mental difficulty in which thinking originates, and an act of searching, hunting, and inquiring to find material that will resolve the doubt and settle and dispose of the perplexity (Dewey, 1933).

While Dewey’s definition of the reflective act is most helpful, it does not, from the point of view of teacher preparation, delineate the focus of reflection. Van Manen’s (1977) analysis of “levels of reflectivity,” which is echoed in the recent work of Mulcahy et al. (2015), does, however, provide us with such a focus. He identified three levels of reflectivity, each of which describes different criteria for choosing among alternative courses of action.
Level One is reflection at the level of “technical rationality.” This relates to the second major principle underpinning the general focus of this paper, namely, that teachers should know how to teach. What is meant here is that while the primary emphasis in “technical rationality” within the teaching context is on the efficient and effective application of knowledge in education for the purpose of attaining given ends, reflection at this level is concerned with questioning the appropriateness of various courses of action in the classroom (but does not enquire about purpose). This is most definitely not to argue against teaching student teachers practices that concentrate on technical aspects of teaching. Rather, it is to hold that the nature of the teaching should be such that the practices also become open to the possibility of being turned back upon themselves so as to establish through dialogical approaches the veracity of their own means.

The second level of reflection promoted by Van Manen involves the clarification of assumptions that are the basis of practical action. Here the interest is with the moral, ethical, and value considerations in the education enterprise. Engagement in reflection at this level involves deciding the worth of competing education goals and experiences, not just harnessing energies for their attainment. Such activity is to be highly recommended because it provides a safeguard against teachers learning to view set curricula and set methods as the upper and outer limits of what is possible, and against developing structures and habits of thought, which could retard continued learning from teaching.

Van Manen’s third level of reflection is that of “critical reflection.” Reflection at this level focuses upon the way in which goals and practices in education can become systematically and ideologically distorted by structural forces and constraints at work in various sectors of society, including education settings. It involves paying attention to the wider organizational, social, and political factors influencing instruction and curriculum. To put it another way, promoting reflection at this level concerns encouraging teachers to reflect on the influence that school and teacher culture has on them, and, in particular, to reflect on any difficulties they face as a result of conflict between personal values and institutional pressures to conform. It involves them in a critique of domination and of repressive forms of authority. It is also appropriate for the purpose of promoting a view of problem solving in education as being not just an individual matter, but a social matter also, so that teachers are encouraged to reflect on how they might, as members of a professional community, engage in appropriate action.

Conclusion
To conclude, the case has now been made as to why three principles should guide the design and development of programmes on how classroom practitioners at the pre-service and ongoing teacher-development levels should be prepared for, and guided in, their work. Particular emphasis has been placed on the third of these principles, namely, that teachers should be prepared such that they are able to engage in reflection not only on work at the
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classroom level, but also on education more broadly. This brings us to one final question: what mental apparatus does a teacher need to have in order to be able to engage in this task. Crucial in this regard is the importance of having at their disposal a wide range of concepts (and theories, models, and typologies developed from them), which they can use to structure their thinking, organize facts and ideas, and raise critical questions; these are their "tools for thinking with." Historically, such concepts have been provided either in courses in the foundation disciplines of education (and especially in the four core foundation disciplines of history of education, philosophy of education, psychology of education, and sociology of education), or in interdisciplinary courses centred on five "problem" areas in education, namely, aims and policy; curriculum; teaching and learning; management, administration, and leadership; and teacher education. For various reasons that cannot be discussed here, and which merit a separate paper, I favour the interdisciplinary approach. In a recent work (O'Donoghue, 2017), I have argued this case and illustrated in detail what could be involved. In this, I was influenced very much by Alexander's (2011, p. 27) point that, by "making the strange familiar" we “make the familiar strange,” and "thus increase our understanding of our own society."

References


