

Studying Educational Foundations: A Century of Critical Issues in Education

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Abstract:

Forty-five educational textbooks published between 1906-1999 were examined through content analysis to determine the common themes which transcended the century. Several themes prevailed: Diversity, pedagogy, social-economic issues, school organization, school size, and the art and science of teaching. The depth and focus of these themes changed with the times and these changes are addressed in this paper.

A major concern in teacher education in the United States is the poor understanding by pre-service teachers of the historical context of issues facing them as they enter the teaching profession (Epstein, 1991). Because the social issues of contemporary society are a primary concern of politicians and taxpayers, those issues drive the direction of the curriculum in foundation classes and they become the focus of issues used in pre-service training (e.g. in recent years, these included block scheduling, vouchers, multiculturalism, thinking skills, legal issues, school finance, school violence, at-risk student and accountability).

This study is an examination of major educational issues/concerns presented in educational foundations textbooks used in pre-service teacher education programs in the United States during the past century. Forty-five books have been reviewed by the researchers covering the period 1906-1999. Books included "introduction to education" books, "general education" books and "methods" books. Since early textbooks were "categorized" somewhat differently than current books, it was necessary to examine a variety of books which may have been used in the training of teachers throughout the century. Books of the last third of the century tended to be labeled "introductory" books, those designated for use in a first course in an education program. Earlier books included more "methods" books, or books related to sociological, philosophical, historical and psychological foundations of education.

The method used in this study was content analysis. Textbooks were examined to determine major categories of issues/concerns by decades. Once this process was completed, these issues were analyzed for specific information which could be traced across the decades in order to establish trends with respect to issues and concepts of some importance. Every decade had unique concerns; however some major themes have consistently been addressed in education textbooks. Numerous themes emerged from the analysis. In this paper, the authors will only address those themes which appeared repeatedly (in the majority of books examined) throughout every decade. The six primary categories were: Purpose of Education, Organization of Schools, Learning Problems, Instruction, Diversity, and Character Education.

Purpose of Education

The purpose of American education has been a consistent concern throughout the century. In the early textbooks, much attention was given to the historical roots of American belief systems, with specific attention to educational programs in Rome and Greece. In the early 1900s much of the rhetoric in the books was devoted to education as a means of preserving the democratic principles of our society. N. D. Showalter (1920) clearly viewed schools as a means of providing a strong future for the country. "The school as a destiny-making machine shop must not be underrated, and the teacher as a pattern maker becomes the master mechanic" (p. 94). An educated populace was deemed necessary to ensure the survival of the American way of life, politically, socially and economically. As Kilpatrick (1926, p. 270) stated, "...democracy needs good education." Upon our emergence from World War I, Almack and Lang (1925) said "It was perceived by teacher and layman alike that efficiency, either in peace or in war, could be insured only by a stable, resolute, intelligent, and efficient citizenry (p. ix). Words about schools being designed to provide a "universal education" for all children and about all children being entitled to "equal opportunities" to learn were commonplace in the textbooks. However, the understanding of who "all children" referred to certainly has changed over the century. In the early half of the century, all children referred to white, middle class Americans, with little acknowledgment of other groups of people within the society.

By the 1960s, more attention was given to the African-American populace of the country, extending the meaning of "all children"—a direct result of Federal legislation in the mid-fifties and the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties. With the passage of PL 94-142, the meaning of "all children" extended to the special needs children of our society. Handicapped children (including mentally retarded, learning disabled, physically disabled and emotionally disabled) were guaranteed opportunities to learn in regular schools and classrooms across the country.

The purpose of education also became more "global" after World War II. Prior to this time, the need for an educated populace was to preserve our democracy and to assure continuance of our political, economic and social way of life. School districts across the country set appropriate curricular goals for their constituents in

compliance with the democratic principles that guided our country. After World War II, the United States emerged as a major political and economic world leader. Thus, the purpose of education was no longer viewed only as a means of preserving our democracy, but also as a means of preserving our "leadership" in the world. Our pre-service teachers were unequivocally taught that because America was a world leader American schools must educate the best and the brightest for major leadership roles and that all American citizens, regardless of their backgrounds and abilities, were responsible for maintaining strong competitive roles within the global society. Anderson (1951) describes the content of teacher education courses to include "the study of the demands which current social realities and a democratic value system has put upon the schools...an understanding of the social context and of a democratic value system in terms of their meanings for the current social and political position of our democracy" (p. 13). Meeting the needs of the nation as a world power became a primary goal of the country, and schools played a central role toward achieving that goal.

In 1991, President Bush announced *America 2000: An Education Strategy*. In that document, six goals of American education were clearly delineated; two of them spoke directly to America's role as a world leader: "U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement;" "Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (p.3). Every state within the United States "adopted" their own version of America 2000 and began restructuring their curricula to comply with the new national goals. These national goals permeated the content of introductory courses.

Organization of Schools

How schools are organized is another topic that appears throughout the century. In the first third of the century, attention was given to how schools were organized and established in various regions of the country, illustrating historically important regional differences in American education. Parts of the country established strong rural schools, others strong city schools. Comparisons were made with European educational systems, not to negate those systems, but to indicate how the structure of schools within the United States was essential to assure "equal opportunity for all children," a part of the purpose of American education. Careful attention was devoted to how schools were governed within these regions and strong emphasis was placed on the relationship between states' rights in the control of education and the role of the Federal government in public education. In 1917, Cubberley described the school as a

community center, where members of that community could gather to discuss issues important to the community and where they could secure continuous educational opportunities. By the mid-fifties, due to economic concerns, consolidation of schools became a major movement within the country.

According to Conant (1959), "The prevalence of such [small] high schools—those with graduating classes of less than one hundred students—constitutes one of the serious obstacles to good secondary education in the United States. I believe that such schools are not in a position to provide a satisfactory education for any group of their students—the academically talented, the vocationally oriented, or the slow reader...such a school uses uneconomically the time and efforts of administrators, teachers, and specialists, the shortage of whom is a serious national problem" (p.77). Thus, many textbooks focused on the curriculum which could be provided in larger schools and attention was devoted to how to function within the large school, particularly the American comprehensive high school.

As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, the issue of school organization took another twist in the road. Textbooks openly referred to the "separate but equal" doctrine that existed within parts of the United States and discussed the desegregation of schools, both in the southern states and major northern cities. Attention was given to meeting the needs of a variety of students now being educated in the schools—vocational students, special needs students and at risk students. Attention to alternative school structures began to appear in the textbooks of the 1980s. Concepts such as magnet schools, schools within schools and charter schools are all part of the education language in current textbooks. Much attention is also given to proposed and existing "full service" schools, i.e., schools which provide "one-stop-shopping" for families within a community—health center, adult education center, employment center—a life-line to the community. The issue of school size is once again in the picture, but now, far from the recommendation of Conant, the cry is for smaller schools, where students can get the attention they need. Schools are viewed as too big, especially in states like Florida, where schools are organized along county districts rather than city/township districts. Schools are perceived as huge bureaucracies, where students are "numbers" instead of people, the environment is cold and teachers are overburdened. The questions which constantly arise in the literature are "How can we make large small? What will be the cost to the public of restructuring schools?"

Learning Problems

In the first third of the century, psychology was becoming a science which would eventually have profound influence on how teaching and learning was conducted in the schools. Early influences were evident with references in educational textbooks to making learning relevant to students, incorporating experiential learning and attending to individual needs as well as group activities. Emphasis was placed on homogenous grouping of students to meet individual needs, and new teaching approaches and strategies geared to learner differences were recommended. Much of this was based upon intelligence tests used to measure student abilities and aptitudes. Special attention was given to the idea of capitalizing on student interests as a means of motivation. Social class differences, problems of coping with students who did not speak English and attention to child development and research began to influence textbook content in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Kilpatrick's (1926) work on "method of teaching" influenced much of the rhetoric in textbooks. Purposeful activity, developing thinking skills, coercion vs learning, defining learning, project method, student engagement and the science of teaching were topics regularly explored in the textbooks throughout the 1930s. During this period textbook writers also made reference to the use of visuals to help students understand concepts being taught.

During the mid-century, researchers identified social class and family environment as more contributory to inadequate student achievement than ethnicity and race. These ideas continue to permeate the contemporary literature. Understanding fundamental causes of lack of academic achievement has been fostered through better sociological and psychological research which contributes to the body of knowledge on factors affecting learning in American schools.

With the passage of PL94-142 (The All Handicapped Children Education Act) in the mid-seventies, learning problems of handicapped children gained prominence in the textbooks. Extensive attention to learning disabled, language disabled, mentally, emotionally and physically handicapped students can be found in basic education textbooks. Initially the special needs of these children were equated to those of the poor and minority groups; however, by the 1980s distinctions were made between these groups. Textbook topics address different perceptions of intelligence, with special attention to multiple intelligences, talents, personality factors, and creativity. There is still much attention given to the need to develop critical thinking for all children, now with a much more inclusive meaning to the word "all."

Instruction

How to teach and strategies of teaching are topics

included in most textbooks used in introductory or general education books throughout the century. In the 1900s-1920s most references to instructional practice focused on rote learning, drill and practice, delivery of information and building of skills. William Faunce described the children as "...chiefly deficient in power of sustained attention and original thinking. They can not, or at least, they usually do not, think as clearly, as patiently, and as cogently as did their fathers" (cited in McEvoy, 1911, p. 145). However, by the late 1920s with direction from William Heard Kilpatrick and John Dewey, more attention was devoted to the nature of the child and the needs for more student involvement in their learning. Future teachers were encouraged to develop more child-centered classrooms. Purposeful learning and project activities were encouraged. Adjusting instructional methods and assessment strategies to meet the diverse needs of students were ideas advocated by mid-century. However, during the 1960s, many textbooks were critical of the fact that how teachers taught had not changed sufficiently to accommodate the changing students. Criticism was particularly acute at the secondary level. Textbooks reflected on the failure of curricular reforms advocated during the late 1950s and early 1960s to improve secondary education, particularly in mathematics and science.

Comparisons with European schools, unlike earlier comparisons, were made to question the quality of American secondary schools. Issues were again raised with respect to equal opportunity and the "informal" tracking of students in classes based on race and ethnicity. Teacher expectation of student performance was frequently addressed in the literature. By the 1980s, much more attention was devoted to the effects of technology on instruction, individualized instruction, heterogeneous grouping, team teaching, rotating schedules, flexible schedule, year-round schools, block scheduling and non-graded schools as organizational and instructional practices which might help improve student achievement.

Ornstein and Levine (1984) in their book, *Introduction to the Foundations of Education*, describe factors which directly affected instructional practices throughout the country.

As society changes, so do the aims of education. Since the turn of the century, American aims have gone through at least five periods, each with a different focus of attention: academic rigor and mental discipline; the whole child; academically talented students; disadvantaged, minority and handicapped students; and, in the 1980s, tougher academic standards for all students (p. 475).

By the 1990s, using technology to improve instruction is central to textbook discourse. Strategies to improve higher order thinking skills, develop problem solving skills and encourage critical thinking skills are advocated. Cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching, writing across the curriculum and collaborative learning are commonplace topics in the textbooks.

Diversity

Early century textbooks did not really address issues of diversity. Emphases were placed on teaching reading, writing and arithmetic to all students. Curricular differences for vocational and college bound students were mentioned, and references to college bound programs for male students could be found in a number of books.

Social and economic issues were addressed, but they compared the problems of rural schools and urban schools. Prior to World War I, reference was made to the non-English speaking European immigrant who resided in American's cities. The "inability" of the children to learn in schools was treated more as a "native ability" problem than as lack of English skills. Although some English language and bilingual programs were in evidence in various areas of the country, education for non-English speaking immigrant children operated on the principle of "sink or swim." Thomas McEvoy (1911) quoted William Faunce, President of Brown University, in his lecture to the Board of Education in Rhode Island. "Many of our children have a poverty-stricken vocabulary, and rejoice in it...the remedy is not found in endless drill in grammar or markings in blue pencil, but in association with those who already know how to write and speak their mother tongue" (p. 146). Cubberley, (1919) described the language problem as "We must resolutely set to work during respite from the immigrant flood which the world war promises for a time to give us, to Americanize the foreign born in our midst. We must abolish illiteracy and make English our one language" (p. 481).

By the 1950s, the plight of women's education was addressed. Because, as a result of World War II and the industrial revolution, more and more women were entering the work force, their educational needs were defined as... "women need three kinds of education: a general education the same as for all, a specialized education for an occupation, and education in the household arts, including homemaking, childbearing, and childrearing" (Bottrell, 1955, p. 37).

After the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the growth of desegregated schools, discussions of diversity issues appeared more frequently in education textbooks. Special attention was given to minorities, mostly African-American. Statistics started to enter the arena with specific racial data on dropouts. By the 1970s

multiculturalism and cultural pluralism became concepts permeating textbook literature. More information on court cases assuring equal opportunities of minorities appeared in textbook content. Specific information on civil rights legislation and federal programs supporting minority students were included in the textbooks.

By the 1990s, diversity was defined not only along racial and ethnic lines, but also by handicapping conditions and language deficiency. Previously verboten topics such as "white flight," busing, compensatory education, effects of segregation on schooling and issues of religion crept into textbook discourse. Books included more visuals, particularly photographs, and efforts were made to assure they were representative of America's diversity. Entering the 1990s, authors worked hard to separate low achievement data from race and ethnicity. Stereotypes were dismissed as inappropriate. More attention was given to social class as a predictor of academic success or failure in schools. Homeless children, teenage pregnancies, child abuse, substance abuse, rising adolescent suicides and school violence became topics in textbooks. Gender issues once again became part of the curriculum, as well as problems of urban education. In this period of the century (1980s-1990s), language and cultural differences emerged as major challenges for teachers. Teacher shortages and specifically shortages of minority teachers are addressed as well and seen as part of the challenge of diversity within our society and our schools.

Character Education

In the early part of the century, schools were perceived as places where morality was taught along with methods and content. Teachers were viewed as models of moral behavior. Religion (Christian beliefs) was part of the context of the school curriculum. Obviously during that early period of American life, there was a "commonness" throughout society with respect to religious beliefs and moral values. There was no question of the core values within American society.

During the 1950s and 1960s, emphasis was on equality of educational opportunity and civil rights. This meant that educators needed to deal with the cultural aspects of minority groups within the schools, including differences in religious beliefs and cultural values, thus a strong interest in examining the core values of American society was awakened. Much of the literature in the textbooks stressed the need to separate church and state and the need to keep religion out of the classroom. Values and religion were viewed as one and the same. Moral education was often seen as tied to religious beliefs. Attempts were made to introduce "values education" into the curriculum in the early 1970s, but religious groups addressed many of these programs as "secular humanism"

and “secular religion.” These issues were mentioned in many textbooks. Pre-service teachers were taught to be cautious about the curriculum materials they used in their classrooms so that specific religious viewpoints were not represented. The science curriculum was constantly scrutinized as the issue of “evolution” became a “hot topic” in science classrooms throughout the last half of the century.

By the 1980s, issues were constantly being raised about the decay of values in American society and in school classrooms. Increases in violence in the schools, lack of student respect for others and classroom management problems were topics introduced into college textbooks used in teacher education programs. Changes in the political leanings of the country brought the religious right into action, and the issues of separation of church and state once again became hot topics to study. The growing minority population of peoples from the Middle East and the Far East brought additional problems to the schools—how to teach values and morality with steadily increasing diversity in religious beliefs. Current textbooks focus on America’s search for a common core of beliefs that can once again be brought into the public schools. Values education is central to many of the challenges facing public education.

Summary

There were many other “themes” that became apparent as the researchers examined textbooks across the century. Certainly assessment and evaluation comprised one of these themes, albeit a very complex one as educators learned more about how to assess. Standardized tests, norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, aptitude tests, intelligence tests program evaluation, authentic assessment, portfolio assessment, are all issues that are part of teachers’ education. As the psychologists and psychometricians learn more, educators struggle with how to use this information to inform practice.

Accountability is another theme that permeates the literature. The nature of accountability certainly has changed over the last one hundred years; nevertheless, it is an important concept that is regularly singled out for study. Technology has also been one of those topics addressed throughout the century. Obviously the nature of technology is constantly changing, but some of the issues about whether or not the technology can replace the teacher are not new ideas. The use of television as a teaching tool during the 1950s was viewed as a potential threat to the teacher. Computers are often perceived in the same way. How teachers access and control the technology is an ongoing challenge that is dealt with within the literature.

Recent textbooks focus on questions that originally appeared in the early textbooks of the century, but seemed to disappear during the middle of the century: why teach? who should teach? what should be characteristics of good teachers? and what are the responsibilities of teachers for professional growth? The disappearance of these questions during the mid-century is a phenomenon that still needs to be explored.

There were factors that limited the research of this study. Getting access to textbooks was somewhat problematic. Although the researchers assumed it would be most difficult to get early textbooks, that was not true. The most difficult books to find were those published during the 1940s and 1950s. Contacting publishing houses did not provide much help. Reasons for the lack of books from that period of time could be attributed to lack of publication of books, particularly during the early part of the 1940s. During the 1950s much attention was devoted to “specialized methods” and perhaps colleges and universities no longer taught “introductory” courses in education. Again, that issue would need to be explored more.

This effort is at the beginning stages. Each of the topics mentioned in this paper can, and will be explored in more depth. What the researchers found to be most interesting in this endeavor was the cyclical nature of topics, the common language used across the decades (e.g., teaching to the needs of the students, relevancy of learning, active learning) and that solutions to some age-old problems still defy the educational community. Although the problems have become more complex as society has become more complex, their solutions are still fundamental to providing good education to all American citizens. The challenges are still there. New teachers must be made aware of them and must be given the knowledge with which to search for solutions.

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