

## Admonitions and Challenges

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At age 91, who could refuse an invitation from the co-editor of this brand-new journal of the Society of Professors of Education? Donna Breault wrote, "If you would like to reflect on your work as a professor of education or if you have challenges and/or admonitions to offer current professors of education, you could express these in as little or as much elaboration as you wish. We believe that it would be the centerpiece of the issue." Like Ado Annie in Oklahoma!, "I cain't say no" to such gracious words.

My reflections on 41 years of work as a professor of education (assistant professor 1936, full professor 1947, distinguished professor 1967, emeritus 1977) are already reported in *My Way of Looking at It: An Autobiography*, so I will confine myself here to "admonitions" (counsel; advice; cautions, gentle reproofs) to the professors in the three organizations I was privileged to serve as president (Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development 1961-62, John Dewey Society 1964-66, National Society of College Teachers of Education 1967-68) and then close with a challenge to teacher educators irrespective of their affiliations.

I advise the six percent of the membership of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development who are classified in the professor/instructor category to seek out and earn roles in the ASCD government, encourage concern for crucial social and educational issues, support theoretical inquiry and research, and develop ASCD cooperation with smaller educational organizations. I am aware that there have been and will continue to be much discussion by members and boards of smaller organizations as to whether professors can contribute effectively in large organizations such as ASCD with its membership of 165,000, including 34% principal/assistant/ associates and 23% classroom teachers, and its \$40,561,583 revenue in 2001-2. But ASCD has a long and honorable history of taking positions on controversial issues in school and society and of supporting social forces that foster humane values and democracy in education. Today, the voices of professors, joined with others, are needed to remind all newcomers that ASCD is a non-profit organization created to meet its members' needs and make a difference in the lives of learners, and it is not a business organization basically intent on high profits and sales.

Professors of education constitute a large percentage of the small John Dewey Society. In 1947 to 1973, the period when I worked most closely with the JDS, it seemed to me that two types of activities characterized its program. As I reported in *Educational Theory* in the Summer of 1993, one type was related to theoretical considerations in order to broaden the base of knowledge. This included sponsorship of *Educational Theory*, the Ohio State University Studies in Educational Theory, and the John Dewey Lecture Series.

The second type explored social and curricular issues and problems in order to help members to make decisions and follow through with social action. This included the original Yearbook series, the magazine *Insights* for free trade in ideas, and the John Dewey

Society meetings at the ASCD conferences where panelists discussed the year's most controversial issue. Both types had their proponents. "Extensions of knowledge" activities were of primary interest to philosophers, historians, sociologists, curriculum theorists, and comparative educators while "activist" activities were of primary interest to practitioners in curriculum, supervision, and administration whether at work in school systems or in universities. Depending on the predilections of the board, the Society's program continues to lean one way or the other. To me it seems that both emphases are approaches worthy of the Society's support. Especially promising would be experiments in inter-relating the two emphases.

The Society of Professors of Education was founded in 1902 as the National Society of College Teachers of Education. As both titles indicate, this is an organization by and for teacher educators. One of its activities in providing a forum for professional educators is to further collaboration among groups to which the teacher educators belong. After my election as president of NSCTE and shortly before its change of title to Society of Professors of Education, I soon found that a major responsibility was the scheduling of the meeting of small organizations at the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education annual conference in Chicago. Schedules to be coordinated included the History of Education Society, the Comparative Education Society, the John Dewey Society, the Philosophy of Education Society, along with that of the National Society of College Teachers of Education.

It occurred to some of us in the NCTSE that these organizations might acquire more influence and achieve more efficient functioning through still greater cooperation and some degree of federation, such as sharing a paid executive secretary. So along with the newly formed American Educational Studies Association, the small organizations held meetings in 1967 and 1968 in Terre Haute hosted by NSCTE and Indiana State University. Some success was achieved, but much unfinished business remains. Therefore, I welcome current president Bill Schubert's interest in greater collaboration among associations expressed in his message in the Spring 2002 SPE newsletter.

But there are many more professors of education in addition to those enrolled in SPE, the sponsor of this journal, or in JDS or ASCD. They can be found in the larger organizations such as AERA and AACTE as well as in dozens of small specializing organizations. Indeed, some professors may belong to no educational group at all. Yet, whatever their affiliation might be, all professors of education are highly impacted by the surrounding culture, including the climate of opinion on education.

They all live in a time when testing dominates the educational scene and public discourse; when the purpose of education is perceived as scoring high on standardized tests; when teachers find themselves forced to teach for the test; when political policies and new laws mandate ever-increasing testing; when in the name of accountability it is proposed that teacher earnings be based on student performance on standardized tests. All teacher educators live in a time when respect for the individual learner and recognition of varied types of intelligence are replaced by insistence that each young person, regardless of learning disability or crippling environment, achieve the same high standards; a time of

publicized comparative ranking of schools without recognition of the roles of financial and parental support or of home, neighborhood, and community environment.

Inevitably many professors of education find that such a climate of opinion denies many of their deepest convictions and teachings. Public discussion of education today is dominated by spokesmen for business interests and governing bodies. The views of professors of education are seldom heard. When they do speak out, they usually talk to themselves through books and journals (yes, like this one) directed to professional educators. Yet, a powerful case for democratic education can and should be made to the public by teacher educators.

The challenge to professors of education in our time is to speak out to the public as individuals and through their organizations. As individuals speaking out to the public on education, some could reach national, state, or regional audiences. Still others could reach the public through the internet, its web sites, through e-mail, local papers, the media, parent meetings, friendship groups, clubs, etcetera. As members of professional organizations, they could encourage publications, statements of positions, news releases, communications to political leaders, etcetera.

Let's communicate democratic education. Who is better equipped to play a role in public understanding of good education than you? What organizations are better qualified to speak out on education than yours? If not you, then who? If not now, then when?

*The Sophists' Bane, 2002*