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THE RHETORIC AND REALITY OF TEACHER EDUCATION: TOWARDS A PRAXIS MODEL

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Abstract

The preparation of teachers has unfortunately been characterised by a distinction between the theory and practice of educating. Historical antecedents such as the justifiable move away from teacher training approaches have resulted in a de-emphasis of practice. The preparation of teachers has become an academic study at the expense of teaching experience. Current models of teacher preparation are, as a result, discipline-oriented rather than practice-referenced. It is argued in this paper that there are some difficulties in operationalising such models; in fact, it is argued that the rhetoric sustaining such models is not at all a portrayal of the reality of teacher education. An accurate model would show the inherent contradictions and conflicts within a program that pretends to be discipline-based. It would, moreover, clear the way for a model of teacher education that contains the reference to theoretical formulation of the more recent programs. This paper outlines such a model, calling it a praxis model of teacher education.

Teacher education is distinguished historically from teacher training. In Australia the system of apprenticing children who had completed primary schooling to master teachers for a period of four years commenced in 1852. This apprenticeship system was the main form of teacher preparation until the establishment of teachers' colleges in the early twentieth century (Turney, 1982: xi-xii; Hyams, 1979). The latter development was significant not simply because it changed the format of teacher training but more because it heralded an academic conception of the preparation process.

Everywhere the universities had begun an association with the enterprise of educating teachers and there was, at least theoretically, an official subscription to the notion of a liberal education for school teachers, primary as well as secondary.

Also to be achieved was the acceptance of an incipient body of abstract knowledge as the basis for a new pedagogy and as the core for the professional training of teachers. (Hyams, 1979: 40)

This association, coupled with the "movement of educational enlightenment known as the "New Education" (Hyams in Auchmuty, 1980: 256) set the stage for theory-based preparation of teachers. By the 1960's the term teacher "education" had gained wide currency.

Australia followed the United States of America in substituting the term teacher "education" for teacher "training", thus shifting the emphasis in stated objectives from "how to do it" to "why do it", from the domination of practice, to the matter of general principles and theory on which practice is based. (Hyams in Auchmuty, 1980: 257)

But the newer term for teacher preparation signifies something more than an academic emphasis. Teacher preparation can now be considered part of the education of those who would be teachers. (Cf. Schuttenberg: 1983, 17) No longer does the assumption hold of there being trainee teachers who are not only vocationally oriented but also suited to specified teaching roles. Teacher preparation can be regarded instead as a process of personal development through theoretical and practical endeavour of one who expresses an interest in education as a cultural phenomenon. Perhaps Turney (1977: 1) put it in a more succinct way when he said:

The general adoption of the term "teacher education" indicates the marked shift from the limited concept of training to that of the development of individuals with the sensitivities, understandings and skills necessary for working creatively with children.

A new level of sophistication in teacher preparation is gained by putting aside the "trainee" and older "apprentice" images of prospective teachers. After all,

if skill training plus some apprenticeship in the field is to be the norm of teacher preparation, the community college can probably produce the needed teachers more efficiently and economically than the certification curriculum at a four-year college. (Broudy, 1983: 6)

Teacher education, as taking the direction outlined above, involves an appraisal of practical training. For instance, the assumption of there being a good teacher apart from a certain time and place must be seriously

questioned since this assumption gave credence to a training in methods of teaching and obscured the, at times, idiosyncratic but invariably human qualities of the teaching act. To be trained in teaching methodology is not necessarily to be a good teacher because one may simply copy the empirical aspects of a teaching performance “without cultivating the knowledge and character of the first-rate teacher” (Broudy, 1965: 3). One must emulate good teachers and not merely try to replicate their actions. Teaching method courses are accordingly given a different emphasis, especially when it is now realised that those who stand as exemplars of teaching method have in fact defined for themselves a method on the basis of their knowledge of time and circumstance. Practical training must, therefore, be complemented by a reflective understanding of that practice, an understanding which derives from the experiences of those preparing to teach but disciplined through their exposure to the academic study of education. Teacher education is thus an induction into educational disciplines at the same time as a focussing of interest upon the institutions of educating. It is practical and theoretical.

The preparation of teachers has unfortunately been characterised by a distinction between the theory and practice of educating. Historical antecedents such as the justifiable move away from teacher training approaches have resulted in a de-emphasis of practice. The preparation of teachers has become an academic study at the expense of teaching experience. Current models of teacher preparation are, as a result, discipline-oriented rather than practice-referenced. It will be argued in this paper that there are some difficulties in operationalising such models; in fact, it will be argued that the rhetoric sustaining such models is not at all a portrayal of the reality of teacher education. An accurate model would show the inherent contradictions and conflicts within a program that pretends to be discipline-based. It would, moreover, clear the way for a model of teacher education that contains the reference to theoretical formulation of the more recent programs. Since, as Auchmuty (1980: 111) stated: “the time is appropriate to attempt to develop a new curriculum model for teacher education and to imbed it firmly in the Australian context”, we shall outline in this paper one such attempt. Before treating this task, however, a few remarks ought to be made regarding the nature of teaching. We need to re-define teaching and derive from this definition criteria for the teacher education process. Otherwise teacher preparation will be torn between the practitioner’s knowledge of schooling and the academic’s knowledge of educating. A basis for teacher education must be established through a definition of teaching that allows for the practical and theoretical view.

The Phenomenon of Teaching

Teaching is not merely a complex skill as one might conclude from recent initiatives in performance based teacher education (e.g. Turney, 1983), nor is it simply an art (Highet, 1951). It is fundamentally grounded in a “mode of being” (Denton, 1975) which is defined by the “codisclosure of possibilities of being” (Vandenberg, 1966, 1969a, 1969b, 1979: 174). To teach well is not essentially to act in methodised ways, it is to be one who relates to children through a shared interest in subject matter.

The teacher deliberately establishes an interhuman relation (Vandenberg, 1979: 196) through which the world relation of the adult can be disclosed to, understood and valued by the child. Accordingly teacher preparation must embrace this pedagogy. The traditional emphasis upon instructional methodology and the recent emphasis upon academic study must be changed in accordance with phenomenological insights in pedagogy (e.g. Van Manen, 1982: 294-296). This is not to imply that teacher education ought not incorporate an understanding of instructional methodology nor indeed should it be anti-academic; rather, it is to suggest that teaching ought to be developed in the first instance as an experience of encountering children through subject matter, and in the second instance as a reflection upon these lived experiences in the classroom, playground and outdoor domains.

Having recognised the central phenomenon at the pre-thetic level, teacher education can develop in two directions. On the one side, it involves a reflection of pedagogical action from an academic perspective for the purpose of understanding and emphasising the teachings and learnings that are consistent with prescribed educational ends. On the other side this academic study which includes methodological as well as programmatic foci is referenced to practice in such a manner that the process of teacher education leads to what Small (1978) and others (e.g. Gotz, 1983: 7) called “educational praxis”.

To say that teaching and learning (looking at them in a general way) are forms of *praxis* is first and foremost to say that they are activities which involve human beings as a *whole*, and not just a one-sided way. They are therefore not unthinking but reflective activities, activities that imply an *awareness* of the aims and methods involved. Teaching and learning without this dimension of reflection would not be *praxis*. They would be activities as mechanical as the movements of the worker on the assembly line. To be forms of *praxis* (and this means: to be truly

human activities) teaching and learning must involve conscious reflection about ends and means. (Small, 1978: 220-221)

Teacher education is a model for praxis when it involves a practical induction into and theoretical illumination of various forms of education praxis depending upon one's subject orientation. Teacher education focusses upon the practice of educating scientifically, socially, physically, morally, aesthetically etc., as such practices unfold through the conscious albeit academic study of the methods and aims of the respective domains of educating.

The Rhetoric of Teacher Education

Teacher educators are aware of the lack of coherence in teacher preparation courses with respect to the theoretical and practical aspects. They are concerned, moreover, that

practicum experiences are only marginally related to the theory propounded in the programme and do little to close the serious and long standing gap in teacher education between educational theory and practice. (Turney, 1980: 195)

Out of this concern has arisen a range of innovatory approaches (Turney, 1977: 10-14). Modifications have been made, on the one hand, to the theoretical component, as for example, certain institutions offer foundation studies of education within specialist curriculum areas. On the other hand, modifications have been made to the practicum, considering in particular on-campus practicum experiences where a greater measure of theoretical input is possible. Simulated teaching experiences and microteaching laboratories are examples of innovation within the practicum in an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. One very noteworthy idea in this respect is that of a practicum curriculum:

a carefully planned and monitored sequence of purposeful experiences in the classroom, school and community which are illuminated by the ideas explored in the program. These experiences should be attuned to the individual professional needs of students and lead to the development of understanding and skill in the varied range of roles that teachers perform. (Turney, 1982: 195)

Turney and his associates are currently formulating guidelines for such a practicum curriculum (information supplied at Regional Workshops on Teaching about Teaching, B.C.A.E., Mt Gravatt Campus, No. 7-8: 1983). We would contend, however, that while this practicum curriculum is especially needed, by itself it will not reduce the gap between theory and

practice and may indeed foster a "trainee" image if the curriculum is used too prescriptively. The practicum curriculum must exist only as a sub-set of the teacher education curriculum.

This (teaching) experience provides the crucible in which the theories learned earlier are tested and permits the illumination of the theories as their cogency and validity become apparent and useful in the problem-solving life of the young teacher. The experiences make the young teacher more aware of the need for a framework to interpret these experiences, to provide guides for his endeavours. Theory, revisited in the light of experience, gains relevance and utility and can be incorporated by teachers into their own philosophy of education. (Auchmuty, 1980: 57)

A praxis model of teacher education would appear to be indicated.

The difficulty in developing a praxis model is due to a prevailing orthodoxy in teacher education whereby the theory-practice dilemma persists in spite of any minor innovations to programs of professional preparation. Perhaps it is not generally recognised that teacher preparation courses are not only discipline-oriented but also discipline-based. The mastery of subject matter is discipline-based as is the theory of learning upon which instructional strategies are based. In fact educational theory is a field of knowledge derived from the so-called parent disciplines. The model of teacher education is a sequential one working from disciplines to the level of professional application. The problem with such a model is that discipline-based courses are in the first instance foreign to students whose experiences are undisciplined. This is not a long-term problem if we accept that students are by definition initiates to disciplined understandings, unfortunately these courses remain in part foreign because the structures of the disciplines are not structures of educating. If education itself is considered to be an autonomous discipline (McMurray, 1955) then theories deriving from social and behavioural disciplines cannot be central to an understanding of educational activity.

The great value of the findings of research in the field of education based on the conceptual frameworks of allied social and behavioural sciences should not blur the logical distinction that these inquiries investigate phenomena of psychology, sociology, history, anthropology, and so forth, rather than educational phenomena, and the findings are contributions to the sister disciplines, not the science of education. (Vandenberg, 1979: 178)

Teacher preparation courses which seek to discipline the prospective teacher's sense of educating solely through the social and behavioural sciences must inevitably appear too theoretical.

Let us consider the problem more closely. We will outline the reality of the discipline-based approach to teacher education, show the tensions that exist within such programs, and thereby indicate the necessity of not only re-evaluating our conception of educational theory but also of indicating its relationship to the practice of teaching.

The Reality of Teacher Education

Educational phenomena, as distinct from the phenomena of the respective disciplines, are neglected in the quest for a disciplined understanding of education. Educational theory appears removed from the day to day exigencies of teaching because it is theory of the conditions of practice, conditions that are understood in psychological, sociological, historical and even biological ways. Teaching practice is grist for the theoretical mills. As long as education is considered a field of knowledge based upon theoretical disciplines the theory-practice distinction remains within teacher preparation programs. Educational theory appears far removed from the practicum experiences of student teachers. Their initiation into the disciplined study of education is not a reflective extension of pre-theoretical understanding but a "conceptual leap", as Kierkegaard called in (Schutz, 1973: 554), into unfamiliar "provinces of meaning". This theory-practice distinction is a feature of any program of teacher preparation which is discipline-based and conceives of educational theory as a derivative field of knowledge.

Intending teachers are faced with a problem quite beyond their grasp. They are presented with a field of knowledge that not only draws from disciplines but gives undue reverence to these disciplines. The critical awareness that is encouraged in students of a discipline is notably absent when disciplined understandings are presented to prospective teachers as educational principles. The problem is related to the general study of education.

Educational theory draws upon all disciplines empirical and philosophical so that simplification of the professional studies into generally accepted paradigms is almost out of the question.
(Broudy, 1983: 4)

But because there can be no simplification it does not follow that educational theory must remain a field of study dependent upon inquiry in the parent disciplines. In fact it is this dependence upon disciplined understanding that allows for the importation of conflicting world views into educational

discourse. The field of educational theory is not only removed from educational practice but presents a conflict of interest that further disenfranchises those preparing to teach. As Smith (1980: 183) said:

We have witnessed, and continue to witness, deep ideological divisions among pedagogical faculties. Even common modes of procedure break down under the pressure of these conflicting doctrines. The contending sides are able to live together in an institutional setting only by letting each go its way. The result is that the program for teacher preparation is poverty-stricken and widespread intellectual confusion is created among those who are being prepared to teach. A professional school can sometimes profit from doctrinal divisions. But pedagogical education has long since passed the point of diminishing returns from schisms.

Educational studies are polarised according to either social science or behavioural science paradigms and the world views of the social scientist and behavioural scientist come to define the nature of educational theory. There is, right from foundation studies of education to the study of curriculum and teaching-learning processes, a conflict between anthropocentric and sociocentric views of the world (Cf. Soltis, 1981). The anthropocentric view is given substance through the behavioural sciences. Certain psychological paradigms, for instance, give priority to human agency in the generation of knowledge. To know about a form of human agency such as teaching is thus to be knowledgeable of teaching strategies in the sense that one has acquired skill in their usage. One is not directly concerned with the teaching context since contextual factors are "pre-sage variables" removed from the teaching act (Dunkin and Biddle, 1974). In this way an anthropocentric view which divorces the individual from social context is manifested in pedagogical outlook that is substantiated through disciplined study (Sanders, 1981). Indeed one cannot have anthropocentric pedagogy, but rather, psychological theories of teaching and learning which approximate the experience of educating. The sociocentric view, on the other hand, gives priority to social context in the reproduction of knowledge. The disciplines of anthropology and sociology reinforce this view and provide the conceptual framework for the study of curriculum. Although, here, the pedagogic relation is often displaced by a concern for the social, political, economic and historical determinants of teaching and learning actions. We conclude that both anthropocentrism and sociocentrism distort the educational endeavour. Educational theory is the product of contrary world views which escape notice because between

educational theory as a field of knowledge and these views lie the disciplines of academic study, the presumed substrate of educational theory.

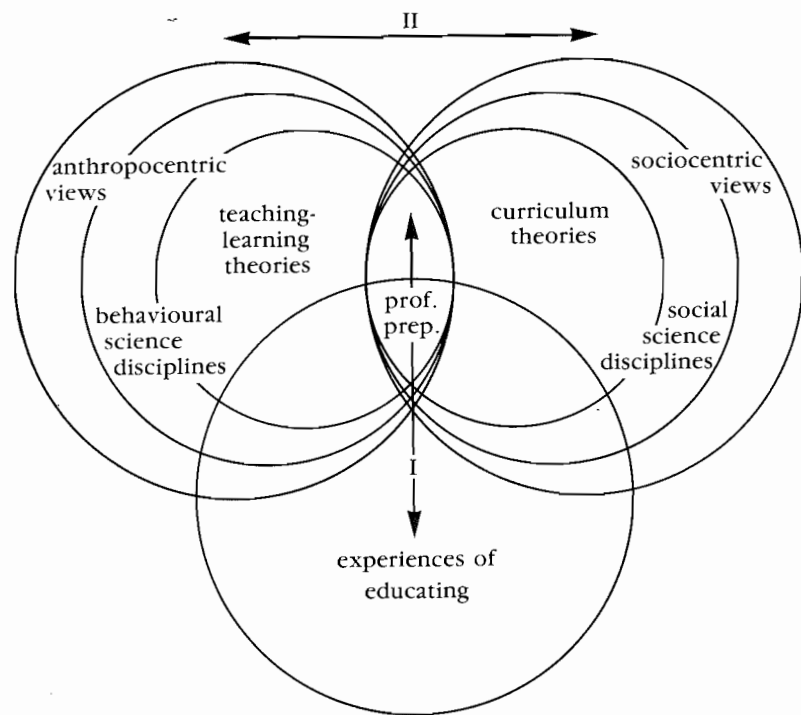


Figure 1: Conflict model of teacher education showing:

- (i) the division between the theory and practice of educating, and
- (ii) the theoretical division within the disciplines of educational theory.

The theory-practice dilemma in teacher education is presented in figure one. The model shows the inherent conflicts within teacher education, the conflict between the theory and practice of teaching and the conflict that a discipline-based approach introduces to the teacher education program. Experiences of educating are those life experiences which create a disposition towards teaching. Some of these experiences accord with the theoretical study of education. There is, in these instances, education which enhances professional preparation. The likelihood of such accord is, however, less than the likelihood of discord between theory and practice

since the life experiences of student teachers are dissimilar to the experiences of those drawn to the disciplined study of behavioural and social sciences. The theory-practice distinction is, in this case, a matter of inexperience. Initiation into the disciplined study of education lies ahead. But the second source of conflict, that within the disciplines, makes the theory-practice distinction more difficult to surmount. Students are subject to conflicting world views which keep at a distance their theoretical grasp of education. The conflict is felt by students throughout their course of teacher education since it is a feature of the bipartite course structure of a discipline-based teacher education program.

The task of making teacher education more meaningful is two-fold: first, we have to decide how best to initiate students into the disciplined study of education, and second, we have to reconceptualise the field of educational studies so that it is a reflection of educational practice rather than a forum for theoretical debate as to the efficacy of behavioural or social science findings for education. Resolving conflict between competing world views is not essentially the task of the educator even though it has great significance for the study of education (Cf. Huston Smith, 1979). The more pressing task as far as the teacher educator is concerned is to ensure a greater overlap of teaching practice and its theoretical understanding. This first task, however, depends upon the second.

A Praxis Model

A starting point is the recognition that educational theory is a theory of practice (Brauner, in Vandenberg, 1974) and that practical understanding ought to guide any subsequent theorising. Carr (1983: 38) made comment on this point which is worth citing.

The very identification of an educational practice always depends on grasping the framework of thought that makes it count as practice of that sort. Secondly, if educational practice is always embedded in theory, then there is nothing to which the notion of "educational theory" can coherently refer, other than the theory that guides the practice of those engaged in educational pursuits. An educational theory, therefore, is not something "derived from" or "based on" the theories about education that are produced by the theoretical social sciences (or behavioural sciences). Nor is it something that can be mechanically attached to practice in the form of problem-solving guidance. Rather, like sociological or psychological theory, it refers to a conceptual framework that expresses how those engaged in some particular activity ought to proceed.

Educational theory, properly conceived, refers to a pedagogic framework which in turn expresses the pedagogic relation that is desired within particular domains of educating. This pedagogic relation which students enter into is in the grounding of educational theory and the nub of debate as to the efficacy of educational practices.

We must be quite clear in what we are saying here for we are talking of the derivation of educational theory and the proper way of understanding it. We are positing an attitude of inquiry as an essential feature of pedagogic action and the stimulus for disciplined inquiry into educational phenomena. The question arises: is this simply another call for research to be the link between the theory and practice of education? Perhaps it even seems to be a call for a particular type of research, for as Bolster (1983: 295) said:

If researchers are to generate knowledge that is likely to affect classroom practice, they must construe their inquiries in ways that are much more compatible with teachers' perspectives.

The important point for Bolster and those who advocate "action-research" is that researchers ought to be mindful of the reflexivity of human behaviour.

Applied to the process of teaching, the assumption of reflexivity requires envisioning each classroom as a small culture created by teacher and student as they work together over a period of time. The basic elements of the process of teaching in such a conceptualisation are not defined as specific teacher initiatives which cause students to master skills or process information in predictable ways, but rather as the constant demands that a specific classroom environment places on those who work in it. The ultimate purpose of research based on this view of teaching is not to generate universal propositions that predict teacher effectiveness, but rather to build and verify a coherent explanation of how a particular classroom works. The resultant knowledge will not be expressed as nostrums to improve teacher competence, but as systematic and reliable information which teachers can use to shed light on their own pedagogical situations. (Bolster, 1983: 303-304)

Taking the point a stage further we find some writers calling for the teacher to be a researcher. Here we see the possibilities for deriving educational theory and thus bridging the gap between theory and practice. For example, Williams, Neff and Finkelstein (1981: 95) (although aiming their comments at the professional preparation of early childhood educators) suggest an alternative program which, by stressing a research orientation, integrates theoretical and practical perspectives on teaching.

In traditional programs little attention is given to the teacher as an active inquirer continuously framing and testing hypotheses, gathering data, and "making meaning" from ongoing, routine experiences. The teacher as an active decision maker is often not considered at all. The alternative proposed here is an approach to professional development which can enable educators to become more conscious of the decisions they make - in a sense, to become researchers. This approach is based on the assumption that, by becoming aware of a decision being made, and by being able to review the way the decision interfaces with a given context, the knowledgeable educator can make wiser and more effective decisions.

Teacher education would be on this account the development of students' research skills along with an attitude of disciplined inquiry. While having merit there is the possibility that this suggestion may err too much on the side of the practitioner's perspectival view of educating. As Williams et al. go on to say, teachers "must be helped to become more conscious of context and the way in which their decisions interface with that context" This is achieved by making teachers aware of their own life contexts, the perspectives of other participants in an educational encounter, and the theoretical knowledge that integrates with these contextual understandings.

The educator takes generalized knowledge about such things as adult development, child development, curriculum, teaching-learning environments, and evaluation and attempts to understand it in terms of a specific content. For example, an educator analyzes "his own context" to determine the information which, at present, "makes sense" and that which does not. He can then be helped to integrate that which does not make sense into his context and, for the present, to reject that which does not. Similarly, this process is repeated for other bodies of knowledge. It is, of course, hoped that this process will become a natural part of the educator's thinking and acting. (Williams, Neff and Finkelstein, 1981: 95-96)

We contend, however, that although this focus on contextual understandings is not misplaced and nor is the interpretive function of theory incorrect, the significance of personal meaning is not fully appreciated and thus the theory-practice dilemma in teacher education is bound to remain. Teacher education programs need not be dramatically changed by the above proposal even though our discussion of their reality shows change to be necessary. The links between the practical knowledge

of teaching and learning, an at times "tacit dimension" (Polanyi, 1966), and the theoretical knowledge of education need to be explicated more thoroughly than the call for "teacher as researcher" allows. Teacher education means explicating a pre-theoretical understanding of pedagogy as it occurs in various domains via reflection from the disciplines that bear upon the practitioner's actions. If research methods that involve the practitioner can promote theoretical perspectives on teaching then all the better. But merely to call for the teacher to be a researcher puts methodological concerns before the need to develop a pedagogical perspective that is theorised, and misconceives the relevance of the lived experience of educating to the theoretical study of education. Educational theory ought to be derived directly from the lived experience of educating.

Leonard (1983: 20) provides a guide towards developing a model of teacher education grounded in lived experiences and referenced to educational theory. He calls for "the illumination of lived experience as the aim of curriculum theory and practice", and while his purpose is "urriculum renewal" he insists that this purpose is first achieved in teacher education (pp. 22, 23). Intending teachers ought to be engaged in discourse regarding their knowledge and commitments to particular domains of educating.

If there is any single process for the making of good curriculum it lies in a radical respect on the part of teachers for their own developing consciousness and that of each other. Honest talk with each other about their knowledge and commitments enables the transcending, self-corrective consciousness of teachers to grow in richness and power.

The teachers of those who would be teachers ought to be similarly engaged in dialogue and capable of drawing the latter into a realm of discourse that extends their emergent awareness of pedagogy. In this way Leonard has intimated that it is not so much the field of educational theory that has to be understood by prospective teachers, as it is the case that educational theorising needs to be considered part of the process of curriculum renewal. There ought to be a somewhat ordered dialogue in a program of teacher education, a dialogue which is directed towards a disciplined understanding of practice.

The designations "theory" and "practice of teaching" preclude a fuller account of teacher education as the "illumination of lived experiences". A praxis model requires not simply a bridging term but a designation of the mediation between theory and practice. In terms of the present discussion it requires the grounding of educational theory between the older conceptualisations of disciplined theory and raw practice.

Three modes of educational theory are thus indicated. The first mode is that of the practitioner himself as he comes to understand concrete situations of practice, and educational facts within them, through experience in the pedagogic relation. The second is that of educational principles and their justification by knowledge from the special sciences as delineated by Hirst. The third is the philosophical explication and elucidation of the pre-scientific, pre-theoretical understanding attained in the first mode and unconsciously presupposed in the second mode. (Vandenberg, 1974: 189-190).

The third mode of educational theory is called fundamental educational theory. Vandenberg discussed its nature and method in detail, and while his treatment is important for the present reappraisal of the theory and practice of teaching, it must suffice to present Vandenberg's diagram of educational theorising.

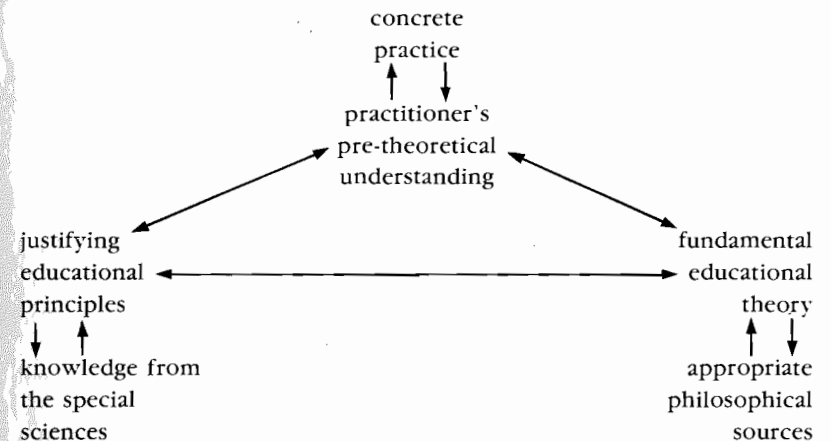


Figure 2: Modes of Educational Theorizing (Vandenberg, 1974: 191)

This model presents a goal for a program of teacher education. It is a model of educational theory which educational researchers ought to adopt, but in the case of the prospective teacher too much is expected in the short term. Accepting that the model represents desirable dispositions of the educational researcher, dispositions we have already conceded are desirable for teachers, we can use it to develop a praxis model of teacher education. Such a model accepts as the basic reality for prospective teachers, lived

experience or the practitioner's pre-theoretical understanding: discourse as the first approximation of fundamental educational theory; and foci of discourse which systematise practice and the condition of practice and which herald the study of teaching-learning process and curriculum theory. The illumination of lived experience is a progression through these modes of educational theorising and an initiation into the disciplined study of education. The conflict model of teacher education outlined earlier can, therefore, be re-conceptualised as a model of educational praxis. (fig. 3)

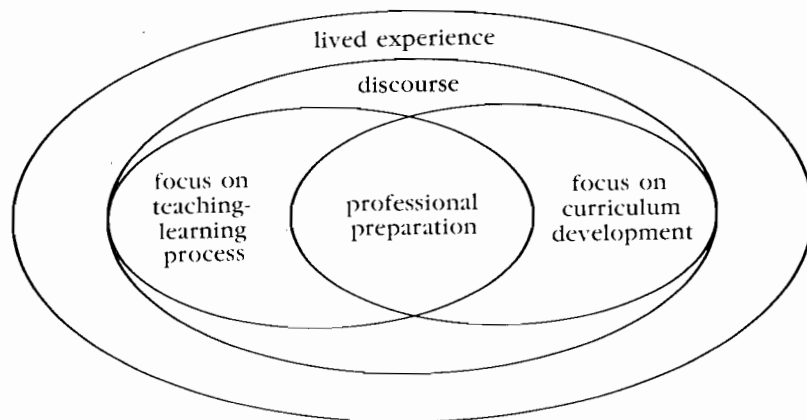


Figure 3: Praxis Model of Teacher Education

The accent on lived experience absolves us of concern for the paradigmatic division in the disciplines of education and changes the nature of educational theory by grounding it in the conditions of practice. Professional preparation is accordingly a central core of experiences that are directed through modes of educational theorising towards the disciplined study of education. Professional preparation is an educational praxis because it imbeds an emerging theory of education in the very pedagogic experiences students are likely to have in their teacher education program. This praxis model, we would contend, takes teacher education beyond the apprenticing and training of teachers, even beyond the supposed liberal education of teachers, and to a stage of professional education where teacher autonomy reaches new levels of sophistication.

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