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Constructing the Field of Education as a Liberal Art and as Teacher Preparation at Five Western Australian Universities: An Historical Analysis

Bruce Haynes (Reviewer)

Gardiner, D., O'Donoghue, T. and O'Neill, M. , Lewiston, N.Y., Edwin Mellen Press, 2011, 378pp., US\$49.95

The authors seek to provide “an understanding of how, historically, Education has been constructed as a field of study at the five universities in Western Australia.” (page 1) This focus on Education precludes consideration of other aspects of teacher education, e.g. teaching content studies, practicum, personal development, that raise issues not central to the narrative presented here. The State Education Department's concerns regarding teacher supply in times of shortage and oversupply and the struggles between university Faculties for the funding flowing from preservice teacher education students are not central considerations in this book (for an example see page 184).

The substantial research underpinning this book is carefully referenced to the source documents but relatively few interviews informed the narrative. So the decision of the University of Western Australia (UWA) Philosophy Department to fail a large proportion of the Philosophy 10 students from Teachers College, because they were concerned there were insufficient staff to cater for a large intake into second year units, is probably not officially documented and thus not accessible to this form of research. The failed students had to withdraw from UWA and become primary teachers. In 1959 I was informed, as a Teachers College student, students could not enrol in Philosophy 10 because the decision in the previous year had thrown Department of Education planning for staffing the rapidly growing secondary school system into disarray. Psychology 10 was required instead. Likewise, the battles over whether curriculum content units in teacher education courses were to be taught in the School of Education or in Arts or Science faculties, were often verbal and not officially documented. While the arguments were often conducted in terms of content relevance or the adequacy of the students to cope with the standards required, quite often the decision hinged on distribution of resources. Even the central issue in Education, the initiation into a tradition via humanities studies or the creation of a science of education via psychology, is not well documented. Quite often decisions on such matters were the result of the interests and background of influential decision-makers rather than well documented argument. One educational psychologist in a position of administrative power asserted in 1976 “He could teach the students all they needed to know about philosophy of education in the time it took him to go from the kitchen to the toilet.” Such documentation on this topic as is presented in this book is illuminating.

These caveats aside, this book provides a wealth of detail to inform consideration of this Western Australian case study of the development of the structure of the study of Education. The authors contend that the development was along common lines

each university included initial teacher preparation, professional development for practising teachers, and higher degrees and research.... The most

prominent orientations [of the study of Education] were the academic, integrated, vocational, technical, pragmatic and professional. (page 1)

It may seem like drawing a long bow to claim that UWA (where Education was not a foundation subject, unlike other universities) was involved in initial teacher preparation in the period from 1916 to 1931 when only an Education unit taught in the Arts Faculty was available. However, as this was the only teacher preparation available to many who went on to teach in private secondary schools and even Teach For America is regarded by some as a form of teacher preparation, it may be conceded that UWA was engaged in initial teacher preparation soon after the institution began. Higher degrees and research by staff in Education only became a feature in Western Australian universities in the last 50 years and most have a much shorter experience of these features.

The authors used Beeby's four stages of development of teacher education to contrast the Teachers College program (Stage of Transition) with that of UWA when it commenced in 1916 (Stage of Meaning). Students in the former program were better educated than those in the Stage of Formalism (ill educated but trained to use authoritarian, formal methods for rote learning of prescribed texts) and received basic training but still relied on formal rote methods with some emphasis on understanding meaning of what is taught. The UWA program is characterised as intended to produce teachers who are "well educated, well prepared and able to use a variety of content and methods, including problem solving, to cater creatively for individual differences in learners." (page 19)

In terms of the typology indicated above, the UWA approach was '**academic**' and the Teachers College was '**technical**'. The W A State School Teachers' Union supported the different approaches in which "the College confine itself to methodology and the art of teaching, and the 'substance' be taught at the University." (page 102) This divide continued through the various developments at each institution. The Teachers College introduced compulsory study of education and psychology in 1952 to provide foundational knowledge to enhance but not replace the 'technical' approach. UWA in the post-war period moved towards a more 'discipline-oriented' academic approach with a greater emphasis on higher degrees and research. This approach included the introduction, in 1950, of an official research journal (presently *Educational Research and Perspectives*) making it the oldest education journal in Australia. By way of contrast, the production of the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* in 1975 was the initiative of some individual staff members at a Teachers College and the journal never received official sanction or support.

The creation in 1967 of the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) as an autonomous college of advanced education, separate from the W A Education Technical Education Division, saw a different approach to the study of Education – characterised by the authors as '**vocational**'. The first course was a Diploma of Educational Administration in the Department of Administrative Studies. By 1987, when WAIT became the Curtin University of Technology, the focus had shifted to Graduate Diploma and Masters in Educational Administration and to research. Initial teacher education did not commence until 1975 when the Kindergarten Teachers College was transferred. The new course was based on the assumption that "students should become teachers first and teachers of subjects second" (page 222) and competency based. The competency based approach was not so rigorously enforced as to preclude the inaugural Dean Wally Neal offering me a position in Education in 1975, even though I spent most of the interview rebutting the approach (circumstances precluded my accepting the offer). A third site was created

for the study of Education in 1978 at the Science and Mathematics Education Centre. The competency based approach in the Graduate Diploma in Science Education has a focus on classroom processes. The main emphasis of the Centre is research and higher degrees.

The other new teacher education course to commence was at Murdoch University when it opened in 1975. The inaugural Dean Brian Hill implemented an 'educational **professional**' approach with 'tight-coupling' between theory and practice. This approach was based on the work of Harry Broudy at the University of Illinois and the units in Studies in the Context of Education examined the place of education in society. A distinctively close connection with schools was central in making the theory/practice connection. This approach also informed the development of higher degrees and research that became features of the program.

The approach to the study of Education at the Teachers Colleges began to shift from 'technical' towards 'academic' in the late 1960s and this was accentuated with the creation of three new colleges, although all were still part of the State Education Department. The colleges became semi-autonomous in 1973 and fully autonomous in 1978 and the shift towards the 'disciplines academic' approach continued, signalled by the preference for the term 'teacher education' rather than 'teacher training'. Opportunity for change was created in the new degree and graduate diploma courses introduced at this time. The most brutal and total change in teacher education in Western Australia occurred in 1983 when the Commonwealth Government forced the amalgamation of the colleges to form the W A College of Advanced Education. All existing programs and courses were abolished and a new '**integrated**' approach was enforced in the new program that was introduced in the following year. Of the Education foundation disciplines, only Educational Psychology survived in a recognisable form. The overall approach to teacher education reverted more towards the 'technical' again with particular emphasis on curriculum methodology. This approach continued with the renaming of the institution as Edith Cowan University in 1991 but was augmented by the new emphasis on research and higher degrees.

The newest university in Western Australia is the University of Notre Dame Australia that commenced in 1992 and the study of Education adopted a '**pragmatic and vocational**' approach. This private Catholic university did not espouse the various traditional Catholic approaches to education but was more concerned with attracting students (mainly to teach in Catholic schools) by a focus on training to meet immediate needs of teachers combined with studies in Catholic theology and ethics. The approach was supported by a close association with schools for the placement of students.

What none of these approaches sought to do was design or restructure their courses and units on the basis of the student test outcomes in their graduates' classes. This American newest best idea is waiting to happen (Dillon and Silva, 2011, p. 58)

Thus the authors have identified a number of distinctive approaches to the study of Education in the context of preservice, inservice and higher degree study. They provide detailed description of the various institutions and their context to enable an understanding of these approaches and why they were adopted.

Notwithstanding the title of the book, which might be construed otherwise, the authors contend that

The study of Education (at UWA) was seen from the beginning as being primarily concerned with teacher preparation,... At no stage was the study of Education promoted primarily as an area of liberal studies which could be pursued by students purely for its intrinsic interest. Rather, the liberal

education tradition strongly accompanied the professionally-oriented focus.
(page 92)

The most notable example of Education as a liberal art was at Murdoch University when, from 1981, a Diploma of Educational Studies was introduced as an “academic study in Education without professional preparation for teaching.” (page 190) Subsequent permutations of this course have continued this approach to undergraduate study of Education for application in areas other than teaching.

In summary, the authors advance five propositions

1. The preparation of professionals for work primarily in schools was fundamental to the purpose of the study of Education at each university in Western Australia.
2. Each university displayed different foci with regard to the preparation of professionals for work in schools.
3. The study of Education was not solely focused on the preparation of professionals for work in schools.
4. Research within the study of Education at the universities in Western Australia was of secondary importance.
5. The construction of Education as an area of study at each university in Western Australia reflected a different historical tradition. (page 320)

This book is invaluable for anyone seeking to understand the evolution of teacher education in Western Australia, either to comprehend what has happened in this State or as an example of developments in Australian teacher education. It is also useful in providing a detailed context for consideration of the various approaches to the study of Education that have occurred and that should serve to deepen the understanding of anyone seeking to implement a teacher education program involving the study of Education.

Reference

Dillon, E. and Silva, E. (2011). Grading the teachers’ teachers: Higher education comes under scrutiny, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93 (1) 54 - 58