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# History of Education Courses in the Preparation of Canadian Teachers

Recent publications on both sides of the Atlantic foreshadow as lively a debate on the nature and purpose of history of education during the decade of the 1970's as Bernard Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society* provoked during the 1960's<sup>2</sup>. What was missing during the previous decade was a concerted attempt to relate the debate to the Canadian scene. This gap must be filled in the coming decade. Exciting developments in the historiography of American and British education, plus repeated criticisms of educational history by both "academic" historians and educational administrators in Canada give the problem a certain urgency. The time has arrived, therefore, to ask some basic questions about the place of history of education courses in the preparation of Canadian teachers. Does history of education have a place? If it does, then how prominent a place — as a required or an elective component of teacher education programs? What kind of history of education? Basic questions such as these lead naturally to the more fundamental questions of the very nature and purpose of history of education.

It has become traditional to use Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society*, as a point of reference in dealing with the changing nature of educational history. This work was an analysis of the major writing in the history of American education, accompanied by an important interpretive essay that examined colonial American education against its British and European background and the wider social issues. Bailyn made the point that educational history could not be considered in isolation, but must be viewed as a part of general social history. This view was sustained in the middle of the decade both by Lawrence Cremin, America's

leading "educational" historian, and by the prestigious Committee on the Role of Education in American History.<sup>3</sup> These writings effectively ended the antiquated "history of schools in isolation" approach to the writing of educational history in the United States.

Meanwhile, the purpose of history of education in American teacher education programs was also extensively questioned. The Committee on Historical Foundations of the National Society of College Teachers of Education published its conclusions in a three-part series in the *History of Education Journal* during 1955 and 1956.<sup>4</sup> Thought-provoking articles by Irving Hendrick and Maxine Greene continued the search for a rationale for history of education courses in the preparation of American teachers.<sup>5</sup> History of education was also included in general analyses of the foundation subjects by Harry Broudy and other American writers.<sup>6</sup> In each case, the author reached positive conclusions regarding the subject. One of the strongest cases has been advanced by Paul Nash in his recent collection of essays:

One of the principal fruits of the historical study of education is improvement in the quality of individual decision making and policy formation. The historically informed teacher or educational policy maker can arrive at his decisions with deliberation, aware of what he is accepting and rejecting. He can put his choices into a wide context of evaluation and comparison and choose with a minimum of rancor and prejudice.<sup>7</sup>

In Britain the nature and purpose of history of education have likewise been analyzed and discussed in both historical and educational circles. Worthy of special mention is the work of Brian Simon, whose two monographs of the 1960's *Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870* (1960) and *Education and the Labour Movement, 1870-1920* (1966) have reshaped the British approach to educational history in a manner similar to that of Bailyn in the United States. Simon stressed the social function of the educational historian. "It should be one of the main tasks of historical study," he argued, "to trace the development of education in this sense, to try to assess the function it has fulfilled at different stages of social development and so to reach a deeper understanding of the function it fulfills today."<sup>8</sup>

Canadian educators waited until 1968 for the beginning of any similar attempt to scrutinize the nature and purpose of history of education in this country. In that year a modest

start was made with Andrew Skinner's general article on the role of the foundation subjects, "Teacher-Training and the Foundational Studies: A Personal Statement," and with a chapter by R. L. Schnell in Robert Anderson, *et al*, *Foundation Disciplines and the Study of Education*.<sup>9</sup> But these were the only attempts prior to Margaret Gillett's 1970 article<sup>10</sup> to come to grips with the problem in a Canadian setting.

Where history of education courses have been included in the preparation of Canadian teachers in the past, they have been severely criticized. "Academic" historians claimed that a true historical approach was neglected and that historical attitudes were not being cultivated. As Hilda Neatby wrote in 1953:

The course in the history of education may consist of brief references to Socrates, Bacon, Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Horace Mann, with little attempt being made to understand them in their historical and philosophic setting. A true history of education might indeed provide a foundation for a true philosophy of education; but the purpose seems to be rather to herald the glad dawn of Dewey's day.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately this negative criticism was not accompanied by positive suggestions for improvement in research methods or for changes in emphasis. Political and constitutional history absorbed the attention of Canadian historians in faculties of arts,<sup>12</sup> while educational history was left largely to those working in colleges or faculties of education.<sup>13</sup>

Recent trends in the writing of Canadian history, however, are of significance for educational historians. The monopoly enjoyed by political and constitutional history has ended in Canadian historiography. Increasingly, senior historians are becoming involved with educational questions as they begin to fill in the gaps in Canadian social, cultural, and intellectual history. More post-graduate theses in Canadian history are now concerned with educational themes or themes in which educational factors play an important role. The appearance of a new bilingual journal, *Histoire sociale/Social History*, sponsored jointly by the University of Ottawa and Carleton University, opens a new field for the publication of articles in social and educational history.

Of major importance was Alan Wilson's plea in 1965 for increased research and writing in the field of non-political biography. Among the figures in Canadian education identified by Wilson as standing in need of detailed biographical study were Bishop Laval, John Strachan, Alexander Macdonell,

Thomas McCulloch, and F. W. G. Haultain.<sup>14</sup> Wilson has since been appointed co-editor of the *Canadian Biographical Series*, published by the University of Toronto Press and Les Presses de l'Université Laval. It is significant that one of the first biographies to appear in this series dealt with John Strachan.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time competent research and writing in Canadian educational historiography is under way in colleges and faculties of education. The historian of education in Canada is no longer confining himself to a narrow "history of schools in isolation" approach, but is moving educational history into the mainstream of social, cultural, and intellectual history. Various approaches are being examined and used throughout the country: the role of the family in the transmission of culture; the changing status of the child; the role of education in nation-building; community attitudes towards education as revealed in novels; the relationship between economic change and education. These new emphases will not go un-noticed by the "academic" historians and may provide a completely new rationale for history of education in the training of teachers.

If history of education is being gently restructured by the researchers and writers, it is also being forcibly restructured by new approaches to teacher education in the country. The near-monopoly that history and philosophy of education once enjoyed in the "foundations" field is no longer the case; the legitimate demands of other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and comparative education have to be and are being met. Even more challenging are the bold and imaginative approaches to teacher education which stress the internship or the apprenticeship aspect of training and leave little time for in-college attention to such supposedly esoteric subjects as history of education. Demands by students for more immediate relevancy to contemporary problems and for a major role in curriculum planning also pose challenges to those teaching educational history courses.

Indeed, one may legitimately ask whether history of education courses have a future in basic teacher preparation schemes. Many Canadian educators seem ready to relegate such courses to post-graduate work. So many other elements appear to have greater relevance and priority in basic teacher preparation. Of course, time must be found to strengthen the student teacher's background in his teaching subject area; time must be found to prepare the predominantly middle-class student teacher for the "culture shock" of inner-city classrooms; time must be found to acquaint him with the instruc-

tional media of the McLuhan age.

The criticisms of academic historians and educational administrators, plus the restructuring taking place both in Canadian historiography and Canadian teacher education, make it necessary for Canadian educational historians to follow the lead of their American and British counterparts in examining their discipline. In the following paragraphs four basic premises are outlined which could help assure history of education a vital and meaningful role in the future preparation of Canadian teachers.

1. Courses in history of education must be elective rather than compulsory. The major reason for their compulsory nature in the past was that teacher-trainers saw in them certain utilitarian values which, of course, the academic historian decried. As Maxine Greene has written, questions about the discipline's significance "were either set aside or resolved by administrative fiat."

Educational history tended to be validated by the contributions it made to the public image of the profession. The men of the past conceived the schools of the past to be but preparations for the common school of today; and the emergence of the common school was seen to represent one of history's culminations — the fulfillment of a 'promise' made at the beginning of time.<sup>16</sup>

The business of determining the discipline's significance is far more complicated today. Relevance is still the crux of the matter as far as the determination of professional significance is concerned; but relevance today signifies relevance for the individual student. Dr. Greene concluded: "The relevance depends on the degree to which a study of the educational past enables the teacher to organize his own experience in the situations of the present, to refine his strategies, to enlarge his conceptual scope."<sup>17</sup>

Broudy and Skinner both argued that the major justification for history of education and other foundation courses is that they help give the beginning teacher some idea of his professional responsibilities as a teacher and an educator.<sup>18</sup> If we want teachers to have a craft training only, then history of education will not be all that relevant; if, on the other hand, we wish to prepare professional educators as well as skilled classroom craftsmen, then history of education will have a certain relevance.

But a course which is meaningful and relevant to one stu-

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dent may be totally irrelevant to another. The number of disciplines demanding attention in the “foundations” or “professional” area of teacher training means that history of education must be placed on an elective basis and hence chosen by those students who will find it meaningful in their preparation for the classroom. It may very well be that only students who have found history relevant to their previous needs and interests (i.e. in undergraduate arts courses) will choose history of education. This should be welcomed rather than regretted — it will enable the instructor to work in depth with vitally interested students. Such a course of action will tend to eliminate two frequent types of criticism directed at history of education courses. Academic historians will no longer be able to complain of the “superficial” nature of educational history courses; and students will no longer be able to complain of the irrelevancy of “compulsory” history of education courses.

2. History of education courses must be regarded as “history” courses as well as “education” courses. This is the only way in which history of education will break out of the narrow “history of schools” context, and move into the mainstream of social, cultural, and intellectual history. The broader approach in educational history is described by Kenneth Charlton of the University of Keele in these terms:

[The historian of education] must concern himself not merely with what went on in the classrooms of the past but with the transmission and modification of culture; not simply with the institutions through which culture is transmitted, modified and acquired but also with the ideas which those institutions sought to put into effect, with the ways in which those ideas were set in motion, and most important of all, with the context in which and for which these ideas were developed.<sup>10</sup>

This approach is being pursued in advanced research in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. It has enabled educational historians to play a greater role in contributing to general historical scholarship. It has won the respect of many of the “academic” historians. And it has won student respect for history of education courses in teacher preparation programs.

History of education courses will be accepted as “history” courses when the instructors concerned are acceptable to the faculty of arts as “historians” as well as to the faculty of education as “educators.” In the past there has been little

communication between historians in faculties of arts and historians of education in faculties of education. That the gap has not been bridged is perhaps the fault of both groups. What is more important is the future, and what is needed is more communication between these two groups of scholars interested in historical study. But how is this to be accomplished? Frank MacKinnon suggested that educational foundations departments be abolished and that courses in history of education be assigned to departments of history in faculties of arts.<sup>20</sup> But this will work only on those few campuses where there is a genuine interest in educational history among members of the history department in the faculty of arts.

American writers such as Conant and Koerner did not go as far as MacKinnon, but they stressed that historians in faculties of education must be acceptable to history departments in faculties of arts.<sup>21</sup> This might be achieved through cross-appointments or through consultation with history departments before appointments are made in the faculty of education. In any case, if history of education courses wish to win the respect of academic historians, then the professors involved must be competent historians. In fact their background in history is as important as their background in education.

3. The basic or introductory educational history course offered to Canadian student teachers should be a history of Canadian education. In the past, Canadian educational history has usually been relegated to post-graduate programs; few Canadian institutions offered it as the first course in educational history. In many universities, it was thought best to give the neophyte teacher a course in European educational history or the educational history of the Western world. It has been argued, with some validity, that Canadian education cannot be understood unless the student first has a knowledge of the development of education in the Western world.

There is no desire here to impose a narrow type of flag-waving nationalism upon our future teachers, nor to exclude from educational history courses those important foreign influences which have shaped and continue to shape Canadian education. But surely an emphasis on Canadian educational history is justified from the point of view of both the student and the nature of Canadian educational development. The vast majority of education students in Canadian universities and teachers' colleges will pursue their professional teaching careers in this country. Following graduation they will be in a

position to exercise considerable influence over the youth of this country. Surely there is a moral obligation to relate the basic history of education course to the Canadian environment rather than to the European background.

An equally compelling argument is that the basic forces shaping historical and contemporary developments in Canadian education have been Canadian. Despite the foreign roots of early Canadian education, the main determining factors in its subsequent development have been Canadian social, economic, religious, and political pressures. Despite the debt owed by Canadian education to people like Socrates, Quintilian, Locke, Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, Skinner, and others, Canadian educational practices and policies have been shaped primarily by Canadians — by men like Bishop Laval, Thomas McCulloch, John Strachan, Egerton Ryerson, J. W. Dawson, Theodore Harding Rand, F. W. G. Haultain, John Jessop, James Hughes, James Robertson, Jean-Paul Desbiens, and others.

An emphasis on Canadian educational history will also afford the student an opportunity to view the role of education in the nation-building process in Canada. It will enable the student to judge the importance of education in the survival of French Canadian culture following the British Conquest of 1760, in the assimilation of European immigrants in the turn-of-the-century Canadian West, in the perpetuation of British imperial sentiment in pre-1914 Ontario, and in the causes of Quebec's "Quiet Revolution" of the early 1960's.

4. Finally, courses in educational history should be as concerned with contemporary educational change as with past educational change. No course in Canadian educational history should be considered complete if it ends in 1900, or 1914, or 1945. No course in Canadian educational history can overlook the changes that have taken place in the past two decades. Attention must be paid to the roots and subsequent development of such issues as the ungraded elementary and secondary school, the expansion of secondary and post-secondary education, the revolution in adult education, the increasing vocational orientation of education, the impact of technology, the spread of French-language instruction beyond the province of Quebec, the consolidation of local school boards, and the role of the federal government in Canadian education.

An emphasis on contemporary developments may be viewed by some as undue deference to student demands for immediate



relevancy. But surely, some utilitarian expectations of students in professional schools and faculties are justified. Historians of education should attempt to relate events of the past with current happenings. If only from the point of view of motivation, the linking of the present with the past gets attention, holds interest and, hopefully, builds attitudes.

The academic historian might argue that an undue emphasis on present developments may lead to a distortion of history, too much of a "present-mindedness in history," a tendency to read history backwards, and a tendency to justify present developments in the light of past events. These concerns are justified, but an emphasis on contemporary educational developments does not automatically mean these distortions will occur.

The joint emphasis on both past and contemporary developments in history of education courses will enable the beginning teacher to view recent theories and innovations in their proper perspective. Rather than accepting well-publicized innovations in his own school system as the gospel truth and the last word, the beginning teacher will hopefully be more critical. History of education, when properly taught, should encourage a skeptical approach to ideas which may simply rationalize existing practice. Student teachers often have a difficult time viewing objectively an educational system in which they are immediately and intimately involved. Historical study can be a powerful means to providing such a view.

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