Teaching the Foundations of Education: A Developmental Perspective

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The Education Department at La Salle University in Philadelphia has restructured its teacher preparation program around the principles of human growth and development. Instructors teaching the foundations courses are encouraged to stress developmental principles through the application of four themes: (a) Educational Practice in Developmental Perspective, (b) Image of the Child in Developmental Perspective, (c) Educational Theory in Developmental Perspective, and (d) Educational Language in Developmental Perspective. The focus and coherence of foundations courses approached according to these themes would be improved, especially because these courses are frequently weakened by encyclopedic, disjuncted texts and by inadequately trained instructors.

Le département d'éducation de l'université La Salle (Philadelphie) a restructuré son programme de formation des maîtres autour des principes de la croissance et du développement humain. Les cours de fondements mettent l'accent sur les principes et la perspective du développement tels qu'ils s'appliquent à: a) la pratique éducative, b) l'image de l'enfant, c) la théorie éducative, d) le langage éducatif. Cette nouvelle conception a pour but de donner une certaine cohérence à des cours qui, trop souvent, versent dans l'encyclopédisme, surtout lorsqu'ils sont donnés par des professeurs inexpérimentés.

In November, 1988, the Carnegie Corporation contributed $800,000 to 30 selected universities to fund the redesigning of teacher education curricula based upn topics or themes. Quoted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (1988), Frank B. Murray, a co-director of the project and dean of education at the University of Delaware, observed that Project 30 was "organized around themes that are essential to arts and sciences and education" (30 colleges . . . p. 15). These themes include "knowledge and values that teachers must have to be educated persons; knowledge of the subject to be taught; teaching ability; the role of race, ethnicity and sex in the curriculum, and the shortage of minority-group members in the teaching profession" (30 colleges . . . p. 15). Each participating institution has pledged to reform its teacher education program around one or more of the themes.

Anticipating the Carnegie Corporation's emphasis on a thematic perspective by almost six years, in 1982 the Department of Education at La Salle University

in Philadelphia restructured its teacher education program around a developmental theme. The department emphasizes theories of human growth and development, but it also stresses how developmental concepts in general are reflected in different but related contexts: in course sequencing, requirements, and assignments; in prepracticum and practicum experiences; in classroom dynamics; in human relations; and in the procedures governing the teaching of particular subjects. In terms of courses, a two-semester sequence in educational psychology is essential to the program's developmental perspective, for here students are introduced to both strong and weak models of human growth and development. According to Damon (1983), a strong model asserts that development occurs in a sequence of stages that are qualitatively rather than quantitatively distinct from one another, that the stages describe whole systems of behavior rather than discrete acts, and that the stages are irreversible and universal. A weak model contends that development occurs in stages that are not necessarily irreversible, holistic, qualitatively distinct or universal (Damon, 1983). Later, strong and weak principles are applied in methods seminars, where the emphasis is on how and when material should be taught.

It is perhaps clear how courses in educational psychology and methods relate to this developmental theme, but what about a course in the foundations of education? In the balance of this discussion, I will explain how the foundations course fits into a developmentally-oriented teacher preparation program; but, more importantly, I will argue the benefits of teaching the course developmentally through the application of four developmental perspectives or themes.

These developmental themes bring to the foundations of education not a departure from the traditional content of foundations, but a different focus and emphasis. In foundations courses such general topics as the history, philosophy, sociology, economics, and politics of education are usually examined. As well, school administration, finance, law, and the educational implications of various social problems may also be treated in some detail. Through these four developmental themes, the same topics may be explored, but in such a way that the students are directed to analyze them as the topics relate to developmental concepts in general and, whenever possible, to the dynamics of social and educational change in particular.

This is not to suggest, however, that issues in the foundations of education develop along the lines of biological organisms. In the history and philosophy of education, and especially in the history of ideas, there is no real end point of maturation toward which the development of an idea is directed: Educational phenomena are often regressive as well as cyclical. They frequently disappear and then later reappear in new form. A case in point is elements of progressivism which appeared, in various garb, at different times over the past hundred years in American education (Ravitch, 1983).

What biological organisms share with education is a process response to change and conflict. As Piaget indicates, an organism, when placed in conflict or disequilibration, assimilates and accommodates the conflicting elements so that equilibration can be re-established (Gallagher & Reid, 1981). Similarly, as a social phenomenon, education acts as a thermostat, adjusting its form and function to conflicts and changes within the social fabric (Postman, 1979). However, unlike an organism, education does not adjust predictably or uniformly, and it does not go through stages that are irreversible, qualitatively distinct from one another, or universal. Instead, education adjusts and adapts to social change based upon the perception and needs of the society it serves.

Understood in this context, the concept of educational development expands the narrow definition of development used in the biological and psychological sciences. It refers to the process of events which unfolds sequentially and which, when analyzed, reveals causal links between the components of conflict and change. These components in the foundations of education may be economic, political, social, philosophical, or historical in nature.

In teaching the foundations course developmentally, instructors challenge students to search for these causal links between social change and education's response to this change. More specifically, they emphasize how changes and conflicts in society influenced and continue to influence educational policy, theory, and practice, as well as educational language and the role and image of the child. These analytic exercises refine critical thinking skills and, in sensitizing students to the conflict and interplay between social and educational phenomena, reinforce an understanding of the dynamics of conflict theory which function in both weak and strong models of human growth and development.

I will now discuss each of the four developmental themes individually. However, in the classroom, these themes should be as fully integrated as possible. This integration should improve student participation and interest and, as I will emphasize later in this discussion, should also enhance the overall coherence of the course material.

Theme # 1: Educational Practice in Developmental Perspective

In the first of these four themes, ways in which changes in society have brought about changes in the educational enterprise are analyzed. Particular attention is given to analyzing *how* and *why* specific social changes throughout history and present society have influenced the purpose of schooling, the administration and funding of schooling, the methods and materials used in the schooling process, the training and employment of teachers, and the teaching of minorities. The interactions involved in these developments are traced as they functioned and changed from one historical period to another, and as they function in present society. However, the emphasis is always on elucidating the causal connections involved in the dynamics of social and educational change.

Theme #2: Image of the Child in Developmental Perspective

In the second theme, historical and social perspectives on childhood and child development are emphasized. When treating the history of education, effort is made to indicate how each society understood the concept of childhood and how its educational institutions reflected its perceptions of child development. For instance, how did the ancient Greeks, the Puritans, and the Victorians view children, and what impact did this have on methods, materials, and purposes of schooling? In examining the changing image of the child from the 19th to the 20th century, instructors underscore how developments in child psychology altered the way in which contemporary culture perceived the child. For instance, while the "sentimentalized child" surfaced at various times from the late 19th century to the present (e.g., to dramatize the need for child labor reform in 1890 and later to argue for such programs as Head Start), the image of the sentimentalized child was generally transformed by child psychology (Coveney, 1967; Kessen, 1979). However, an examination of child psychology as an influence on understanding the child also stresses how "child psychology is itself a peculiar cultural invention that moves with the tidal sweeps of the larger culture in ways that we understand at best dimly and often ignore" (Kessen, 1979, p. 815).

The degree to which the schools' perceptions of childhood and child development differed from that of the society in general or the community in particular is also clarified. This would have been the case, for example, in 19th century urban America, where dramatic increases in immigration from a variety of European countries occurred. As Jane Addams observed, the immigrants brought with them specific attitudes about the raising of children and about the role of the child in the family and community (Lagemann, 1985). These attitudes often conflicted with those of the American schools to which immigrants were required to send their children. These clashes often resulted in alienating the children from their families or in parents refusing to comply with the schools' mandatory attendance policies.

More recently, there has been a similar split between schools and some Hispanic communities because of conflicting attitudes regarding their respective understanding of childhood, language use, and social empowerment. In some cases, this has resulted in student academic failure and low self-esteem for children as well as for parents; however, bilingual and bicultural programs in many of these schools have helped to defuse these tensions and have actually increased academic achievement and overall self-esteem (Cummins, 1986).

Theme #3: Educational Theory in Developmental Perspective

The impact of philosophers, psychologists, and theorists on education is addressed in this theme. This focus should not be construed as resurrecting the encyclopedic Great Thinkers approach to education; instead of providing a cursory overview of the contributions of each to the history of educational thought, attention is given

to clarifying correspondences and/or refinements between and among theories. For example, do the respective educational theories of Plato, Aristotle, and Quintilian represent developmental refinements in understanding how children develop and learn? In this theme, degrees of influence of one theorist on another are assessed. As well, the degree to which educational theories actually influence teacher training and/or classroom instruction is explored. Finally, analysis is made of the possibilities and problems involved in implementing these theories.

Theme #4: Educational Language in Developmental Perspective

Over the centuries, and especially during the last hundred years, the language used to describe components of the educational enterprise has changed. This is an emphasis of the fourth theme. Underpinning this reality are two points: first, the concepts represented by these terms have themselves changed; and second, social agendas often infused these terms with particular meaning and connotation. Peters and Hirst (1970) point out that the term *education* itself had a very generalized meaning for centuries in England, and that, during the 17th century, it referred to the rearing of plants and animals as well as children. "With the coming of industrialism, however, and with the increasing demands for knowledge and skill consequent to it, 'education' became increasingly associated with 'schooling' and with the sort of training and instruction that went on in special institutions" (Peters & Hirst, 1970, p. 23). Such terms as *instruction, training, propaganda, indoctrination, intelligence, learning,* and *curriculum* have also changed in meaning over the years or have changed meaning because of context.

By focusing on changes in educational language, students are able to examine the changing social situations that may have been responsible for the changes in meaning and they are alerted to the educational jargon and slogans obscuring many current issues in education. In one sense, Greene's (1976) concern is addressed that in teacher education "there has been a tendency to present an unexamined surface reality as 'natural,' fundamentally unquestionable. There has been a tendency as well to treat official labelings and legitimations as lawlike, to overlook the constructed character of social reality" (p. 10). Since the changes in educational language are examined in this theme, students are helped to excavate the constructed character of social reality.

Texts and Teaching Faculty

Through developmental themes, students are directed to approach traditional foundations topics as they reflect causal connections and as they illustrate the dynamics of social change. In achieving this purpose, however, it is critical that these four themes be integrated. As I mentioned previously, each has here been presented individually for the sake of clarity. In practice, however, all four function together as an interactional network which brings to the foundations curriculum a coherence that is presently being compromised by two issues: poor textbooks and inadequately prepared instructors.

Tozer and McAninch (1987) point out that one of the most significant problems facing a foundations instructor is the poor quality of available textbooks. The two top sellers, Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, and Johansen's *Introduction to the Foundations of American Education* (1985) and Ornstein and Levine's *An Introduction to the Foundations of Education* (1985), suffer from shallow and disjunctive treatment of material. Tozer and McAninch (1987) assert that the attractiveness of Johnson et al.'s text "may well lie in its effort to cover an encyclopedic range of topics. However, this contributes to its greatest weakness, which is the shallow and cursory treatment of these topics" (p. 18). Generally the authors' approach:

> is to supply a bit of data, in a chart or table and in a paragraph or two, without any coherent explanatory framework from which the student can derive meaningful understanding of the data . . . . One result of this treatment of a great many significant issues in just a few pages is that much is declared and little is explained. (p. 18)

Tozer and McAninch conclude that "the authoritatively declared presentation of nearly all of the material in this volume does not invite students to inquire thoughtfully into social reality. (p. 19)

Ornstein and Levine's text is similarly deficient because it presents "a lot of data on *what* is the case but very little on *why* it is the case. The mode of presentation is mainly declarative, seldom explanatory" (Tozer & McAninch, 1987, p. 21,). Tozer and McAninch are especially critical of the text's handling of "Historical and Philosophical Foundations," in which several two-page charts chronicling the history of education since 7000 B.C are provided:

> Accompanying the tables are a few paragraphs on each of the great many educational figures, but, as in other instances, the narrative is a series of declarations of information and is subsequently not likely to help students understand how different ideas operated in different istorical contexts. Why did Aristotle and Plato differ in their educational beliefs? Why did their vision of the good life differ? Why should anyone prefer one over the other? These are questions sudents are not helped to address. Without some account of how different ideas emerge in different (or similar) historical settings, the narrative is poorly suited to equip students to examine critically what they read. (p. 22)

Tozer and McAninch are correct in pointing out these deficiencies. However, if such an encyclopedic approach is attempted in a foundations text, shallow and cursory analysis of topics would seem to be the necessary result. It is therefore incumbent upon the instructor to provide fuller explanations, to highlight causal connections, and to emphasize the social and educational interplay that has developed throughot the centuies and which is continuing to develop in the present. A consistent and thoughtful application of the developmental themes presented here would render the material in either Johnson et al.'s or Ornstein and Levine's text more intelligible and coherent, and would ultimately provide student with the background and critical thinking skills to approach past, present, and future educational questions more logically and confidently.

A second problem compromising the effectiveness and coherence of foundations courses is the quality of instruction. Shea and Henry (1986) conducted a survey of faculty who teach undergraduate foundations courses and concluded that "there are large numbers of personnel teaching foundations courses who have had little or no preparation in the field" (p. 11). If this is the case, there is an increased possbility that instructors who are pressed into service lack the background and awareness to examine the nuances involved in socio-educational change. Moreover, if these instructors are using texts that are replete with declarative facts but short on analyses, it would be no surprise for students to pass through foundations courses without any appreciation of the rich interplay between society and education.

Admittedly, an unqualified instructor might be somewhat intimidated by the scope of most foundations curricula; nevertheless, if the instructor gradually introduced two or three of the developmental themes into the course, the material might well become less disjuncted, more meaningful, and ultimately more gratifying to teach.

Recommendation for Instruction

One recommended approach for teaching the foundations course developmentally is to divide in half the typical three hours per week of instruction. During the first 90 or so minutes, the instructor presents through lecture and discussion the history and philosophy of education and implements all four themes appropriately. Thoughtful summaries, clarifications, and carefully crafted questions are essential in emphasizing the dynamics of social and educational conflict and change.

During the second 90 minute session, the instructor leads the class through a series of study questions distributed earlier, designed by the instructor to guide students through critical readings of the text. The questions focus on knowledge, comprehension, synthesis, and evaluation of material; wherever possible, the questions consistently underscore the interconnectedness of concepts and events proceeding from the four developmental themes. The questions periodically include case studies requiring students to interrelate and apply developmental themes. These activities also require rigorous application of Theme #4, Educational Language in Developmental Perspective, and provide the groundwork for similar case study activities in later courses in teaching methods.

All papers, presentations, quizzes, and examinations relate to the lectures and study questions; thus, the four themes are synthesized at various stages of the course. It is also essential that the instructor explain at the beginning of the course the organization of the material, highlighting the broader understanding of the concept of development and the focus to be placed on conflict theory and social change in the educational context.

In a traditional teacher preparation program, the developmentally-oriented foundations course may stand alone in generating developmental concepts, in

providing integration and focus, and in sharpening student writing and thinking skills. However, in a developmentally-oriented teacher preparation program, the course will help to erect the scaffolding for later developmental concepts and will reinforce those already in place.

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