

## **FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION IN NEW YORK STATE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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(Last night Evander Holeyfield successfully defended his heavyweight championship by defeating the challenger, George Forman. For their few moments of physical effort Holeyfield received twenty million dollars; Forman received 12.5 million. Virginia Ravitch has joined Lamar Alexander's forces in Washington. The New York Stock Exchange closed yesterday with the Dow Jones Average at 2965.42. The Amir of Kuwait's army continues to reign terror on Palestinians. The valedictorian of Tamaric Hills graduating class commits suicide over the weekend.)

I begin with these headline stories of the last few days to remind us of the context in which we work. Allow me to continue by making a few declarative statements each followed by a simple interrogative sentence.

- (1) The most urgent calls today in American Education appear to be related to economics. Do the foundations have a response to that?
- (2) A major portion of the rhetoric in our field (not limited to the foundations) seems to be related to how we will address the growing inadequacy of our educational system to enfranchise the "have nots" in our society. Do the foundations have a response to that?
- (3) The current demands of national and state efforts to improve education call for collaboration among those that prepare teachers and those that produce knowledge in academe. Do the foundations have a response to that?
- (4) The efforts now underway to restructure the educational programs which prepare teachers call for university presence in the schools. Do the foundations have a response to that?

(Four students arrested and charged with vandalism of central offices totaling a quarter of a million dollars.)

This set of statements and questions represents not only the current state of education in New York State but the position of the foundational studies relative to it as well. We can not, and surely must not dismiss these needs. Our response to the concerns and the issues which emerge from them must transcend philosophical biases, retreats to psychological constructs, sociological paradigms and historical deconstruction. We must squarely face what is now happening in our schools. Bluntly, we must enter the muddy waters and get our feet wet and dirty.

(A driver education teacher narrowly escaped serious injury as a fire bomb exploded as he entered his car yesterday.)

The last time I spoke to you formally I entitled my short presentation "Standing On The Corner . . . Watching." Today, as I take over the helm of this organization I'm nagged by the feeling we may have been left at the corner. As I read and reread the reports emanating from Albany I sense that we who have been marginalized for over a decade in teacher preparation are about to be lifted altogether from the pages unless we can effectively demonstrate in a most pragmatic way how we can make a difference. The analysis of these reports which follows may give you a glimpse of why I draw this conclusion.

Within the last year we have had to begin a three year plan for reregistration of our teacher certification programs in elementary and secondary education. New Commissioner's Regulations have been activated defining the use of calculators during Regents Examinations and requiring of a two hour workshop in child abuse and maltreatment identification and reporting. School district are required to have a crisis team in place to respond in emergencies such as a measles outbreak or teenage suicide. A New Compact for Learning has all but ignored the handicapped. And where are the foundations? Is there any mention of the a historical nature of American education? Is there any mention of the moral and ethical dimensions of the teaching act? Is there any mention of the deskilling of the classroom teacher through increasing the roles of

technology and the bureaucratization of the schooling process? The answers are clearly no. Succinctly, the foundations are out. Even the most optimistic look at the documents would force me to conclude that our role in New York State is to be somewhat akin to art and music in the secondary schools; we're there, but we're of very low priority.

I don't believe it necessary to elaborate on the position which the foundational studies occupies in our colleges and universities. We have been set apart from both the liberal studies and the pedagogical. Most importantly, we have been all but eliminated from practice itself. I say most importantly, because my analysis suggests that we as foundational scholars have removed ourselves so completely from the public school classroom that the problems which our state and nation face are not perceived as ones which we can solve. When, for example, were any of you asked to conduct a workshop for teachers in the elementary or secondary schools? When, for example, have any of you invited practicing teachers to your department meetings? When, for example, was the last time you examined the state requirements for elementary school mathematics? What, for example, are the qualifying scores for Professional Knowledge on the National Teachers Examination? Have any of you been consulted regarding the items on that examination? Many of you can respond positively to a few of these questions; however, far too many of us have been locked into institutions and reward structures which do not acknowledge that activity as being important. Hence we realistically, avoid it.

Two weeks ago I came before a meeting of teachers in an urban high school with a challenge, a challenge which required a reflective look at practice, a challenge to belief systems which underlie the common sense notions about how we educate our youth, a challenge to collaborate with the development of new ways of preparing teachers for the twenty first century. When my presentation was finished and the building principal asked for question, there were none. Instead, ten minutes were used in debating the merits of a newly implemented procedure for mailing report cards. It wasn't that my message was misunderstood; they were disinterested. Teachers don't seem much interested in the moral implications embedded in a reporting system which reduced the

classroom experience to fragmented pieces of oftentimes irrelevant cultural content to be later reproduced on norm-referenced examinations. They are far more concerned about a management system which establishes policy without prior teacher advise and consent. This is not to say that teacher authority to make decisions which affect their work in unimportant. The problem for us in the foundations is that most solutions to the current malaise in education are sought elsewhere.

But there is the possibility for our work to be of some importance, albeit somewhat inferential, since most reports remain general and vague when it comes to matters such as equity and moral imperatives. Allow me to summarize briefly what I am sure is familiar to you all. Norm (past-president Norman Bauer) has laid out the national scene quite well, but I want to begin there in a small way simply to set the stage for what I believe should be our agenda for the 90's. During a national conference on the restructuring of teacher education programs last December, a panel of state education department spokesperson were describing their most recent efforts to improve the quality of teaching within their domains. The New York State representatives, Donald Nolan, referenced the Regents Action Plan which attempts to bring elementary and secondary school outcomes, teacher certification and college preparatory programs together. I have extracted some language from that Document and others related to it to suggest entry points for foundational study.

“Statement of Regents Goals For Elementary — and Secondary — School Students 1984 . . . We want each child to develop self-confidence and belief in success in learning. We want each to develop a capacity for continued self-learning. We want each to develop self-discipline and a sense of decency and responsibility.”

“Each student will respect and practice basic civic values and acquire the skills, knowledge, understanding, and attitudes necessary to participate in democratic self government.”

Under this last rubric the following are stated:

“5.1 Understanding and acceptance of the values of justice, honesty, self-discipline, due process, equality, and majority rule with respect for minority rights.”

“5.2 Respect for self, others and property as integral to a self-governing, democratic society.” “Each student will develop the ability to understand and respect people of different race; sex; ability; cultural heritage; national origin; religion; and political, economic, and social background, and their values, beliefs and attitudes.”

These are some of the goals.

If one looks at the recommended course requirements sections for K-6, particularly under the “Content/Objectives” section, one sees that:

“Instruction must be provided in: Patriotism and citizenship; history, significance, meaning and effect of the Constitution of the United States and amendments thereto; Declaration of Independence; Constitution of New York State and amendments; the flag, pledge of allegiance, certain holidays.”

These lofty declarations are linked with several other mandates, including:

“Physical education and kindred subjects . . . Highway safety and traffic regulations; bicycle safety; school safety patrol . . . Arson and fire prevention . . . and Conservation Day.”

Intriguingly, the first set of requirements is not applicable to nonpublic schools. Even more provocative, these same requirements apply to the 7-12 program of studies as well. I can’t recall ever having dealt with the school safety patrol in these upper grades, say nothing about those “kindred subjects.”

There are no additional sections under requirements that offer any insight into how we are to attain the goals outlined above. There is, however, one statement under the “Generic Change in Instruction” section of the Action Plan which does.

“8. Implement Education for Civic Values. Values are a key element in everyone’s life. Certain kinds of values — civic values — are a critical element in the maintenance of a democratic society, and public and non public schools in a pluralistic society have a responsibility for helping to ensure that young people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to act according to civic values.”

This section makes reference to the Regents position Paper “Education for Civic Values” in which school programs purporting to do this are described. It is expected that these civic values will be integrated within both the instructional and non-instructional aspects of students’ school experiences.

Few would disagree as to the reasonableness of the goals for our state’s youth. It remains problematic as to how these goals are to be met through the Actions Plans’ specification of requirements and the prescribed instruction. Even more problematic is the teacher preparation necessary to achieve the goals. As I read and reread the Regents Action Plan I remain convinced that the Regents have inferred that the goals will be met through the curriculum provided by the schools, guided by the various State Education Department syllabi for all subjects K-12. Those of us who work directly in the teacher education programs of our colleges know perfectly well that these syllabi are equally vague as to how these “values . . . understandings . . . sensitivities . . . beliefs . . . and attitudes” are to be encouraged, taught, fostered, etc. Again, it appears that the various department bureaus involved in curriculum development infer that these things will somehow emerge within the instructional programs. Perhaps they also infer that teachers will have gained the appropriate attitudes and skills for transmission to their students from their teacher preparation programs.

Before we turn our attention to that preparation, there are two additional documents from which I want to draw statements germane to our work. One is from a memo written by Commissioner Sobol addressed to “interested persons” in response to the public’s reaction to the “A Curriculum for Inclusion” report. In that memo, Commissioner Sobol

wrote, “we cannot understand our complex society without understanding the history and culture of its major ethnic and cultural components. We face a paradox: only through understanding our diverse roots and branches can we fully comprehend the whole. Only by accommodating our differences can we become one society. Only by exploring our human variation can we apprehend our common humanity.” This appears in the same section in which we wrote, “the Regents took this action in response to the educational, social, political and economic imperatives of our time.” I repeat, “. . . educational, social, political and economic imperatives of our time.” These appear relevant.

On October 2, 1990, another rather controversial document went forth from the Commissioner’s office entitled “A New Compact for Learning: A Partnership to Improve Educational Results.” Early on, the document summarized the goals outlined in the Regents Action Plan and further indicated that they continued to “define our purpose as we approach the next century.” Two statements within the “Compact” should cause us in the foundations to become proactive.

Within the “Set Statewide Goals” section, the following is stated: “In specifying the skills, knowledge and values which students should acquire, the Regents should consult broadly with members of the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary community; . . .” Later, in the “Provide Resources Incentive and Assistance” section we find this: “More specifically, the Regents should work collaboratively with school districts, teacher centers, teacher training institutions, parent groups, and education organizations to provide teachers, other members of the school staff, and parents with the training needed for effective pursuit of statewide goals and desired learning outcomes and for effective participation in planning and decision making.”

I urge you all to read this document, particularly section H. The Role of Higher Education. This section is small by comparison to those describing the roles of other participants, perhaps unintentionally communicating that we may very well be a minor partner in this new compact. Nevertheless, I want to conclude by expanding on one statement

within section H. It reads, “Develop preservice and inservice education and professional preparatory programs for a new generation of elementary and secondary teachers and administrators committed to achieving better results.”

For the past eighteen months I have been working very closely with the administration and key faculty in an area school district and a select group of faculty from our college liberal arts departments. The working has been driven by a single mission: how we can, together, restructure our teacher preparation program. From this effort two new sociology courses have emerged, one at our Junior College at the 200 level and the other at the Women’s College at the 300 level; both courses address educational issues effected by sociological variables. This is significant given that our Education Department recently dropped our foundations course and replaced it with an introduction of education course. I draw attention to this event for a very specific reason.

There is a source of vigor in working cooperatively with liberal arts faculty who see the preparation of teachers as a significant part of their role. More importantly for us in the foundations at this critical time is the blending of dialogue and blurring of curricular and disciplinary boundaries. To this point we have established two working committees, one at the college and one at a collaborating public school, which are addressing the statements which I have extracted from the Regents Action Plan and other documents. The college-based committee is comprised of a faculty member from each liberal arts department, a representative from a middle school and a senior high school, a school administrator and an Education Department chairman, and a faculty member from the liberal arts and education. The school committee is focusing on the instructional and goal statements from the same documents, relating them to the current public school programs. Its primary function is to find ways of targeting pre-service and in-service teacher education of the content and experiences which are achieving the goals, followed by a translating of the teacher behavior which accompany those achievements into college level experiences. What is happening here is the addressing of our types or questions within the context of actual class-

room experiences. For the first time at our college, the liberal arts faculty in sociology, psychology, history and political science are reframing their disciplinary questions in foundational terms, and methods instructors are asking their students to critically examine their lesson plans in terms of consequences other than academic achievement. One example is our discussions of classroom evaluations which include such things as sex stereotyping in language usage in math word problems and ways in which standardized tests can reproduce social hegemony.

The major reason for describing what has been happening at our college is to stress the need for proactive participation in the restructuring of schooling. I'm relating this to inform you that there are indeed school administrators and teachers ready and willing to challenge the status quo. There are liberal arts and methods faculty who are in tune with us, but they need a vehicle to express it which will not jeopardize their status in the schools and academe. I want to stress strongly that we are the ones who can provide the link between the schools and the university. But, and it's an important but, we must begin at the school level, not the college level. We must enter the schools often with regularity. We must bring the classroom teachers into our midst, listening to what they have to say. We need to establish a stronger network among ourselves so that our individual efforts and those of our schools of education don't continue to separate courses and become diffused. We need to provide a more concrete voice for the school teachers, a vehicle that will allow us to understand what it means to be a teacher in our nation's schools today.

I agree that we must become more politically active as an association, however, I am not convinced that our words will be heard if we are unable to demonstrate, concretely and overtly, ways that the things which concern us are internalized and expressed by those who teach our children and youth. I feel we have to do more than simply join with other foundational associations.

What I need from you, now, are suggestions as to how, collectively, we can "bring off" such things as those happening at Washington University (St. Louis).