(Why) Should Research Universities Have Schools of Education?

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University of Delaware School of Education Spring Colloquium Series

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The problem

In these tight economic times, universities will be looking harder than ever at their programs and resources. Schools and colleges of education have often been the object of skepticism and criticism, and could be questioned even more strongly in the coming years, especially when, at the same time, studies keep appearing that do not show an edge for teachers prepared in "traditional" (ed school) programs. How would you answer the question that is the title of my talk: Why should research universities (like the University of Delaware or the University of Michigan, or Harvard or Stanford or Penn) have schools of education?

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I am thinking of closing the School of Education. Is there a good reason that I should not?

What would you say?

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What this inquiry is, and what it is not

An effort to:

- Challenge ourselves
- Sharpen the purposes for schools of education
- Understand why the question is real, and set it in context
- Improve the question
- Set a course for how ed schools could improve

A desire to:

- Bash ourselves (internal critic)
- Defend the current portfolio or quality of schools of education
- Defend, in general, teacher education or education research

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Is there a reason to have schools of education?

1. Reasons for the question
2. Focusing the question
3. What could comprise a persuasive answer?
4. What would we have to learn or do?

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Resources for asking, refining, and answering the question

- Interview university presidents and deans
- Read critiques of ed schools
- Review the research on effects of teacher education
- Investigate the history of schools of education in higher education, including their establishment or not in research universities
- Delve into the notion of "professional school" and its relation to "research university"
- Examine the challenges faced by other professions (e.g., Flexner report, business schools, journalism)

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Skepticism of ed schools not a new phenomenon

- A fundamentally uncertain profession (Arthur Powell, 1980)
- Scorn for the very idea that there might be knowledge of teaching beyond the insight provided by psychology
- Teaching is an art: "happy tact and ingenuity tell us what to say and do when the pupil is before us" (William James)
- Practice is too particular to lend itself to general principles; "the divine skill of the born teacher's instincts" preferable to "faddish" methods (Josiah Royce, 1891)
- Scant sign of impact of professional training or of scientific research

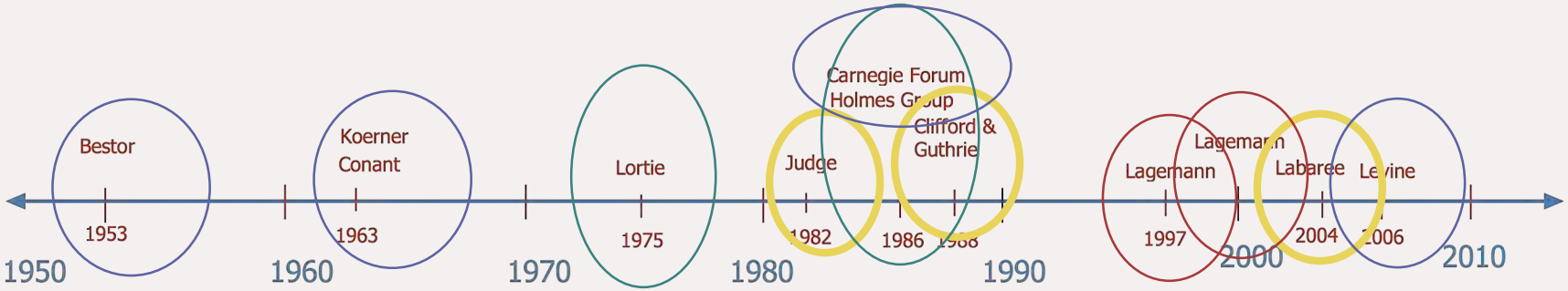
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A collection of major critiques

1. Bestor, A. (1953). *Educational wastelands*.
2. Conant, J.B. (1963). *The education of American teachers*.
3. Koerner, James D. (1963). *The miseducation of American teachers*.
4. Lortie, Dan. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study.*
5. Judge, H. (1982). *American graduate schools of education: A view from abroad.*
6. Holmes Group (1986). *Tomorrow's teachers: A report of the Holmes Group*.
7. Carnegie Forum (1986). *A nation prepared: Teachers for the 21st century. The report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy's Task Force on Teaching as a Profession.*
8. Clifford, J.J. & Guthrie, J. (1988). *Ed School: A brief for professional education*.
9. Lagemann, E. C. (1997). *Contested terrain: A history of education research in the United States, 1890-1990.*
10. Lagemann, E.C. (2000). *An elusive science: The troubling history of education research.*
11. Labaree, D. (2004). *The trouble with ed schools*.
12. Levine, A. (2006). *Educating school teachers*.

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Categories of critiques over time



Poor quality and effects of teacher education

The teaching profession

Education research

Schools of education

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What makes ed schools vulnerable?

1. Little evidence for the "edge" of an education school preparation for teaching
2. Lack of clarity of the nature of education research, and lack of persuasiveness about its quality
3. No unique mission in an institution whose purpose is education, and no convincing expertise (all seems common sense)
4. The "Rodney Dangerfield" phenomenon and the failure to take the problem seriously
5. Our own disbelief and the critical turn

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In general: Professional schools in a research university

- Conduct research on problems of practice and treatments
- Connect practice, research in and for practice, and social science/science
- Train practitioners to use the practices developed through research
- Influence broader environment

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Contemporary problems as opportunities for ed schools

1. Weak effects of teacher education
2. Persistent educational inequality and lack of adequate knowledge about instruction and interventions
3. The growing importance of access to higher education and the rising demand for quality and accountability
4. Universities' need to engage in "outreach"

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Opportunity #1: Weak effects of teacher education

- Like all professional schools, our mission is to prepare professionals for our domain of practice.
- K-12 education is of concern, and its connections to higher education (e.g., Spellings Commission Report).
- No one has a real edge on reliable preparation of teachers.

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Why the problem is one of professional training

- The scale of the need
- (Effective) teaching as unnatural and intricate work

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Serve as laboratories for building a reliable system of training ordinary people to teach effectively

1. Focus teacher preparation and continuing education on practice and pupil learning:
   - Content knowledge for teaching
   - Instructional practices, treatments, procedures, routines, professional judgment and obligations
2. Move from solely individual to organizational solutions, design and test training and approaches
   - Support early career teaching, years 0 – 5 through new relations with schools, mentoring, continuing education
3. Build common assessments of content knowledge for teaching and performance assessments; conduct research on relationship of scores to student achievement
4. Develop ways to hold ourselves accountable (closing the loop)
5. Invest in research on on instructional practices ("treatments", routines, etc) to build a solid base for teacher training)

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Opportunity #2:
The need for knowledge about instruction and interventions

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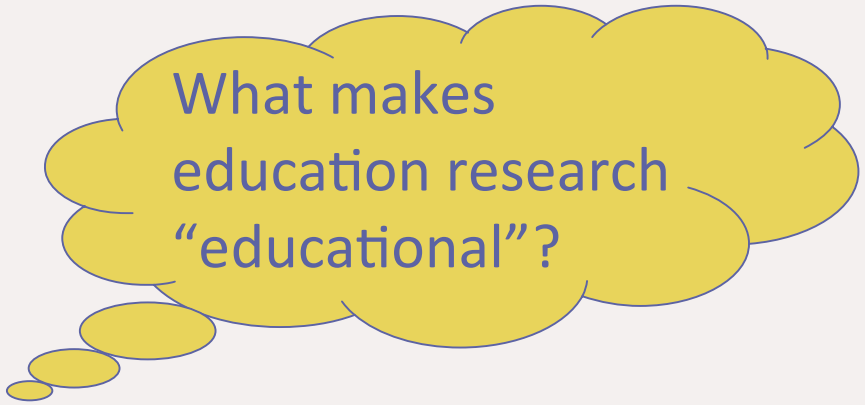
Research universities

- Mission to produce disciplined knowledge
- Tenure endorses valued work
- Orientation to disciplined inquiry, creation and design, innovation that trump common sense and force
- Imperative to use the resources of the academy for the public good, and to solve societal and human problems

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What is quintessentially *educational* about education research?

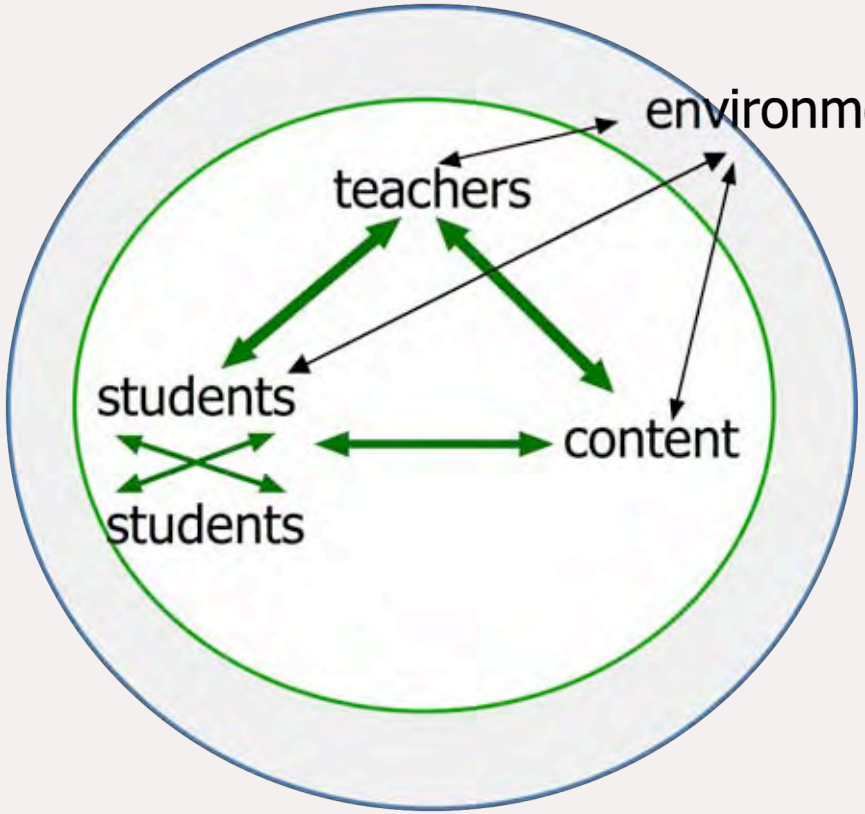
- What is special about our focus and expertise?
- What are educational problems?
- What are educational ways of framing and studying problems?



Ball & Forzani (2007), *Educational Researcher*

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Research in education



- Studies that probe the *insides*
- The dynamic of "instruction", or policy implementation; "inside the black box"
- This is the part that is often invisible and overlooked
- Often more work is done on the corners and edges and contexts —– research that **informs** education

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Opportunity #3: Higher education and the demand for access, quality, and accountability

- Universities are under pressure to demonstrate their value — high cost of postsecondary education, declining public support even for "public" institutions. Designing and studying programs, practices, policies, and innovations
  - Experiments with new uses of technology, textbooks, and study groups; new approaches to assessment and residential arrangements
  - Making success in college real through effective connections to K-12, and serious work on instruction and campus life
- On all of these, moving past common sense and intuition to improve practice
- Universities are under pressure to demonstrate their value — high cost of postsecondary education, declining public support even for "public" institutions.

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Opportunity #4: Universities' engagement in "outreach"

- Universities are increasingly accommodating a mission of outreach, engagement, service to the public
  - Access and pipeline challenges (STEM, under-represented minorities, broadening college-going)
  - Outreach to K-12 schools
  - Sites in communities (e.g., charter schools)
  - Service learning
- Major problem: What is the quality and impact of these activities?
  - The need for expertise in design and evaluation
  - Experiments with new attempts at outreach, including communication and knowledge transfer across boundaries

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What, then, is a persuasive warrant for a "school of education"?

. . . within an enterprise that is entirely about education?

The role and mission of a professional school

A special kind of expertise and competence, that includes knowledge, tools, and specialized ways of thinking, applied to problems of education and the educational process

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The cultivation of expertise in education

- Developing as *professional schools* in research universities
- Ed schools would have to be places to
  - House people with knowledge of practice
  - Prepare people with this sort of knowledge and expertise
  - Help others who are interested in education learn about its phenomena and important problems
  - Lead collaborations with other experts to tackle tough problems
  - Help the university meet its responsibilities to the public good

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What would it take to make this argument and its promise successful?

- Focus research on problems that are central to education
- Communicate more clearly and persuasively about what is at the core, what expertise in education can contribute
- Demonstrate the value of disciplined knowledge of teaching and learning, over intuition and common sense, across disciplinary boundaries and with the public

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Recapping the question, and the argument

What is the role of professional schools in a research university?

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- Train practitioners to use the practices developed through research
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