(Why) Should Research Universities Have Schools of Education?



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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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A closer look at the question

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It's a real question

". . . state representative Bob Genetski, R-Saugatuck, noted that Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan both run education programs only a few miles apart, and asked whether "it is responsible from a taxpayers' standpoint to be funding two schools of education ... during tough economic times when we have more certified teachers in the system than we need."

Ann Arbor News, February 27, 2009

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What is the question not?

- Should teacher education be carried out in higher education institutions?
- Should there be schools of education in any universities?
- Are schools of education, as we currently know them, valuable?
- How can we defend ourselves from our critics?

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What this inquiry is, and what it is not

Seeking 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

Not intending 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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What makes ed schools vulnerable?

- ✓ Low status of the teaching profession
- ✓ Lost: disconnected from schools and from the disciplines (Lagemann)
- ✓ Seen as weak compared with the arts and sciences disciplines

1. Lack of clarity of the nature of education research, and lack of persuasiveness about its quality, relevance, or rigor
2. Little evidence for the "edge" of an education school preparation for teaching
3. The "Rodney Dangerfield" phenomenon and the failure to take the problem seriously
4. Our own disbelief and the critical turn
5. Our tendency toward undisciplined advocacy
6. Mission drift

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Clarifying the question

What would be lost if research universities did not have schools of education?

Alternatively, what would be lost if we abandoned the idea of schools of education in research universities?

A logical and analytic question, not an empirical one . . .

. . . with an answer that is both analytic and normative.

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Resources for asking, refining, and answering the question

- Interview university presidents and deans
- Read critiques of schools of education
- 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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What are compelling reasons for research universities 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 (ed schools) have to learn or do, and how would we have to change?

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What do some university presidents and leaders think about the raisons d'être for ed schools?

- To train teachers
- To translate and put to use breakthroughs in cognitive science research
- To help improve undergraduate education
- To model excellent teaching and innovations in instructional practice at the university level
- To help conduct evaluations of innovations in the university

What is missing?

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What is missing?

Disciplined research and specialized expertise in education

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Research universities

- Mission to produce disciplined knowledge
- Orientation to disciplined inquiry, creation and design, and innovation that trump common sense and power
- Imperative to use the resources of the academy for the public good, and to solve societal and human problems, and to celebrate and develop human culture

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So what is the unique mission of the school of education at a research university?

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Why should research universities have schools of education?

As the core home for specialized expertise in education in order to:

- Conduct work on educational problems, develop educational theory, using that expertise
- Train people with specialized expertise in education

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But the core mission of ed schools is being outsourced

- Research on education is increasingly being done by scholars in other disciplines
- Teacher preparation is increasingly being conducted by other organizations

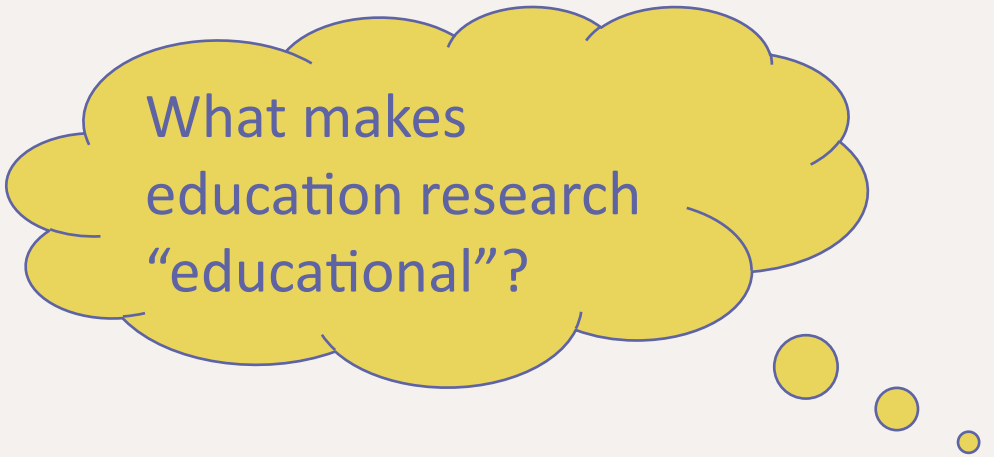
Missing?

Specialized expertise in education; consequences for the work

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The "E" in education research

- Asks questions that are central to *education*
- Draws on a special kind of expertise



Big "O" versus big "B" : What is organizational about organizational behavior?" Heath & Sitkin (2001)

Ball & Forzani (2008), *Educational Researcher*

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What is "specialized" expertise in education?

a) Knowledge inside the transactions involved in "education": the phenomena and problems of education

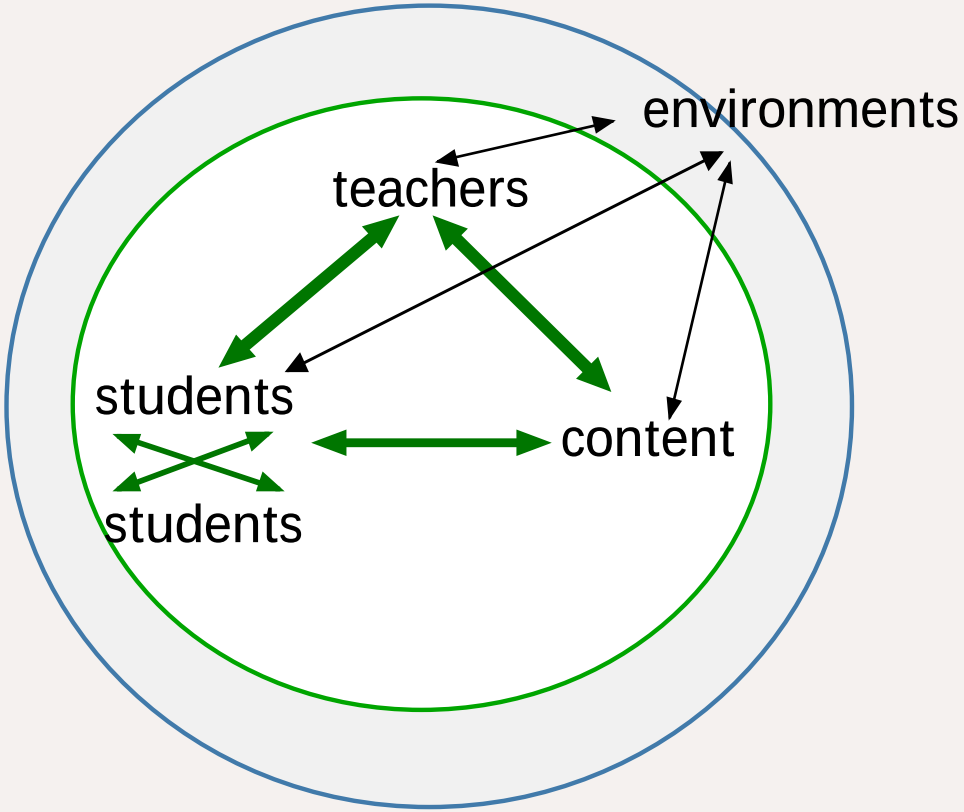
b) An educational orientation to the fundamental questions posed

c) Methods for asking and answering questions that are well-suited for (a) and (b)

d) Using and coordinating other disciplines to approach educational questions

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Asking educational questions about educational problems



- 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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Developing methods

- Disciplined work in education requires rigor that fits the nature of the question and the goal
  - Design
  - Data collection or sources
  - Analytic methods

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Coordinating the "inter" in interdisciplinary work in education

- The core problems are inherently ones for which multiple disciplinary perspectives, tools, and methods are needed.
- Using the disciplines to work on fundamental problems inside education requires coordination with a focus on the core.
- Not democratic, but purposeful

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Four contemporary problems in education: An opportunity for ed schools

1. Persistent educational inequality: lack of adequate knowledge about instruction, interventions, policies
2. The growing importance of access to higher education and the rising demand for quality and accountability (research, evaluation, and *teaching*)
3. Universities' need to engage in "outreach"
4. Weak effects of teacher education: what is our special role?

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Our special mandate with respect to 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
- No one currently has a real edge on reliable preparation of teachers or on the continuing professional development and increasing skill of teachers.

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Ed schools as laboratories for teacher education

- Building a reliable system of training ordinary people to teach effectively
  - An R&D agenda
  - Developing, testing, and studying the professional curriculum: specialized content preparation and practices of teaching, professionally-oriented foundations (e.g., ethical obligations of the role), approaches to teaching for teaching, use of settings for practice
  - Conceptualizing and developing research designs and methods for tracing effects of professional training

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The real issue

- This is not an argument about alternative routes. It is about what we can contribute in a context that reasonably has multiple providers.
- Who provides teacher education should not be our battle.
- Building the quality and effectiveness of teacher education, whoever provides it, is uniquely our responsibility.

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What could be lost if research universities did not have (good) schools of education?

What would it take for ed schools to live up to this promise?

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What would be much more difficult to make happen?

1. **Education research**: No home for research that is quintessentially inside educational problems and phenomena
2. **Education expertise**: No way of hiring or preparing people with expertise in education
3. **Professional education in education**: No laboratory for developing methods for the training the nation's largest occupational group, and evaluating the effects of training
4. **The university's own mission as a public agent of education**: Lack of on-site expertise for studying and solving crucial problems of the university, uneven ability to show contributions to K-12 education

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

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

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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1. Focus on specialized expertise in education

- Attend to the core problem spaces that we have unique expertise to probe
- Frame problems from an educational perspective
- Bring educational expertise to bear on questions of measurement and design
- Use tools and ideas from other disciplines in educationally-tailored ways

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Specialized knowledge is not an apology for "real" knowledge

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2. Cultivate and apply specialized expertise in education

- House people with knowledge inside education
- 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 in education or that profit from educational perspectives and tools
- Help the university meet its responsibilities to the public good
- Advocate with specialized insight and discipline

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

1. Grow the capacity to focus research on problems that are central to education
2. Embrace a core mission; avoid "mission drift" and avoid outsourcing our core mission
3. Consider carefully who the faculty and students are and what expertise is needed to center work in education
4. Value and reward work that focuses (in different ways) on practice
5. Communicate more clearly and persuasively about what is at the core, what expertise in education is required
6. 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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Enfin . . .

1. That we inhabit an enterprise that IS about education is both our challenge and our opportunity.
2. Doing teacher preparation is not a sufficient warrant for schools of education in research universities, but to fulfill their unique mission, ed schools must include the training of teachers.
3. Embracing our core mission would allow the development of our special expertise.
4. Ed schools will have to change to embrace our core mission.

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