

# Foreword

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Two rounds of editing educational journals, each for a year, precipitated a lifelong decision: never more! Those of you with similar experiences will know the reason: It is demanding, underappreciated work and involves a never-ending stream of articles to read, tough decisions to make, friends who do not write well to disappoint, deadlines to meet, and more. Rewards notwithstanding, one gives up a great deal. Responsibility increases when the publication is backed by a large professional organization. Such is the case with the *Journal of Teacher Education (JTE)*.

Marilyn Cochran-Smith did not need the brownie points on her academic record that come with the work. She was already a full professor, internationally known for her research and writing, especially in the field of teacher education. She was well aware of the downside in taking on the editing role, warts and all. Unlike my shortsightedness, however, she looked beyond to the opportunity it offered. With years of thought-filled experience behind her, she now possessed a rich ecology of educational belief. Why not test and refine it even more in the challenging tasks of shaping her learnings for a wide and often critical audience? Isn't learning from experience what life is all about?

Even though in my brief editorial experience, I walked the halls where John Dewey walked decades before me, I failed to see the learning opportunities beyond the routines that confronted me. My only excuse is that it was early in my academic career, and the buzzing in my mind had not yet begun to settle down into patterns that would shape and reshape later on. What bully pulpits those two journals of the University of Chicago had offered me!

## x POLICY, PRACTICE, AND POLITICS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

I thought my main writing task of the editorial responsibility was to briefly introduce the articles to follow in the issue. But why provide an abstract with, perhaps, a fifty-fifty chance of turning the potential reader off or on? When Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*, writes a piece, it almost invariably provides a larger context that may or may not refer to a specific article. One soon gets to know what the magazine stands for and increasingly is able to judge how well its contents serve its mission.

And so it is with all good editors. And so it is with Cochran-Smith in her editorial service to the *Journal of Teacher Education*. She almost invariably provides a context, historical or contemporary or both, for the themes of each issue, sometimes referring to specific articles, sometimes not. What she does so artfully is introduce the reader to her own perspective on the larger context she sees to be relevant to the current issue of the journal.

At times, in editing, the larger context overrides attention to articles in the magazine, as it should. Katrina vanden Heuvel did not hesitate in the September 19, 2005, issue of *The Nation* to express her disgust over a prominent pundit's repeated reference to one of our nation's worst natural disasters as the work of Hurricane Katrina vanden Heuvel.

The invitation to write a foreword to a book composed of editorials of the *JTE* written by Cochran-Smith from May/June 2000 to January/February 2006 came to me when I was primarily involved each day in climbing out of a life-threatening illness. I did not need a writing responsibility, particularly one that necessitated an early deadline. However, I had read about half of Cochran-Smith's editorials over these years and had been very impressed. Each of the pieces I had read had implications for a much larger educational domain and audience than teacher education and teacher educators. Her writings were just as relevant to teachers, policymakers, school board members, and anyone who cares about our schools and their public purpose. Putting them into a book for wider circulation than characterizes a specialized professional journal simply made sense. I was pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to it.

In my own research and experience, I have become acutely aware of the general absence of well-chosen books on educational matters in the libraries of both secondary and elementary schools. Dialogue, enriched by reading, about highly relevant educational problems and issues is a rare phenomenon. I concluded my reveries

about these circumstances with the conclusion that a book of Cochran-Smith's thoughtful editorials deserves attention both within and beyond the professional teacher education community.

I do not know what percentage of readers skip the editorials in the journals and magazines they read. My record is mixed. When I am purposeless, seated, and alone, I reach for something relatively short to read and often settle on a piece because of its title or because the name of the author is familiar to me and I enjoy his or her stuff. Cochran-Smith must be aware that many of us have such habits and probably never get back to anything in a magazine or journal other than what catches our attention during those brief respites.

She gave each of her editorials a title. Try these on for their magnetism: "The Questions That Drive Reform"; "Desperately Seeking Solutions"; "Teacher Education, Ideology, and Napoleon"; "The Unforgiving Complexity of Teaching"; "Sometimes It's *Not* About the Money: Teaching and Heart"; "Stayers, Leavers, Lovers, and Dreamers: Insights About Teacher Retention"; "No Child Left Behind: 3 Years and Counting"; "Teacher Education and the Outcomes Trap." Further, she gets into her topic quickly. Consider these opening sentences: "Teacher education is under attack"; "For a number of years, some of us involved in teacher education have been writing about the importance of learning to teach for social justice, social change, and social responsibility"; "Some policy and political analysts assume that ambiguity, conflict, and competing goals are inherent in human societies"; "In an essay on medical practice, Vivian Wang (2000) questioned what she called the 'fallacy of neutral universalism'; "Three years ago, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law."

After pulling us into the narrative, she follows with a few paragraphs that provide a context for what follows. And then she never allows herself to deviate from the central theme of the editorial, employing throughout straightforward, nonacademic language. In my reading, including writing of my own once in print, I encounter sentences I would like to rewrite for greater clarity. I moved along quickly with Cochran-Smith's without encountering any such temptation. There will be readers who will disagree from time to time with Cochran-Smith's take on some issues, but surely they will have admiration for the work of a professional at the top of her form.

Cochran-Smith refers several times to her quarter-century of inquiry into the teacher education enterprise and lessons learned from it. Reading her editorials sequentially revealed to me a

strengthening in the major themes of her ecology of educational belief even over the short span of a half dozen years. I have selected four that resonated significantly with me. I chose these because they run through the editorials as organizing threads or elements that hold them together. As a result, this book is not just a collection of miscellaneous articles. The themes I have chosen provide the cohesion a book requires. The careful reader might well draw out a different list. I make no effort to prioritize mine because each is significant for anyone who cares deeply about the role of education and schooling in our social and political democracy.

### THE IDEOLOGY TRAP

Among the annoyances that probably bump around in Cochran-Smith's mental space, I suspect that one heading her list might well be called "the ideology trap." She does not attempt to disguise her dislike of advocates of a given persuasion criticizing the persuasion of another individual or group as ideological and lacking evidence. She strongly points out that each of us has at any given time a repertoire of beliefs, some well-supported by evidence and some not. Pushed into argument, we cite such evidence as we can muster. Each of us is entitled to our opinions, but entitlement is not validity. What she insists on—and this perspective emerges frequently—is that both the arguments put forward and the decisions ultimately taken be backed by solid inquiry. One might well wish that this were more often the case.

I have heard it said that Cochran-Smith uses the bully pulpit of editor to advance her own ideology. Of course. What should we expect? A bland citing of the research, pro or con, regarding each issue addressed, leaving it to the reader to choose? No thanks. She has beliefs developed over years of experience, study, and disciplined inquiry that lend authenticity to the positions she takes. I do not expect her to recite a step-by-step litany of how she came to believe what she believes.

The field of education is not characterized by public acknowledgment of credentials such as specialized preparation, certification, and experience. The public is not well versed in educational matters, in spite of its interest and of nearly everyone having attended school for several years. Rarely do general education programs in colleges offer courses on the nation's educational system and the ubiquitous educating that surrounds us night and day. It is little wonder that Cochran-Smith

chides educators for their limited engagement in determining the mission and conduct of this system. And it is shocking that, in recent years, those educators most respected by their colleagues for their inquiry and ideas have rarely been invited to the nation's educational summits. Perhaps a change in the word—from ideology to “ideaology”—would both necessitate bringing expertise to the table and substantially improve the quality of outcomes from these periodic rituals.

## **THE PUBLIC PURPOSE OF SCHOOLING**

Early on, Cochran-Smith stays close to the issues of teacher education carried from the 20th century to the 21st: an enterprise under sharp attack, implications of the increasing privatization of education, the standards movement in schooling now moving to include teacher education, the “evidence” question pertaining to the impact of teachers' preparation on students' learning, alternative routes to teaching, politically motivated solutions to complex educational problems, and more. In her first piece, she chides educators for not doing more to “shape the debate and chart the course of policy in teacher education”—a theme that reoccurs.

Initially, her growing concern for the role of schooling and teacher education in sustaining the American democracy merely sneaks into the narrative from time to time. But references to the public purpose of schooling and the increasing dominance of private purpose appear more frequently and more passionately over time. In a concluding editorial, she charges the teacher education community “to help change the terms of the debate about the purpose of schooling (and teacher education) in society. Surely the major purpose is not to produce pupils who can pass tests. . . . The purpose of education needs to be understood as preparing students to engage in satisfying work, function as lifelong learners who can cope with the challenges of a rapidly changing global society, recognize inequities in their everyday contexts, and join with others to challenge them.” This is, of course, a moral purpose.

## **WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO**

What increasingly becomes clear as one reads the editorials is that what Cochran-Smith perceives to be the purpose of schooling in a

democratic society shapes her views on virtually every aspect, every debate, every issue of the teacher education enterprise. It particularly shapes her views of the human beings to whom education of the young in schools is to be entrusted. She addresses this theme obliquely in several editorials but comes firmly to grips with it in "Studying Teacher Education: What We Know and Need to Know."

The articles and books I find to be most satisfying, whether fiction or nonfiction, are those that send me outside the pages, to that ecology of belief I have referred to several times in the preceding pages. How does what is written merge into this ecosystem or does it? What resonated strongly with me in the last editorial is the way in which the perceived purposes of schooling define the work, character, and education required of the teacher.

Earlier on in this foreword to what follows in her book, I wrote that Cochran-Smith's conception of the role of schooling and teacher education in our democratic society "sneaks into the narrative from time to time" as she proceeds through the years of her editorial responsibilities. But in the last two editorials, the pieces fell clearly and firmly into place for me.

For as long as I can remember, I have been well aware that teachers should be prepared, at a minimum, for delivering what we expect our schools to do. But when there is very little discourse about what our schools are for, the domain of possibilities widens, inviting an array of answers to the question of what teachers should know and be able to do. There follow from these answers alternative routes of teacher preparation. Then, should the question of school purpose be raised, the answers frequently are derived from prescribed means instead of the ends. Today, when the purpose mandated for schools is high pupil performance on tests, what teacher education programs must do is prepare future teachers to teach their students to do well on tests.

The common search for scientific evidence in support of good teacher education programs is to find out first what educational experiences contributed to students' high test scores and, of course, what educational experiences provided in teacher preparation programs contributed to the success of the teachers. The work of gaining the sought-for scientific evidence gets a little complicated, doesn't it? But I have not closed the circle yet. There remains the question of what educational experiences contributed to the success of the teacher educators who prepared the teachers whose students did well on tests.

As Cochran-Smith points out, the absence of scientific evidence from educational research to verify effective teacher education programs “seems to suggest that as a profession, teacher education is in sorry shape. . . . But closer analysis reveals that compared with the preparation of professionals in other fields, teacher preparation may actually be at the forefront.” Nonetheless, this lack of “scientific” evidence fuels the drive of critics who would abolish schools of education and, indeed, the so-called professional route that, for decades, has been the major path to teaching in the nation’s schools. I urge the reader to read very carefully Cochran-Smith’s final editorials where she makes very clear why she sees “the outcomes question” as a trap for both teachers and teacher educators, placing on them and them alone accountability in the drive for high test scores.

## **EDUCATORS AND THE PUBLIC**

Implicit in Cochran-Smith’s writing is a belief that is, for her, a basic assumption about teachers and teacher educators that flows directly from her beliefs about the public democratic purposes of schooling: Educators must be among our best-educated citizens. It is my agreement with these beliefs and this opportunity to advance them that significantly influenced my decision to write this foreword to a book that should be widely read.

I am in complete agreement also with her advocacy of educators taking a much more active role in what has been described as the struggle for the soul of the American public school. Some are so reluctant to take a public stand on the fundamental issues of educational policy and practice that they nullify their rights under the First Amendment. The public discourse about education and schooling is diminished when well-educated citizens choose not to be involved. When educators are mute, experience and knowledge relevant to the conversation is missing.

Earlier, I stated that public discourse about education and schooling is not well informed. It is highly disturbing to read that 50 % or fewer of those polled know little or nothing about the No Child Left Behind Act, even though it was passed into law in 2001 and directly affects the substance and conduct of children’s schooling. Even many much-schooled parents are unaware that satisfactory

performance of their children on standardized tests has little to do with becoming well educated. The correlation between test performance and the use of principles and concepts presumably learned in the classroom and their transfer to situations outside of school for which these presumed learnings are relevant is very low. And there is virtually no correlation between test scores and attributes such as honesty, dependability, courage, compassion, respect for others, and other human traits we value.

Polls and studies conducted over the past couple of decades reveal a very broad set of public expectations for schooling. The late Ernest Boyer in his inquiry into secondary schools and that of colleagues and me into both elementary and secondary schools concluded that most people “want it all” from our schools: personal, social, vocational, and academic development. Why is it, then, that the general public is not outraged by a federal mandate that has resulted in a narrowing to just a few subjects what is important in the curriculum? If the test scores do not predict the use out of school of what is judged to be learned in these subjects in school, what predictions might we make about their learnings in the other domains of public expectations?

If high academic achievement in a few subjects considered basic is to be the purpose of schooling, we do not need the apparatus for its conduct we now have: buildings, buses, administrators, teachers, support staff, school boards, and all the rest. Let the economic purpose take over, as it largely has now. The manufacturers of computers and the necessary software will put all of our children and youth on the Internet, day or night or both. The god of economic utility smiles.

This is not to say that we, the people, would be relieved of the taxes we now pay for the schooling of the young. Day care is not the purpose of schooling, but it certainly is a major function—perhaps THE major function. If the home is to be the classroom, the implications for parents in the workplace are enormous. If students are also to attend places of tutoring outside of homes, there arises a need for dependable transportation and a large security force to ensure children’s safety. And who is to attend to the physical and artistic needs and interests of the young? How will the ability to get along with others, to function productively in teams, and to develop respect for people of different colors, faiths, and beliefs be fostered? Indeed, what provisions are we to make for inducting our young people into the work in progress we call democracy?



By George, it appears that we need schools. Just this little, rather simplistic analysis causes one to think that universal public schooling is probably the best invention ever tried. The trouble is that we seem to have forgotten what our schools were initially created for and how these expectations expanded as more and more diverse groups of people strained the principle, *e pluribus unum*. The caring for and renewing of our democracy is a delicate, demanding undertaking. No other institution embraces the young as our schools do. No other institution has the ability or holds the promise of educating the young to make the most of themselves, earn a good living, and be responsible citizens. Clearly, we presently are heading down paths that, if followed for much longer, will cripple our schools in the functions we should expect them to perform and endanger the well-being of our democracy.

The late educational historian Lawrence Cremin asked himself the question of what we should do when confronted with problems for which there appear to be no clear answers. He wrote: We talk. Of late, we have not talked much about the directions of our schools and democracy. Just a few decades ago, there were coffee klatches, book clubs, issue-oriented town hall and school board meetings nationwide in which books such as *Why Johnny Can't Read* were intensely discussed. Some exist today, but they are scattered thinly across the country. The educational debate has largely left local communities and, such as it is, gone to state capitals and Washington, D.C. It must be brought back. Perhaps participation in the educational conversation is what Cochran-Smith had in mind for teacher educators—and, I trust, for teachers, principals, and superintendents—when she urged them to get involved. If this is what some are reluctant to do in their roles as educators, I remind them again of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

There are those who will disagree with me strongly regarding my position on the comprehensive role I perceive for schools. “Put the kids on the Internet. We don’t need schools,” they will say. My position will be rejected as ideological, and so it is if this is just another word for belief. My critics will endeavor to provide hard evidence for their position, which is, of course, ideological. To repeat, I prefer to add an “a” before the first “o” in that word. My position grows out of beliefs currently embedded in my ecology of mind. My evidence would be regarded by critics as soft. It is historical and philosophical and has to do with what it means to be human and part of the fabric that holds us together in a democratic society. I have

stated my position comprehensively elsewhere. If I were asked to provide an abstract of at least the part that refers to democracy, I would borrow the following from my longtime friend and colleague, the late Kenneth Sirotnik:

America is a collection of multiple communities defined by different interests, races, ethnicities, regions, economic stratifications, religions, and so forth. Celebrating these differences is part of what makes this nation great. But there is a community—a moral community—that transcends the special interests of individuals, families, groups, that stands for what this nation is all about: liberty *and justice* for all. . . . It is a “moral ecology” held together by a political democracy and the fundamental values embedded in the system. . . . What could be more central to education generally and public schooling particularly than moral commitments to inquiry, knowledge, competence, caring, and social justice? (*The Moral Dimensions of Teaching*, edited by John I. Goodlad, Roger Soder, and Kenneth A. Sirotnik, 1990, pp. 307–308)

The public conversation about teacher educators and the teachers they help prepare goes beyond the subject matter and pedagogy of the prescribed academic curriculum. It must also be about the larger context in which we live. The metaphor coming to mind is that of introducing the young to the human conversation, especially the attributes we all must possess if democracy is to be more than an abstraction. Our schools must be places of equity, justice, and respect for one another. For this goal to be attained, the conduct of teacher education must be characterized by equity, justice, and respect for one another. These high expectations will be met only if we are able to agree as a nation on the democratic public purpose of our schools. May the conversation ensue and thrive in all of our communities.