
THE OHIO TRANSFER ARTICULATION GUIDE: AN ETHICS CASE STUDY FOR SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION FACULTY

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In the fall of 2004, an associate dean at my university called me to a meeting to explain the concept of a Transfer Articulation Guide, or TAG. A TAG is a transfer module or set of courses approved by the Ohio Board of Regents providing a standard set of general education courses (such as English Composition, mathematics, arts/humanities, social and behavior sciences, and so on) in selected academic disciplines. TAG modules provide guaranteed paths of transfer between two year and four year institutions of higher education and have been around at least a decade in Ohio. Transfer Articulation has of late been introduced in education schools, “a response to the legislative mandates...as well as the recommendations for the Governor’s Commission on Teaching Success as legislated by Ohio senate Bill 2.”¹ In 2004, the Ohio TAG for Education set forth the Professional Education Module to “serve as the foundation for preparation into all licensure areas for teachers”(1). Reviewed and endorsed by “a faculty panel of more than 30 members” as well as the State University Education Deans council, the Education TAG is a set of four teacher education courses: Introduction to Education, Educational Psychology, Introduction to Exceptionalities, and Educational Technology (1). It is the Introduction to Education class that the associate dean called me in to discuss that fall day.

Shifting a bit uncomfortably in his seat, the associate dean informed me that our Division must, to comply with the new TAG requirements, designate one of our core, required courses to be “Introduction to Education”. Our lone required undergraduate Socio-Cultural Foundations of Education course (EDL 204) was the likely choice in the minds of many on the Deans’ staff.

There are six prescribed themes of Introduction to Education course as outlined in the Education TAG:

1. Standards-based Education: Introduction to the national and state professional standards (including INTASC, PRAXIS III, SPA’s, NCATE/TEAC, and state academic content standards) which guide the practice of educators in today’s society.
2. Professionalization: Exploration of the process by which people are socialized into and are rewarded in the field of education and the roles of institutions in determining what it means to be a professional educator, or a member of the teaching profession.
3. Diversity: Exploration of the various components of diversity, including an awareness of multiple categories that teachers need to

recognize and respond to in their teaching, how these influence teacher expectations and student achievement and how diversity is related to a dynamic global society.

4. Democratic Issues/Social Justice: Exploration of the purposes of education historically and currently for individuals, groups and society.

5. Curriculum and Instruction: Exploration of a variety of theories of curriculum and instruction.

6. Legal and Organizational Issues: Exploration of the legal and organizational context within which schools and teachers operate.

The Deans' office was recommending that EDL 204 should be designated as the Introduction to Education course at my university. This recommendation seemed more for practical rather than pedagogical purposes. EDL 204 is the only 200-level course required across the division that is even remotely related to the content prescribed in Introduction to Education, but it is not designed as an "Introduction to Education" class. Unlike some foundations courses that have already gone the path of the Introduction to Education curriculum, 204 still relies on the critical, interpretive, and normative dimensions of educational inquiry found in the traditional foundations fields of philosophy and history. We have invigorated the critical dimensions of traditional foundations study with an infusion of cultural studies approaches to textual and cultural analysis. The themes of our course include: (1) Culture and schooling: exploring how cultural contexts and schools interrelate; (2) Philosophies of education; (3) Purposes of schooling: examining historical texts and debates (4) Social categories and schooling: exploring notions of difference; and (5) Differentiated education: bi-lingual education, de- and re-segregation, and religious education are explored as educational topics. The Introduction to Education course guide, with its use of terms such as "democracy," "social justice," and the ever-popular "diversity," is enough like a Foundations course in description to warrant my seans' conclusion that EDL 204 should be our "Introduction to Education" course. EDL 204 was designated as such because of these facile resemblances and because of its central place as a core requirement across the division, thus side-stepping the unhappy task of trying to add yet another required course to an already-overcrowded undergraduate Teacher Education major.

As I read the list of themes for Introduction to Education, I wondered how much I was being asked to surrender. Were we being asked to take these themes and design a new syllabus for EDL 204? In word, yes. The guidelines provided with the TAG module requirements state, "Teacher education programs will need to identify the appropriate course that matches the learning objectives for each of the courses in the Professional Education Module. Some campuses may need to tweak program curriculum in order to accommodate the

transfer and articulation of these courses” (4). Further, the guidelines state that all the learning objectives outlined in the Professional Education Module should “be considered essential,” and that these objectives should “comprise at least 70% of each course.” Thus, according to my employer, the State of Ohio, the TAG provided the learning objectives that must shape my course, a course that is only partially aligned with my disciplinary field of study.

I face a dilemma as I decide how to respond to these events. The learning objectives, as they are framed in Introduction to Education, are potentially radically different from my department’s current approach to the Socio-Cultural Foundations of Education. Should I change our course to fit the objectives? What are my options? My obligations? And to whom am I obligated? This essay is a case study based on actual events, and my analysis is centered on (1) understanding the socio-cultural contexts of this problem and (2) crafting a solution supported by sound reasoning and integrity.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

There are at least three major factors influencing the Education TAG. First, the status of Social Foundations as a field of study and of education schools in the University as a whole are each revealed in this latest attempt to “reform” teacher education. Second, the growing rise of consumerism in education strongly colors this push to standardize teacher education and reduce it to a series of courses that eventually credential a person as teacher.² Third, and perhaps most relevant to philosophers of education, the theory-practice dualism upon which we have arguably achieved any status that we might enjoy in schools of education grounds this turn of events and shapes current thinking on how teachers should be prepared at the university level.

My first response to the Education TAG and its threat to our socio-cultural foundations curriculum was to bemoan the ever-diminishing status of my field within schools of education and by education policy-makers. Foundations study moved rather quickly from the center to the margins of Education Schools over the course of the roughly century-old history of teacher education in university settings, and its status has been in long been viewed as precarious in teacher education programs. Virtually no one writing about our field in the last two decades has failed to document this fact. In 1990, Kathryn Borman wrote, “The place of the foundations of education in teacher education has never been as important or as uncertain as it is today.”³ This was the same year that Kenneth Sirotnik published, “On the Eroding Foundations of Teacher Education,” describing his study of foundations courses at United States universities. Sirotnik and colleagues learned through extensive surveys and interviews that foundations courses were usually viewed least favorably by students in teacher education programs and were perceived to have little value for them as future teachers.⁴ Some fifteen years later, questions like this one posed by Steve Tozer and Debra Miretzky remain commonplace:

How do social foundations teachers represent to themselves and others the distinctive contribution their field can make to the professional preparation and development of teachers and school leaders in an era that appears inhospitable to foundations coursework in the professional curriculum?⁵

My initial responses to the Education TAG and its impact on my field of teaching and research shared these impulses: how can I demonstrate to those in power my field's vital contributions to the project of preparing teachers? This query was joined with a set of political questions: who came up with these transfer guides and educational modules? Who were these education officials, legislators, and faculty members who convened to make these decisions? Why was I hearing about this after it had already been translated into law?

The discourses of social foundations professional networks construct identities of marginalization and martyrdom regarding our status in Education Schools, but we too easily forget that the education school is itself “the sad sack of American higher education.”⁶ This status makes us more vulnerable than most areas of the University for state regulation and micro-management of our curriculum, particularly given the progressive bent of many education school faculty and the conservative politics now dominating places like Ohio. A myriad of reports over the last decade have castigated education schools, and the criticisms come mostly but by no means solely from conservative political groups. There are many reasons for Education's lowly status, based in history and our feminized, working class roots as a profession. While our status is low compared to other higher education content areas, our security is relatively safer than those academic pursuits that are less practical than those of professional schools. But our secure position is not to be confused with high status, and this status problem invites the kinds of interference and bureaucratic control that the Education TAG represents. David Labaree, an insider to education schools, no doubt speaks for other insiders when admitting that our status problem is partially earned. “Instructionally, ed schools too often provide an academically thin and professionally ineffective form of preparation for teachers, which is not adequate to the urgent needs of American education. And intellectually, they too often provide a form of knowledge production that is neither scholarly nor useful.”⁷

If education schools are not always sources of insightful scholarship or useful teaching, we do at least provide something that everyone seems to need: credentials. If higher education and education in general is largely a process of social mobility, then the name of the game is getting the credentials you need in order to “compete effectively for desirable social positions.”⁸ In the case of the Education TAG, the State of Ohio is in collusion with this social mobility goal and consumer attitude towards education. To address the goal of providing greater access to four-year higher education degrees, education officials have

agreed to standardize the product of education by setting out common teaching and learning objectives for faculty. The pressures to supply more teachers for public schools, and growing consumerism expressed by constituents who see the higher education credential growing further and further beyond the reach of ordinary Americans, seem to justify political decisions to streamline and control the teacher education curriculum.

The third important contextual factor influencing the Education TAG in Ohio is that of the theory-practice problem in Western conceptions of knowledge in general and as this problem shapes higher education in particular. Because education schools have always been associated with the practical application of knowledge, they have received low status and marginal power within universities and from state legislators. But the theory-practice divide affects many fields within the academy, as the spiraling costs of higher education and the dwindling budgets of state governments caused by neo-liberal economic policies cause many to question the practical benefits of an expensive higher education system. As theoretical construction and deconstruction become harder to justify as a “pure” intellectual enterprise to the practically-minded and anti-intellectual American public, the “practical” side of an education school becomes more and more attractive to those politicians who shape the teacher education curriculum. Thus, the more “theoretical” aspects of teacher education programs (such as philosophy and history of education, among others) become less and less valued, because their connection with practice is, or is perceived to be, tenuous.

As we assess the context of the Ohio Education TAG, it almost seems, in hindsight, inevitable. It represents a further weakening of the foundations as a vital contributor to the education of reflective practitioners in schools; it represents a consumer mentality of education as credentialing; it plays into the theory-practice divide by upholding the practical above the theoretical in terms of how it describes the Introduction to Education class, a class featuring prominent themes of professionalization and standards. While making sense of these influencing factors helps me understand the Education TAG as a policy document, they do not necessarily suggest one clear path of response. They reveal the complexity of factors that construct the Education TAG and the political-economy of higher education that it represents. A further examination of my options is necessary.

CRAFTING A RESPONSE

It is tempting and justifiable to simply duck. This response would entail a tacit acceptance of our status as “Introduction to Education” in the eyes of the state for transfer purposes, but would involve no alteration of our course. A form of passive resistance, this response aligns with Tozer and Miretzky’s characterization of the “this too shall pass” mentality that some Foundations professors will take towards the professional standards movement.⁹ In

purposefully ignoring the Education TAG in Ohio, Tozer and Miretzky suggest I would become even more marginalized in the short run, as the professional standards movement runs its course. But these authors suggest that this movement may be with us for a long time as perhaps even a permanent change in teacher preparation, and therefore believe that the “this too shall pass” form of passive resistance is not a tenable political or practice response to the Education TAG.

From the point of view of academic freedom, the action of ignoring and thus passively resisting this requirement is justifiable. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) discusses two moral principles that should guide faculty work: “that colleges and universities serve the common good through learning, teaching, research, and scholarship; and that the fulfillment of these functions necessarily rests upon the preservation of the intellectual freedoms of teaching, expression, research, and debate.”¹⁰

According to these guiding principles, I am fully within my rights in ignoring the Education TAG’s claims on my course content. The academic content of the course at present reflects inquiry of social foundations and cultural studies scholars in education, and is therefore is fully justifiable by the AAUP principle of academic freedom.

But what of the obligation to serve “the common good” through our scholarship and teaching, as the first principle of the AAUP statement describes? Does this responsibility require me to follow the state’s mandates to transform my course, since the state should be a representative voice in shaping the common good? Given the history of the AAUP’s fights to uphold academic freedom against such government-sponsored foes as Joseph McCarthy, there is no reason to believe that my responsibilities are solely or simply to the governing bodies of the state of Ohio. However, I do have responsibilities to the publics I serve, and I can name several publics that have a stake in this decision: the voters and citizens who care about affordable education and an adequate supply of good teachers for their schools; the future teachers that are enrolled in EDL 204; and the students of these future teachers.

My obligation to the citizens of the state in terms of access to higher education are in certain ways fulfilled by simply agreeing for EDL 204 to become Introduction to Education for transfer purposes. Since the Education TAG is primarily aimed at making education a more easily transferable commodity between two- and four-year higher education institutions, simply agreeing to designate my course as the Introduction to Education transfer course will enable these transfers without changing the course content, thus in theory allowing more teacher candidates to move through the full credentialing systems of colleges and universities. If the conceptions of education held by these publics are indeed mostly consumerist, then altering my syllabus to reflect the state’s desired content is unnecessary for the public’s interests to be

met. In fact, such a solution could be justified in the name of my obligations to future teachers who will take the course, since they might greatly benefit from the critical, interpretive, and normative inquiry into the socio-cultural study of education. I can as yet see no convincing evidence that I am obligated by my responsibility to the state nor to future teachers (and their students) to fulfill the specific curricular content requirements of the Education TAG.

But that brings us back to the “this too shall pass” response, one that entails passive resistance and a dogged, Sisyphus-like approach to our field’s scholarship and teaching. We keep pushing foundations up the hill and keep crying when it rolls all the way back down, unappreciated and unloved. Meanwhile, the teacher education field keeps on rolling, and even though we may bemoan its direction and discourses, it seems that it is part of our martyred social foundations identity to keep pushing our rock. We seem to have a professional identity that is based in part on this combination of determined, relentless, undervalued critic. Given our seemingly perpetual state of marginalization in the education school hierarchy and in the halls of state education offices, there is reason to think that we might benefit from shifting some of our thinking about our relationship to teacher education.

My response to the Education TAG can take the shape of integration, weak or strong. A weak integration would consist of focusing the critical inquiry of social foundations onto the issues and themes demanded by the state’s Introduction to Education course. We could use the foundations to help students critique the discourses of professionalization, standards, and diversity that represent teacher education in the state of Ohio. This response would be a weaker form of resistance than the “this too shall pass” mentality but would at least respond to the contemporary teacher education discourses. Such a weakly integrative response would maintain my obligations to future teachers and students in so far as this curriculum may help them become more critically conscious educators working in contemporary frameworks of standards and standardization. The danger of this response is that it “underestimates the substantial support among political leaders at the state level, within both national teachers unions, among influential teacher educators, and in the business community.” In addition, this stance “underestimates the power of the current movement to genuinely inform and change teacher practice to meet the needs of children.” Tozer and Miretzky advocate a third response, what they call “critique in service of improving the model,” sustaining an “effective critique of the standards movement that will prove compelling to nonfoundations scholars—and to suggest ways that the standards model can be improved in theory and in practice.”¹¹

These scholars encourage us to integrate while still maintaining our foundations principles, identity, and distinct disciplinary contributions—a proposal that is paradoxically radical. Social foundations professors have long positioned themselves as marginalized defenders of democracy and the

democratization of schools, and integrating with any official, state-run system of educational change runs against the grain of our knowledge-base and identity as a field. Many of us will feel tempted to resist the calls to integrate for these reasons, as I felt a knee-jerk reaction to work against the Education TAG and all that it represents. While I wish to hold onto the skepticism embedded in this hesitancy to jump on board with every new education “reform” that comes down the highway, I refuse a skepticism based in cynicism, a product of perpetual martyrdom. A posture of relentless critique is a losing proposition, and it can backfire as a strategy to influence schooling, or as a permanent condition of teaching one’s disciplines, as the great literature on resistance in our field will demonstrate.¹² This is not to say critique is unimportant; indeed, it is a vital part of what we do as foundations scholars. But an identity based solely on critique is likely a good way to ensure the permanent irrelevance of your field to the world of real teachers and policy-makers. We must continually work on translating our field’s great democratic tradition into modes and models of work in schools and other educational sites.

If I am to be more than simply a critic of the teacher professionalization movement, it seems clear that I must engage the discourse of this movement. Teaching about teacher professionalism and standards movements from a foundations perspective would offer a rich opportunity for helping students become informed about the history of teaching as a profession and the history of curricular reform in this country. Integrating some of the main themes of the Education TAG would also tap into philosophical questions of aim and purpose of such movements, providing students with models and skills to critically appraise their field’s history and future.

Thus, I may have found some internal, principled reasons for integrating with the Education TAG, but agreeing to teach within the current teacher education paradigm does not itself make foundations relevant to today’s teachers or current practice. How can a “theoretical” field like foundations ever become a central part of what pre-service teachers must study and learn? There are two responses suggested here. The first—and unoriginal—response is to suggest that we already are relevant and we need to do more work in showing this to multiple publics. Our focus on democracy, equity, social justice, and diversity in both our teaching and scholarship means that our work will continue to be important in a pluralistic democracy with persistent problems in achieving equality of opportunity and achievement for all students.¹³ While the contributions to this normative project are clearly part of the special domain of the foundations, our field’s rigid ideological borders jeopardizes the potential contributions we can make to this project.¹⁴ While our legacy clearly is in the progressive tradition, we must take our questions about democracy, equality, and pluralism wherever they lead us. Infusing a healthy mix of ideological perspectives about education into both the foundations and education schools as a whole could contribute to better scholarship and enriched teaching through

invigorated debate and scholarly inquiry inside foundations and in education schools.

The second response to the question of how foundations is to become relevant to educational practice is to attack the question itself. What do we mean by relevancy? What do we mean when we argue that foundations is clearly on the “theory” side of the theory-practice tension in teacher education? Part of what we mean to imply has to do with status (higher status is accorded to theoretical ventures in the academy) and part of what we mean has to do with the theory-practice dualism that helps construct western notions of teaching and learning. Purposefully transgressing the theory-practice dualism and finding new languages to discuss education outside of that theory-practice discourse must become a greater part of our scholarship and teaching. For example, do enough foundations scholars bring the riches of foundations disciplines to bear on the analysis of contemporary school policies? Do we bring these analyses into interdisciplinary educational forums where our ideas can be exchanged with people from all parts of education schools and with K-16 practitioners? Do we engage in scholarship and teaching with colleagues across education schools in order to bring foundations inquiry into more applied fields and programs? These questions might be a starting point for engaging future practice in our field, for good philosophical analysis of the theory-practice divide in education might enable new thinking about how we educate future teachers and how we work with our colleagues outside of foundations. Moving “relevancy” beyond an instrumentalist meaning, moving “theory” beyond an academic abstraction, moving “practice” beyond a simplistic notion of merely doing clearly cries out for the kind of interdisciplinary, disciplined inquiry and teaching that foundations scholars can supply.

My obligation to my publics is to pursue intellectually powerful, educationally relevant teaching and scholarship. The state of Ohio does not define relevancy, but it does help to set and reflect some of the current terms of the debate. My teaching should help students understand these terms and develop a clearer understanding of the implications of these and other discourses of educational practice. Can I revise an EDL 204 class that takes up themes of standards, professionalization, diversity, and democracy in ways that maintain my obligations to a democratic society, my field’s traditions, and my own academic freedom? I believe this is possible.

A more serious challenge, however, is to our scholarship as a field. Can we as philosophers create vital intellectual work that is widely read by non-foundations scholars and K-16 practitioners, informing and shaping current directions in teacher education? Can we collaborate with colleagues in diverse fields across schools of education to bring philosophical, historical, or sociological thinking to bear on a wide variety of issues? Can we radically re-frame the tired theory-practice dualism in its many forms? I think we can do all

these things, but we must first re-construct our own identities as martyrs of democratic hope in schools of education.

NOTES

1. “Ohio Transfer Articulation Guide: Education,” November 23, 2004, 3. This work will be cited in the text for all subsequent references.
 2. Conversations with a colleague helped me to see this connection more clearly.
 3. Kathryn M. Borman, “Foundations of Education in Teacher Education,” *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education: A Project of the Association of Teacher Educators*, ed. W. Robert Houston (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1990), 393.
 4. Kenneth A. Sirotnik, “On the Eroding Foundations of Teacher Education,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 71 (9): 710–716.
 5. Steve Tozer and Debra Miretzky, “Social Foundations, Teaching Standards, and the Future of Teacher Preparation,” *Teaching Social Foundations of Education: Contexts, Theories, and Issues*, ed. Dan Butin (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 5.
 6. David F. Labaree, *The Trouble with Ed Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 175.
 7. Labaree, *The Trouble with Ed Schools*, 206.
 8. Labaree, *The Trouble with Ed Schools*, 186.
 9. Tozer and Miretzky, “Social Foundations,” 14.
 10. American Association of University Professors, “A Statement of the Association’s Council: Freedom and Responsibility,” (1990), <http://www.aaup.org/statements/Redbook/Freedom&Responsibility.pdf>.
 11. Tozer and Miretzky, “Social Foundations,” 17.
 12. As an example, see Dan Butin’s “Identity (Re)Construction and Student Resistance,” 109–126, Butin, ed., *Teaching Social Foundations*. That two out of ten chapters of a text on Foundations teaching relate to themes of student resistance to social foundations course work reveals something about our identity as a field and the focus of our work.
 13. Tozer and Miretzky make this argument, as does Dan Butin, “How Social Foundations Matters to Teacher Preparation: A Policy Brief,” *Educational Studies* (forthcoming): 214–229.
 14. See David Labaree, “The Ed School’s Romance with Progressivism,” in *The Trouble with Ed Schools*, 129–169.
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