

The Marginalization of Teacher Education: Who We Are, How We Got Here, How We Fit in the Big Picture, and What We Might Do about It

By Alan H. Jones

My purpose here is to share several thoughts with you. I will explore the concept of marginalization, and explain why I believe it applies very appropriately to the field of teacher education and our own organization. I will emphasize the importance of knowing our history, and ask why it is that history is not a more

central part of teacher education. To start things off, I will provide a brief history of the California Council on Teacher Education, which I will argue is a prime example of marginalization. With that notion in place, I will seek to show how our history mirrors many of the broader patterns of the history of American education, an equally appropriate portrayal of marginalization. In these ways, hopefully, what I have to say will illuminate who we are, how we got here, and how we fit, or don't fit, in the big picture. With those problematics in place, I will then share what I believe is a critical recognition of a central problem of our marginalization and what we must try to do about it.

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A History of CTE

The California Council on Teacher Education that you know today is an organization of some 600 regularly involved members and delegates, networking closely with perhaps 1,000 other teacher educators across the state who also occasionally attend our conferences, read our newsletters, and respond to our initiatives in the field. Our institutional and individual members include all of the campuses of the California State University and the University of California plus some forty private and independent colleges and universities, as well as several K-12 induction programs, research organizations, state agencies, and other professional organizations and associations. We sponsor two significant research journals, we operate with committees in such areas as policy, research, awards, membership, communications, and outreach, and we cooperate with several other organizations in sponsoring and holding our semi-annual conferences.

So how did all of this come to be? The California Council on Teacher Education began as the California Council on the Education of Teachers in 1945, almost 65 years ago, as an ad hoc advisory group to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. CCET was initially called together to assist officials in the State Department of Education in understanding and working with teacher education and credentialing. In its early years, the organization was essentially a deans and directors club, providing the opportunity for teacher education leaders on various campuses to meet and exchange ideas with each other and with state education officials. Soon the two semi-annual conferences that we still know today became the organization's primary format.

About 15 years after its inception, CCET rather suddenly parted company with the State Superintendent, at that time the strident and vociferous Max Rafferty. Rafferty invited CCET out of the Department, and the group was more than happy to leave. In the years that followed, now as a totally independent organization, the Council expanded its membership to include teacher education faculty from most campuses across the state, and while many deans continued to attend, their role in the organization diminished.

A watershed moment came when the Ryan Act was enacted in 1970, since that legislation strengthened the state's role in certification in ways that directly impacted teacher education practice, such as placing limits on the length of preparation programs and on the number of education units allowed prior to student teaching, and introducing the terminology of multiple and single subject credentials. This new and strong intervention by the state into teacher education caused an interest in policy to begin to grow within our organization. It was a gradual growth, however, as the first efforts to establish a CCET policy committee died after bitter debate at a highly contested spring conference in Monterey, despite the best efforts of then CCET president Al Thompson. This was in 1980.

Such organizational uncertainties and stresses continued, and gradually the doubts about whether teacher educators belonged in the state policy arena were

overcome by the dynamics of evolving state policies that continually lessened the professional independence of teacher educators. If the state of California was going to continue to erode our professional role, then more and more teacher educators asked why we were not playing a part in that policy process. In the late 1990s a formal CCET Policy Committee was established, and as the Twentieth Century became the Twenty-First, CCET merged with the California Association of Colleges of Teacher Education and the State of California Association of Teacher Educators, the state affiliates of AACTE and ATE. This was an effort to consolidate and increase our professional voice, and it was a rather smooth transition since the membership of the three previous organizations overlapped almost completely, and the merger into a single entity consolidated and streamlined our previously joint efforts. Immediately thereafter the new CCTE reinforced its longstanding cooperative relationship with the Independent California Colleges and Universities Council on the Education of Teachers, and that group has been a co-sponsor of the semi-annual conferences the past several years. Also in this first decade of the Twenty-First Century we have reached out to include the California Association of Professors of Special Education/Teacher Education Division, the California Association of Bilingual Teacher Educators, and the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration as conference co-sponsors, and we are currently establishing firm relationships with the BTSA, induction, and professional development communities.

So where are we now in this new century? We now have a viable policy committee, we regularly discuss state and national policy issues at our conferences, we are actively visiting and meeting legislators, legislative staffers, and other policymakers. We have come to more fully understand what I will shortly describe as marginalization, and that the primary problems of marginalization are a lack of respect and lack of influence. All of education is marginalized, and teacher education particularly so within it. The result is that elected officials, representing the public, are making policy decisions that infringe on our profession without consulting those of us who are impacted and without benefit of the professional knowledge that we possess.

A History of Marginalization

Any of us who have paid attention have heard much over the years about how teacher education is a marginalized field, about how we who are charged with the preparation of teachers for public school classrooms must operate from the margins, from positions of limited power and authority, responsible to many others and not given adequate responsibility and authority to effectively accomplish that with which we are charged. But what does this rhetoric about marginalization mean? Where have these ideas come from? What does it mean for the ongoing practice of teacher education? Who are we, and how did we get here, and how did we become marginalized? And what can and should we do about it?

First, I believe it is vitally important to understand that we are not in this mar-

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ginalization thing by ourselves. As I will try to explain, it is indeed fair and perhaps even insightful and valuable to conclude that teacher education is a marginalized field. But it is equally fair to conclude that the entire educational enterprise, the K-12 sector, higher education at all levels from the community colleges to graduate and professional schools, and even the most elite and effective educational institutions, operate on the margins in this country.

All of education is a deeply marginalized endeavor. That education is on the margins in the Twenty-First Century is in large part the result of numerous historical events and forces. Let us consider some of them. In contrast to most other nations around the world, we do not have a national system of education in the United States. Indeed, education is not even mentioned in our Constitution, a circumstance that left the development and implementation of schools to the realm of states' rights. While some of our Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson in particular, had visions and plans for public education, the actual inception of public schools did not begin until several decades after the American Revolution, and when states did eventually move to enact statutes to enable public schools, they routinely established systems of localized school authorities. No national system, no state system, but instead local school districts, school boards, and school buildings spread across the country, each at least initially in charge of itself. A perfect historical blue print for marginalization in a nation that would eventually award bigness, not smallness.

History reveals that this localism, this lack of consideration for a national educational structure, occurred largely because of the schism over slavery, the contestation over education within, among, and between various religions, and the championing of states rights. But it can also be tied to the early and continuing thrust of individualism within the American psyche, leading to the up-by-the-bootstrap beliefs portrayed in the Horatio Alger myths, the always present notion that all it takes to succeed in America is the will to try. All of these notions continue to create and recreate social forces that further marginalize and diminish respect for education.

Meld this early historical context with some additional realities. By definition, all public endeavors are carried out on the cheap, by the lowest bidder, and this dynamic has always plagued our public schools. Add the factor that teaching has been and continues to be primarily a women's profession, within a societal context that even today typically pays women 20% less for equal work, and even more poorly when they, women, are the vast majority of any sector of the work force, such as teaching. Factor in also the odd historical fate of taxation for schooling, tied in the early days to the local property tax back when real property was actually a good indication of wealth. Fast forward to the contemporary distribution of wealth in our nation, no longer keyed primarily to local property but rather to banking, investment, insurance, and other paper commodities, and to the role of the federal income tax which overwhelms all forms of state and local taxation. Thus we educators experience further marginalization, with education struggling for financial

support at the local and state levels, while the major tax and allocation pool exists at the national level.

Then think about the upside down and contrary mythologies that permeate our society. We say that any child can grow up to play any role they wish, and we even offer some rhetorical recognition that education may be one of the key roads to such success. But we conversely believe that experience is the best teacher, that those who can do and those who can't teach, and since we have all been to school for at least a few years we all know that teachers work short days, and short years, and do it all simply out of their love for children. All of these ideas mesh with the cult of individualism, the thrust for competition, the certainty that the American way is the best and only way. Throw all of this together, and it is little wonder that teachers in the United States are held in far less respect than is the case in most countries around the world. A major case of marginalization.

And then there is a strong measure of anti-intellectualism inherent in our society. A strong belief that one learns more out in the world than in the classroom. A total lack of comprehension of what John Dewey meant when he said that the most practical thing is the world is a good theory. No, most of our fellow citizens give no value to theory, we are instead a nation much more attuned to practice, practice, practice. Indeed, those of us within teacher education are constantly bombarded with the assertion that the only way to learn to teach is to go out and do it, regardless of whether those prospective teachers have studied the field first, have become acquainted with some relevant philosophy and theory. No, philosophy and theory are the enemies of our anti-intellectual society. So those of us who might believe in such things are again further marginalized.

Let me also suggest that this marginalization, while a national circumstance, is even more exacerbated in California. Because our state is so much larger than most, the margins are even farther afield, and the burdens of being marginalized here are even greater.

Dissecting Marginalization

Okay, are we then ready to acknowledge that education is marginalized in America? Let's consider levels within that marginalization. First, the public marginalizes teachers, believing that anyone can be a teacher, since all they need to do is love children. A lovely falsehood in two ways, first the reality that it takes far more than love of children to be an excellent teacher, and second that even if it were true, relatively few Americans could then be teachers since it appears clear that relatively few American love children if we are to measure love by the priority and support our government, representing the general public, grants to schools and other agencies that support, assist, and nurture children,

Second, public school teachers and administrators marginalize each other, and both groups marginalize teacher educators, here again stressing that the real

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learning about teaching comes on the job, not in the classroom, from experience rather than from professors.

Then move the scenario to the college and university campus, and we find the campus community as a whole marginalizing schools, colleges, and departments of education, always questioning the academic worth of such studies. And within those schools and colleges of education we find many other education faculty marginalizing their teacher education colleagues, and suggesting that there is less academic merit in teacher education than in other areas of educational scholarship. And even among us teacher educators we sometimes find those who teach theory marginalizing those who work more directly in the schools, and vice versa. Yes, this marginalization business is clearly contagious. It separates, breaks down, and weakens everyone in its path. Indeed, if any of these marginalizing scenarios are present on your campuses, I can only urge you to help end them, to reach out with respect for your colleagues who may be across the hall, in the next building, across campus, or out in the public schools. We must all stand together to meet the challenges of our marginalized profession.

Who Sets Professional Policy?

This state of marginalization, quite obviously, plays out in the public policy arena. Would it not be appropriate for professional education decisions to be made by professional educators, based upon our professional expertise? Would policy-makers similarly intervene in a field like medicine, and seek to tell doctors how to diagnose, prescribe, and operate? Would similar inventions occur in the preparation and induction of other professionals?

Ah, but here are two rubs. First, education is a profession that operates not only on behalf of the public, as do others, but also as employees of the public. The primary arenas of educational operation are K-12 public schools and public higher education campuses, all entities immediately available to state policymakers for regulation and even public micro-management. And even the private and independent educational institutions that are part of our overall constituency, because they are involved in preparing teachers and administrators for service in public schools, also fall under the influence and control of public policy.

The other rub is much less obvious, but may in fact be the heart of the problem. We professional educators, because we work with and on behalf of children, tend to take a generally progressive view of the world, a view that believes government should operate on behalf of the citizenry, undertaking policies that protect the citizenry, that foster equality of opportunity, that look out for the little guy. It follows then that in most areas of public policy, the typical progressive approach is to craft and implement laws and regulations that protect the citizenry and that hold back the otherwise untrammelled powers of the big, the wealthy, the owners rather than the owned. The battle between progressives and conservatives, to use some very contested terms, typically revolves around whether we regulate such entities

as airlines, banks, drug companies, food producers, and other such. Typically the education community and its progressive allies in government support such regulations on behalf of the general public.

But then those same progressive allies in government, those who believe in enacting policies that seek to create, assure, and protect opportunity and equality for all, turn to the field of education, and once again they move to regulate, to establish standards, to require examinations, to dictate curriculum, all with the purported intention of making the system more effective and of greater service, particularly on behalf of those students in greatest need. But in contrast to the role that regulations play in other fields of endeavor, in schools they tend to have just the opposite effect. It is a prime example of the concept of unintended consequences. Regulations when applied to education tend to limit creativity, they force common and uniform approaches when we know that effective education actually requires that teachers have the opportunity to do different things for and with different children. Ultimately such regulations, despite the best intentions of those in government, tie the hands of educational professionals to exercise their professional knowledge on behalf of the children they teach.

Our Biggest Challenge

So here again we educators are marginalized. Our field of public endeavor operates differently than other arenas of public policy. In the case of education additional regulations work against rather than serve the best interests of all involved. Yet that difference is seldom if ever recognized. It is my belief that the biggest problem we face as a marginalized organization of teacher educators is to explain this conundrum, first to our allies in the education field, and then in concert with those allies to the elected and appointed officials who make public education policy in the halls of government.

And how do we do this? Actually, we are already doing it. We continue to stress in our professional programs and our teaching the proven values of reaching each child, each different child. We continue to undertake research, and sift and sort previous research, to best inform our students, who will be the next cadre of teachers. We hold our CCTE conferences and we attend other conferences, to share what we know and to discuss professional and political strategies. We broaden our alliances. We strengthen our policy efforts. We introduce ourselves to policymakers and offer our best thinking.

We have come a long way since the beginnings of CCET, and we have a long way to go. The most important thing is to keep involved, keep reaching out, keep making friends and allies. And the biggest challenge will always be to explain that in the case of education, additional regulations and requirements and examinations that get in the way of creative teaching and learning is not progress, and should not be the hallmark of progressive thinking, progressive policy, and desired reform.

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Tight and rigid regulations may work well and protect the public in arenas of commerce and quantitative activity, but they tend to do just the opposite in human and qualitative arenas like education.

Is this a message that we can effectively deliver? I suspect we can, since, after all, we are teachers. In addition to our students, we must also teach our fellow educators, the public, and the public's representatives in the halls of government about the complexities of the educational endeavor, making full use of the professional expertise that is uniquely ours. I look forward to working with all of you in that ongoing effort as we work from the margins to gradually reduce our historic marginalization. Thank you for sharing this time with me.