Legal Literacy and Teacher Education: A Case Approach Based on the Rights of Teachers and Students.

PUB DATE
Nov 74

NOTE

ABSTRACT
This speech, while noting the existence of law-related projects in inservice teacher education courses, stresses the need for law-related education in both preservice and inservice courses. The method for presenting law-related material in preservice education courses as described herein would not call for the introduction of new courses or units, but would require modification of two courses commonly found in departments of education: introduction to education and social foundations of education. A sample course outline is provided. Within this outline, specific cases are discussed under the following topic headings, which could be used in foundation courses: (a) cultural diversity and the schools, (b) freedom of expression, (c) private life and personal appearance, (d) patriotism and freedom of association, (e) professionalism, (f) due process for students and teachers, and (g) education and equality. Suggested classroom methods include (a) discussion of materials read, (b) visits to a university library to explore the legal reporter system, (c) discussion of hypothetical cases, (d) use of resource speakers, and (e) visits to nearby courts. (JA)
Legal Literacy and Teacher Education:  
A Case Approach Based on the Rights of Teachers and Students  

Louis Fischer and David Schimmel*  

During recent years, there has been an explosion in the field of law-related education. Hundreds of schools have introduced law-related materials or units of instruction into their classes, and some school districts are attempting a systematic revision of their curricula to include law-related materials at different levels of schooling.  

For most students, however, it is not enough to revise the curriculum and provide new books, films, and other materials. Teaching hardware and software, to use the current jargon, might be useful for effective teaching, but they are certainly not sufficient! A decade ago, much excitement was generated among educators around the idea of a "teacher-proof curriculum." As the phrase suggests, the curricular materials were to be so interesting and so well sequenced as to alleviate the need for teachers. Bitter experience, plus millions of dollars of federal and foundation money, however, exploded the dream (or nightmare?) of teacher-proof curriculum, and once again educators realize that the teacher is a central figure in the educative process. Law-related education is not an exception. Books, films, "techniques," and resource people are all useful in this exciting, new educational effort; but without knowledgeable, committed, and competent teachers, we will fail, and the movement will join a host of others in the dusty attic of educational innovations.  

*Louis Fischer and David Schimmel are both lawyers and Professors of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. They are authors of The Civil Rights of Teachers, (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) and The Civil Rights of Students, scheduled for publication by Harper & Row, January, 1975.
The Education of Teachers

Recognizing that teachers are central to the education of large populations, some law-related projects make in-service education of teachers one of their major tasks. An excellent example of this thrust is the "Law In A Free Society" project in California which has produced voluminous materials (on the topics of responsibility, justice, privacy, authority, participation, diversity, property, and freedom) but whose chief activity is the in-service education of teachers. We recognize the need for such efforts, and we also take part in a variety of in-service activities. But, we are equally concerned with the place of law-related materials in the initial or pre-service education of teachers. Rather than argue over whether law-related education should be in pre-or in-service teacher education, we advocate the development of legal literacy through both stages of a teacher's professional development. In this paper, however, we will focus on one approach to law-related education in the pre-service preparation of teachers.

The Units Squeeze

The initial resistance to the inclusion of law-related materials in teacher education relates to the "units squeeze." The skeptic asks: "What will you exclude in order to include these materials?" This question assumes that there are a fixed number of courses and units that comprise the education of teachers, and the addition of any new materials will necessarily squeeze something out. This objection is a serious one, particularly in states that limit by legislation or by policy the number of units of professional education courses that teacher certification requires.
Contrary to popular belief, the education of teachers occurs primarily in the liberal arts departments of colleges and universities. Studies by the TEPS Commission\(^1\) and others indicate that close to eighty percent of the college work of teachers occurs in the liberal arts, and only about twenty percent is of a professional nature. In light of these figures, it is understandable why objections arise in departments of education, based on fears we labelled "the units squeeze." Our proposals, however, do not call for the introduction of new courses or units into teacher education programs which would compete with existing courses.

Content Modification

Unlike some of the more mature professions, like law or medicine, the content of professional preparation in education is not clearly defined by tradition, by consensus, or by authoritative procedures. In law schools, a course in contracts will include substantially similar materials, whether it is taught at Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, or Texas. Medical schools also have reached substantial agreement on the content of their courses on cardiology. No such accord exists in departments of education on the content of most courses or the total programs of teacher education. Disagreement is rife even within the same state among schools operating under the same certification laws.

Two courses, commonly found in departments of education, with wide divergence in content, are Introduction to Education and Social Foundations of Education. The latter often appears under such titles as Foundations of Education, School and Society, Education in America, Education in American Culture, and others similarly worded.

---

\(^1\)The TEPS Commission is the Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards of the National Educational Association.
Our experience shows that these courses readily lend themselves to modification to include law-related materials. We have developed some new ways of organizing the course content and teaching procedures of Social Foundations of Education so that one important outcome is the heightened legal literacy of beginning teachers. Our approach seeks to introduce cases related to the constitutional rights of public school teachers and students into courses in Social Foundations. While this combination may appear to be forced, there are good reasons for this approach, and experience supports its usefulness.

The cases we selected all arise from the ongoing activities of schooling in America and involve the rights of teachers and students. They represent real problems with which teachers or teachers in training can easily identify. These current, legal controversies capture student interest, and our experience indicates that students "are turned-on" by this approach. While the cases are used to teach some substantive civil rights law, they are also used as a means to teach about the general legal system.

The cases, however, do not occur in a vacuum. We use them as springboards to study our diverse culture, particularly those aspects that relate directly to schools and education. Thus, there is an interaction between the two, seemingly disparate sets of ideas and materials. The civil rights cases of teachers and students are powerful motivators, and the foundational materials place the cases into cultural perspective.

The following outline illustrates the dovetailing of some important legal materials with Social Foundations of Education. A similar model would be equally appropriate for a course in Introduction to Education.
A Sample Outline

The topic headings in this outline could be those commonly used in Foundations courses, or they could be a series of civil rights concerns. Instead of choosing either of these traditional styles of organization, the seven topical headings we use draw on both fields. Some are clearly law-related, some are Foundational issues, and some, like "Education and Equality," are mixed. The topics themselves suggest a blending of the two fields of study.

I. Cultural Diversity and the Schools

We use Wisconsin v. Yoder\(^2\) as a springboard into this subject. The case, brought on behalf of some Amish children, challenges Wisconsin state law compelling high school attendance. It is useful to open the entire question of compulsory education and the conflicting interests that states, parents, churches, as well as children have in the education of youth. Yoder leads us to various questions of legal and educational policy in the area of church and state relationships as we examine other leading cases and school practices.

To place Yoder in perspective, we study the concept of cultural pluralism, and the relationship of subcultures to the dominant culture. We examine writings on the processes of socialization and the possible roles schools play in the perpetuation or change of cultural patterns.\(^3\)

---


We have found the concept of cultural diversity to be a useful one for understanding the relationships of schools to other parts of American society as well as gaining insights into the reasons why so many civil rights cases arise that relate to schooling. Schools and courts are among the key arenas where our culture's social, political, and ideological disagreements tend to surface and somehow get resolved.4

II. Freedom of Expression

Our lead case here is Tinker v. Des Moines,5 where the Supreme Court protected the right of high school students to wear black armbands as a symbolic expression protesting American participation in the Vietnam War. This landmark decision, as well as other lower court cases that follow it, are useful to develop a variety of ideas.6 For example: The

4In addition to Yoder, we use various other cases to examine the religion and education controversy such as Minersville v. Gobitis, 310 U.S. 586 (1940), in which the Supreme Court refused to enjoin a Pennsylvania school district from enforcing its mandatory flag salute regulation against Jehovah's Witnesses; Barnette v. West Virginia, 319 U.S. 624 (1943), which overruled Gobitis and protected the right of students not to salute the flag on religious grounds; Abington School District v. Schempp, 374 U.S. 203 (1963), which prohibited Bible reading or prayers as part of a public school program; and Lemon v. Kurtzman, 403 U.S. 602 (1971), in which laws that provided state aid to non-public schools were held unconstitutional because they benefited parochial schools and thereby violated the religion clauses of the First Amendment.


6See, for example, Guzick v. Drebas, 431 F.2d 594 (6th Cir. 1970), that upheld a rule prohibiting the wearing of all buttons, badges, or other symbols of causes "unrelated to education" at a school where disruption had occurred and Butts v. Dallas Independent School District, 436 F.2d 728 (5th Cir. 1971), which held that neither "tension" nor an "expectation" of disruption were sufficient to prohibit student freedom of expression.
difference between facts and law; the differences between trial and appellate courts; the difference between a bold, general principle of law and its application to unique situations, and the processes and reasons whereby the Supreme Court grants review.

From Tinker, we move to a series of cases involving "underground" and "official" student publications and their distribution on school grounds. These cases provide a tool to reexamine concepts of authority found both in our culture and our schools (as well as the limits on such authority). They can be used to distinguish legal matters from educational policy and to show how courts are reluctant to adjudicate issues that are more properly reserved for school boards and educators. In addition, the legal meaning of obscenity is developed in the context of these cases.

Cases related to teachers' freedom of expression are also used in this part of the course. Pickering (concerned with public criticism of administrative policy and personnel) is helpful to establish teachers' freedom of expression.

---

7Interesting cases on this topic are: Shanley v. Northeast Independent School District, 462 F.2d 960 (5th Cir. 1972), that held school regulations requiring prior review for student distribution of publications or petitions unconstitutional (because they were vague, lacked standards for evaluation, and lacked due process safeguards); Riseman v. School Committee of Quincy, 439 F.2d 148 (1st Cir. 1971), that invalidated a rule against advertising on school grounds that was used to prohibit the distribution of political literature; Sullivan v. Houston Independent School District, 333 F.Supp. 1149 (S.D. Tex., 1971); 475 F.2d 1071 (5th Cir. 1973) together with Miller v. California, 413 U.S. 13 (1973), on the issue of obscenity for minors; Dickey v. Alabama State Board of Education, 273 F.Supp. 613 (M.D. Ala. 1967) which ruled that a student editor could not be prohibited from publishing responsible criticism about public officials; and Jacobs v. Board of School Commissioners, 490 F.2d 601 (7th Cir. 1973), that broadly defended students' freedom of press and is now being reviewed by the U.S. Supreme Court.
freedom of speech away from school, 8 while Keefe 9 and Mailloux 10 (which deal with teachers who are dismissed for using "dirty" words) are interesting examples of how the First Amendment relates to the use of controversial materials in the classroom.

Free speech cases are excellent motivational leads to several topics that are found in Social Foundations or Introduction to Education courses. They are useful to explore such questions as: What is the proper role of authority in our culture and in its schools? Should schools be laboratories for democracy? Is censorship ever defensible? How do cultural conflicts affect the schools? Do "dirty words" serve any cultural function? Should teachers be "models" for children and youth? What were the rights of students and teachers in the past?

Even a brief exploration of these issues creates a broader perspective which helps students understand civil rights conflicts in the "Freedom of Expression" area.

III. Private Life and Personal Appearance

Disagreements related to the private lives and personal appearance of teachers generate vigorous controversies. In the private lives of teachers, sexual behavior tends to be most suspect, and any alleged

8 Pickering v. Board of Education, 391 U.S. 563 (1968), was a major Supreme Court decision upholding the right of teachers to speak out freely about educational matters of public concern.

9 Keefe v. Geanacos, 418 F.2d 359 (1st Cir. 1969), upheld the right of a high school English teacher to assign a scholarly article in which the term "motherfucker" was repeatedly used.

10 Mailloux v. Kiley, 448 F.2d 1242 (1st Cir. 1971), involved a teacher who used the term "fuck" to illustrate the concept of taboo words. The teacher was reinstated on due process rather than Free Speech grounds.
deviation from cultural norms is likely to jeopardize both jobs and teaching certificates. Is it surprising that college students tend to be most interested in these cases?

The Morrison case\(^{11}\) is our lead into one of the most controversial topics; namely, teaching and homosexuality. This case, along with others related to the use of marijuana, alcohol, obscene language, and sexual relationships with public school students are important for students in teacher education. These future educators are in a transitional stage, changing social roles from student to teacher, and must learn the social expectations attached to this new role. Our culture still allows more deviation from its norms for college students than for its public school teachers. (What would happen to junior high school teachers, for example, if they had a little fun, "streaking" through the business district of Elmtown, on a Friday afternoon?)

The Finot case,\(^{12}\) in which a teacher is punished for growing a beard, helps explore teachers' rights to grow long hair, wear miniskirts, pantsuits, or otherwise determine their own dress and grooming.\(^{13}\) Cases related to students' hair length and other aspects of "grooming codes"

\(^{11}\)Morrison v. Board of Education, 461 P.2d 375 (1969). In Morrison, the California Supreme Court ruled that homosexuality per se does not necessarily constitute immoral or unprofessional conduct sufficient to warrant revocation of a teacher's certificate.

\(^{12}\)Finot v. Pasadena City Board of Education, 250 C.A.2d 189 (1967). Finot held that a teacher's beard was a form of personal expression and symbolic speech and therefore was entitled to the "peripheral protection" of the First Amendment.

\(^{13}\)Blanchet v. Vermilion Parish School Board, 220 S.2d 534 (1969). In Blanchet, a teacher was dismissed for violating a school district requirement that "male teachers wear neckties." The Louisiana Court of Appeals upheld the rule as a matter of school board discretion.
are legion. The variations in court holdings, both in state and federal courts, make clear the complexity of our laws, the relationship of state and federal laws as well as the significance of a judge's personal convictions.

Cases in this category are useful to pursue in depth such issues as the development of an "adolescent society," the rise of a "counter-culture," and its impact on the dominant culture and the schools.

IV. Patriotism and Freedom of Association

While membership in the Communist Party does not evoke the extreme reaction today that it did twenty years ago, most communities would still disapprove of such membership by their teachers. Other controversial organizations, such as the American Nazi Party, the Black Panthers, the K.K.K., the John Birch Society, or S.D.S., raises community ire in many school districts.

Since schools all over America have as one of their goals the development of effective citizens, most communities want their teachers to stay away from "extreme" groups, take loyalty oaths, and nurture the young toward patriotic, democratic participation. To explore teachers' freedom of association, we use the Keyishian case which voided New York's laws prohibiting Communists in the classroom.

14 See, for example, Karr v. Schmidt, 460 F.2d 609 (5th Cir. 1972), which elaborates the arguments on both sides of the "hair cut controversy" in extensive majority and dissenting opinions.

15 Black's dissent in Tinker is a classic example of this and so are the majority and dissenting opinions in Karr.

16 Keyishian v. Board of Regents of New York, 385 U.S. 589 (1967). We also use this case to explore the concept of "guilt by association," the distinction between "mere membership" in a subversive group and participation in illegal activities, and some of the differences between positive and negative loyalty oaths.
Students' right to organize is explored with the aid of the Supreme Court's decision in Healy v. James, 17 which upheld the right of students to create an S.D.S. chapter on campus. Another aspect of this topic leads to cases involving school regulation of student fraternities and sororities as well as "secret" or "closed membership" societies. 18 These cases, related to freedom of association, are useful in opening up the more general question of the nature of American democracy and the role and limits on organized dissent.

V. Professionalism

The historic case of Fursman v. City of Chicago 19 (which allowed Chicago to prohibit teacher unions) illustrates early restrictions against teacher organizations, while more recent cases can be used to show that teachers today have the right to organize and bargain collectively. 20 The distinction between the right to organize and the right to strike can also be established with the aid of these cases. Inevitably, the issue of illegal strikes by teachers is raised, which is best discussed in a socio-cultural perspective rather than the narrower legal view.

The social issues surrounding such litigation can lead to an examination of broader topics, such as: Is teaching a profession? What is


18 See, for example, Robinson v. Sacramento City Unified School District, 53 Cal.Rptr. 781 (1966) and Passel v. Fort Worth Independent School District, 453 S.W.2d 888 (1970). Both cases followed 50 years of precedent in upholding state statutes which outlawed high school fraternities, sororities, and similar organizations that chose their members in an undemocratic manner.


20 See, for example, McLaughlin v. Tilendis, 398 F.2d 287 (1968).
unprofessional conduct? Are union methods compatible with professional responsibilities? What have been the effects of teacher militancy? And should teachers be active in politics?21

VI. Due Process for Teachers and Students

While questions of due process tend to permeate other issues, their significance merits separate treatment. In exploring procedural due process, the distinction between tenured and untenured teachers becomes clearer, and the elements of fair procedures are explored. Roth and Sinderman22 are key cases analyzing the due process rights of untenured teachers, and they are also useful to point up the importance of state law or local practice in establishing procedural rights.

Students' due process rights can be explored with the help of Dixon v. Alabama,23 a college level case, or the Tibbs case24 that involved the suspension of high school students.

21Various state courts have ruled on the right of teachers to engage in political activities, partisan as well as non-partisan. The expansion of teachers' rights to political participation in recent decades becomes clear through analysis of these cases. See, for example, Montgomery v. White, 320 F.Supp. 304 (1969); Rackley v. School District, 258 F.Supp. 676 (1966); and James v. Board of Education of Central District No. 1, 461 F.2d 566 (1972).


23Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education, 294 F.2d 150 (5th Cir. 1961). In Dixon, the court provided a detailed statement of its views "on the nature of the notice and hearing required by due process prior to expulsion."

24Tibbs v. Board of Education of the Township of Franklin, 284 A.2d 179 (1971). In Tibbs, a New Jersey court held that expulsion "constitutes deprivation of a most drastic kind" and that compromise with "punctilious procedural fairness" was therefore unacceptable.
Beyond the legal issues, due process cases lead to discussion of the loco parentis doctrine and its waning importance. These cases further raise the issue of how best to teach an appreciation of fair procedures. Can authoritarian practices in schools, or on the part of school boards, ever produce a democratic citizenry? The philosophic, educational, and legal questions related to ends and means are effectively raised by these due process cases.

VII. Education and Equality

The broad field of equality of educational opportunity can be analyzed with the aid of four types of discrimination: (1) The complex area of racial discrimination has spawned hundreds of cases—Brown\textsuperscript{25} and Swann\textsuperscript{26} being useful in teaching the uninitiated. (2) Sexual discrimination against teachers can be explored with the aid of the LaFleur case\textsuperscript{27}, in which the Supreme Court examined compulsory pregnancy leave policies of public schools. Among the cases involving sexual discrimination against students, Brenden\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{26}Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, 402 U.S. 1 (1971), in which Justice Burger wrote the Court’s opinion approving a busing plan to implement integration in a North Carolina school district.

\textsuperscript{27}La Fleur v. Cleveland Board of Education, 42 Law Week 4186 (1974).

\textsuperscript{28}Brenden v. Independent School District #742, 477 F.2d 1292 (1973), held that a rule prohibiting a ranking woman tennis player from playing on the boys’ tennis team was a denial of equal protection when the school had no girls’ tennis team.
raises the question of discrimination in school athletic activities. (3) The Rodriguez case enables us to look at economic discrimination in schooling and to understand why the challenge under the federal constitution did not succeed. By contrast, cases from California and New Jersey are good examples of effectively challenging economic inequality by relying on state constitutions. (4) Another category of inequality can be labelled "discrimination against special populations." These can include children from lower economic classes who get caught in tracking, as exemplified in Hobson v. Hansen, the inadequate educational provisions for children with physical or emotional handicaps, as well as students whose home language is other than English.

The wealth of materials on social class and education, racism, poverty, sexism, the special problems of the handicapped, and discrimination against non-English speaking ethnic groups can all be used to place these cases into broader perspective. In turn, these materials become more alive and "relevant" when introduced through the drama of a law suit.

33 Lau v. Nichols, 42 Law Week 4165 (1974). In Lau, the Supreme Court ruled that school policy that did not make allowance for the needs of Chinese-speaking students violated section 601 of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. 2000(d), which bans discrimination based on "the grounds of race, color, or national origin" in "any program or activity receiving financial assistance." Similar results were reached in favor of Spanish-speaking students in Serna v. Fortales Municipal Schools, 43 Law Week 2057 (1974).
The foregoing reflects the content of our efforts to develop legal literacy in pre-service education. The course outlined above dovetails with existing courses in teacher education curricula, and, with some flexibility and interest on the part of the instructor, these materials can be used in courses commonly found in a certification sequence.

Some Suggested Methods

In the main, we rely on classroom discussion of materials read, interspersed with brief explanations (mini-lectures) by the instructors. We make liberal use of hypothetical cases, closely constructed from real situations, which students analyze and react to prior to reading excerpts from actual cases. Because of the complexity of actual cases and the legal language, we excerpt the cases or "translate" them to eliminate "legalese" and procedural complications.

During the semester, however, we do assign two cases to be read in their entirety, plus a visit to the university library to explore the legal reporter system. Our aim here is not to develop "instant-lawyers" but to help to "demystify" the law. As students gain even a minimal understanding of how "the law" is organized, and of the tools of legal research, the system is better understood and respected. Professors who lack training in legal research can call on the specialist at their university library to explain the system to the class, and local lawyers or law students are usually available for such brief assistance. (Parenthetically, students, to our surprise, consistently evaluate this part of the course with high marks:)

Just as we use case summaries, we rely on short articles, excerpts and brief lectures in the social foundations area as well. We do this because no single text provides the socio-cultural analysis in the field of education that can dovetail with the legal materials.
Metropolitan newspapers and even popular magazines are good sources for news items and human interest stories that relate to civil rights and education. Bringing these into the classroom reminds students of the relevance of our study to everyday life, and they become more aware of (or sensitized to) the way civil rights permeate our daily work. Soon, they begin bringing news items to class. In fact, one by-product of the course is a broader interest in law and in the legal system, its strengths and its limitations. What has heretofore been a "text-bookish" understanding of the checks and balances of the three branches of our government becomes a more sophisticated view of how the system works and its reliance on an educated public.

We have used resource speakers in our classes, have assigned visits to nearby courts, and tried out student-administered questionnaire surveys. Role-playing is a useful technique for the exploration of hypothetical situations and a host of other methods that are used in other courses can be adapted to this one.

Some Alternatives

We wish to emphasize that the model outlined above is not the only way to develop legal literacy in teacher education. An examination of the content of courses in Introduction to Education leads us to believe that an interesting course could be constructed with the use of cases from the

---


areas of torts, contracts, and civil rights. The content most often taught in such introductory courses could be developed around controversial school accidents, contract disputes, and civil rights disagreements. As in our model, the court cases would be the motivational leads from which the generally taught content in Introduction to Education could follow.

The reason we selected Introduction to Education and Social Foundations courses, is that they are generally found to be part of the requirements leading to certification. Beyond these, other courses (such as "Issues in Education," "School Law," or "Methods in Social Studies") can be used to develop legal literacy in both pre- and in-service teacher education.

With the rapid growth of law-related materials and programs in recent years, the need for knowledgeable teachers became quite apparent. We work on the obvious hypothesis that law-related materials will be used more widely and intelligently if teachers themselves understand the workings of our legal system. Furthermore, we believe that college students in teacher education as well as teachers in the field are much more likely to be interested in learning about the law if they have an opportunity to study a variety of actual court cases based on recent controversies in the lives of students and teachers. Our suggestions in this paper are offered as a step in this direction.

Some additional books we've found useful in the course are: