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ABSTRACT

Teacher education in Canada is an institution largely enshrined in tradition and certain unquestioned assumptions. It is about preparing teachers to work in school situations. Teacher educators must teach education majors a broader vision of these opportunities, and focus on "education" rather than just on classrooms and schools. Opportunities for new education graduates include adult education, popular education, recreational education, community education, home schooling, and training and development. In the worlds of business and industry, financial service, health care, civil service, and a multitude of other agencies, mammoth needs are surfacing for training and development. The world of business and industry needs specialists who can envision new possibilities for collaborative learning in the workplace, develop effective relationships with learners, build community, and help learners listen to each other and the world around them. Besides their own training needs, many agencies in business, industry, and government provide educational services to the public requiring pedagogical expertise in designing programs, leading workshops, and creating materials. Examples are cited of teachers creating their own jobs to provide new and marketable educational services. (JDD)

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Why Our Young Teachers Don't Get Jobs: And What We Can Do About it!

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Why Our Young Teachers Don't Get Jobs

"So where do I apply?" she demanded. "Where are all these jobs?"

She was a newly graduated teacher and had just finished writing the final exam for the last course of her Bachelor of Education degree, a course titled Educational Administration 401. Like many of the students who had taken the course this spring in Alberta, Carla had been depressed for weeks by the bleak employment situation for teachers not only in this province but in many parts of Canada. She talked about her despondency and her frustration that "I've sunk almost six years of my life into this degree, and all I want to do is to teach, and it's like nobody WANTS me!" She complained about what she saw as insurmountable walls guarding the mythological Mecca of the classroom, about districts where she'd heard they discarded mail bags full of resumes from applicants like herself, about schools she felt were swollen with aging teachers hanging for dear life to their own jobs even though the last thing in the world they wanted to do was be teachers.

Listening to Carla and her classmates, we feel both sympathy and surprise at their discouragement. Of course, our ideas are undoubtedly suspect. Any response we make falls under the heading "It's easy for you to say -- you already have a job." We are sympathetic, wondering what helpful advice we could possibly share or what comfort we could extend to soothe the growing sense of bitterness that our students feel. Still, we must admit that we are also perplexed with the negativism and pessimism we see from what we view as young, generally enthusiastic, teachers.

One reason we are surprised is that we see what seem to be limitless openings in the world for these new education graduates with the imagination, educational skills, and commitment needed to be teachers -- that is, to engage people in learning. Why do these new teachers, many of them reasonably unfettered by family or financial obligations, have trouble exploring some of the opportunities in adult education, popular education, recreational education, community education, home schooling, or training and development that are available? Why can they not peer into the social issues around them and discern the still unnamed learning needs of children and adults? What blocks are preventing them from taking advantage of difficult times and their own creative energies to uncover new ways to open learning experiences, to design new ways of bringing people together to grow and change?

In the worlds of business and industry, financial service, health care, the civil service, and a multitude of other agencies, for instance, mammoth needs are surfacing for training and development. Corporations struggling to survive in turbulent times are redesigning themselves and re-positioning their employees. Skills-retraining is a tiny part of the dramatic re-visioning and restructuring that are creating complex learning issues for companies and public service organizations. The opportunities are visible in everything from Total Quality management, LSO-9000, learning organizations, self-directed learning opportunities, empowered employees, facilitator-managers. The list goes on. Education, and the need for teachers, is hardly dead in the world of business and industry.

To meet their learning needs effectively, business and industry need creative risk-takers. They need people who understand that learning is far more intricate and holistic than competency-based training models; people who can see beyond the conventional; people who specialize in playing with the non-conventional to uncover new ways of thinking and learning. The world of business and industry needs specialists who can envision new possibilities for collaborative learning in the workplace, who know how to develop effective relationships with learners, build community, and help learners listen to each other and the world around them. They need people who can stimulate critical reflection and who are experts in helping learners make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. In short, they need teachers.

The Meeting of Two Worlds

Corporations need teachers, but they have little connection with the world of education, teeming with the sorts of expertise they need to work through the issues they face. To fill the gap, business and industry often turn to expensive "training and development" consultants who may or may not have a foundation in pedagogy, an understanding of curriculum and instruction, or an orientation to student-centered learning. Some consultants have proven to have more loyalty to lucre than learners, and have become particularly adept at creating a consumer need for their products by reducing complex learning issues into technical training problems which their instructional services purport to solve efficiently.

There are needs everywhere for people skilled in instructional planning and teaching methods. Business and industry need to design educational

programs, create educational materials, and to "train the trainers," helping other professionals and tradespeople to share their knowledge and skills with others. For example, besides their own training and development needs, many agencies in business, industry, and government provide educational services to the public requiring pedagogical expertise in designing programs, leading workshops, and creating materials. Publishers of student texts and software are continually searching for writers of teaching and learning materials.

The tourist and museum industry regularly seeks help from educators to work with recreation specialists who design motivating and memorable learning experiences for visitors. The educational programs of churches and community organizations require facilitators and people to develop learning resources and teacher packages. A wide variety of popular education movements working for social change in health issues, global economic concerns and women's issues, community development, and many others need educators with expertise in actively involving learners in new experiences.

Effective emancipatory education requires sensitive, caring workers who can gently guide people through processes of challenging their assumptions, reflecting critically on these beliefs, and gradually developing more inclusive and discriminating perspectives. Continuing Professional Education is growing in a rapidly increasing variety of disciplines, which need educators to work with the "content experts" to design and deliver programs, create materials, and assess student learning.

Colleges, universities, and hospitals often have large-scale staff development programs requiring people to deliver workshops in such topics as instructional planning, presentation skills, ways to motivate learners, modifying instruction for learner diversity, and evaluating learner progress. Personal development programs are burgeoning, offered through churches, continuing education agencies, businesses, hospitals, and non-profit organizations devoted to personal growth or healing and recovery needs for various personal issues.

They all need good teachers. They need teachers because teachers bring with them their knowledge of learning, their pedagogical expertise, their facilitation techniques, and their interpersonal skills. But they also need teachers because new teachers might possibly offer a well-needed vision to the businesses, hospitals, government offices, and all the other agencies that live outside the world of public schooling. Teachers share something that many "trainers" in these environments don't often have -- a deeply felt commitment, some would say a "calling," to helping people become.

What Do We Teach Our Students?

We must admit, we don't usually think to talk about these opportunities with our education students. But when we do, like the day Carla exploded, we wish we were younger and just starting out. We get excited describing the many ways for them to work as teachers outside the public school system, ways that currently exist and ways that have yet to be invented. We also try to remind them that they are not only capable workers, which most of them already know, but also capable and creative thinkers, which most of them do

not know. But often our students just throw up their hands in exasperation and repeat once more. "So where do I apply? Where are all these jobs?"

Our first thoughtless reaction is to ask cynically if students want a list of names and addresses. But, upon reflection, there is a logic to the way our students act. We who teach teachers how to be teachers must share the blame. We not only teach them to be teachers, but we implicitly teach them to be teachers within the school "system." We narrow their view from what it means to be an educator to what it means to be a teacher. There is a difference. Because we are narrowing their vision, we are doing them a disservice. If we are to provide real service to our students and our society, we must change the way we act in our faculties of education.

Why do faculties of education exist? What do we teach students in the courses of our faculties? On one hand, the answers to these questions are simple. Teacher education is about the education of teachers. In this process, they learn the "skills" of teaching, the content of their particular subject areas, the curricular codes for this content, and ways to invite young people in a school classroom to share this learning.

But, we also teach our student teachers some other very powerful lessons about a specific way to define themselves as "a teacher." A teacher is a person who has a job in a school teaching (mostly) children in grades K - 12. We induct our students into the club.

Induction is a ritualized event symbolizing the entering a club and becoming part of an elite and well-defined fraternity. But, fraternities were designed to

be organizations that served society. The job of the fraternity is not to serve the fraternity. When we speak to our young teachers about why they enter the field of education, they often say they were "called" to education.

Many of our young people are very idealistic. They enroll in faculties of education because there really aren't many other institutional places for them to turn once they've decided, for whatever reason in whatever way, that they would like to contribute to the world by helping learners. Soon enough, however, these young teachers learn that idealism isn't practical.

What happens in faculties of education, to squeeze our students into one particular girdle called "teacher?" Students do not always choose the constraints themselves. Sometimes the university helps to pour them into teacher molds, then mounts them like so many Madam Tussaud figures into schools.

Teacher education programs take place with a university, and the university itself is a bureaucracy. As a bureaucratic institution, it has socialized teachers to think bureaucratically. Teachers of teachers are essentially bureaucrats. They think of learning as taking place within disciplined boxes called classrooms. These boxes exist in time and space. These boxes have a particular content (curriculum) and particular theories and practices (assessment and order). And, these boxes are defined in particular ways (who is a student? who is the teacher? who is the administrator? what is the criteria for evaluation? how does success take place?)

When our students graduate, after they have completed courses taken from teachers mostly in classrooms and have student taught or interned in classrooms supervised by subject-area or elementary classroom teachers, they go out and seek "employment opportunities." But, these employment opportunities exist in very narrow parameters. Employment opportunities exist in the form of a job that you apply for by sending a school board a resume. If your resume is good enough, you are interviewed. And, if you meet the criteria for approval designated and administered by a bureaucratic system, you are given a provisional position of employment. If you do well as a temporary staff member, you are accepted into the ranks of permanent employment.

Young teachers learn that they belong to a system where they do not choose, but are chosen. They expect to have the system or school select, from a pool of applicants, the teaching candidate it will work with, choose the time and place where the teaching candidate will practice his or her trade, decide the focus upon which the specific learning that will occur, prescribe the general guidelines that will be used to prescribe the kinds of learning and the ways that this learning will be structured (teaching the curriculum) and that will supposedly bring about this learning. This is the way the system works, and few young people grow to question this system.

Our point in claiming that the system creates its own ethical patterns or mythology is not to raise or encourage a group of rebellious young teachers. But, we are saying that we believe education, and not teaching, is the priority of teacher education. We are also saying that the skills and knowledges that young teacher candidates learn in faculties of education -- things like the

ability to communicate with, care for, and even (dare we suggest) act in loving ways toward other people -- are salable skills outside the narrow confines of the school classroom.

If we can extend the vision of our students to the world and not the classroom.; if we can help them see that their job is to make the world, and not their classroom, a better place to live; and if we can help them see themselves as educators, with a political agenda that helps them understand that all teaching is future-oriented or that a sense of idealism and vocation, a commitment to humanity and service, and an ability to use creativity and imagination are positive things rather than shameful things we can help them become more valuable to society in general and not just in the school classroom.

Instead, we teach our young students that the key ability they have to use is the ability to turn anything into an activity or a mini-lecture. We encourage their orientation to life as "listening" rather than doing. And we forget that teachers are, by definition, lifelong learners, and not just those certificated learners. Because we teach them much about classrooms and schools rather than much about education, we do not help them survive when they can not find jobs within the system. We work on helping them develop their tolerance for incredible levels of noise and adolescent abuse. We encourage them to develop their abilities to respond reflexively with incredible speed at the sound of a bell. But, we do not teach them to think well outside of the confines of the classroom. In fact, we call for more and more time within the classroom. And, as a result of our narrow vision, they are like fish out of water when they are out of their primary environment.

Thinking Entrepreneurially

Why are students in our faculties of education so apparently incapable of thinking entrepreneurially? Why can't they see the opportunities that yawn widely before them? Why are they not able to inscribe a learning event upon the world, or position themselves as the moderator of events, so that they might create a new job for themselves?

The world is more than a place full of schools. Educators teach people, whether they are in schools or not. Business and industry, tourism and government are crying out for educators. These places of business need educators who have sense of how to invite learners closer to the world to see things in new ways, who have learned what kinds of assistance truly help learners understand and use new knowledge and skills, who take for granted their techniques of breaking things down when explaining new content to learners, who ask the right questions and prompt learners to ask their own questions, who search for just the right activity for a learner struggling to internalize a concept, and who are teachers in the broadest sense of the word.

One of the problems with teacher education is that we train students to be teachers who rely on others to evaluate their skills. We also imply, by the way we teach them, that the skills of teaching should be homogeneous. We tend to scrape off their rough edges, rather than seeing these sharp edges as potential razors to cut through the problems and issues.

Teacher education programs teach students to become teachers who don't know their own skills. The program is so fragmented that students say they graduate without a sense of "owning" any particular body of knowledge and skills. A typical new graduating teacher walks down the aisle with what seems to be a patchwork quilt of educational knowledge, which they often describe in bits and pieces: irrelevant psychology like personality theory, a bit of Canadian history, some curriculum theory, several "packages" of subject matter knowledge in erudite matters of Romantic Poets and Organic Chemistry, a few classroom management techniques, a completely planned unit or two of lessons that "work" in some particular grade level, some photocopied "sure hit" instructional games students are guaranteed to love, a thoroughly grilled understanding of teaching codes of ethics and legal liabilities. What these young teachers miss are the questions about just how people learn -- the essence of their knowledge base, which they are told can't be answered. As a result, they don't even try.

Meanwhile, practical teacher knowledge is becoming reified as something so embedded in classroom experience, so localized, so context-bound, so idiosyncratic, and so phenomenologically oriented that new teachers can't possibly have a sense of confidence that they know about anything that truly counts in the real world outside of the classroom. Our attempts to train teachers to work in classrooms have mystified "teacher knowledge" into an elusive amalgam of autobiography -- "personal practical knowledge," narrative folk wisdom that can only be known through problems of practice that essentially demand technical knowledge.

It would be nice to suggest that the debate rages on. But, it does not. Teacher education is an institution largely enshrined in tradition and certain unquestioned assumptions. It is about preparing teachers to work in school situations. It is not about developing personal skills that will be of service in the world outside of the classroom, or of developing pride in individual, personal skills and knowledges. As a result, young teachers face the squishy endeavor of validating their own story by trying to reconcile themselves with the school classroom as opposed to seeing new ways of thinking and doing.

In the meantime, student teachers are struggling in the outside world to even say with pride, I am a teacher. So, how can young teachers own and take a stand upon their teacher knowledge -- the preliminary step for seeing where in the world this knowledge could be valued and useful? Without this preliminary step, young teachers can not even envision a place for themselves outside the school system. Our work has been too successful, and as a result these teachers have been taught to conceptualize themselves and their work as carrying out a series of activities prescribed only by that system and regulated only within that system. These activities include planning lessons, managing groups of children, maintaining multitudinous records, and shrinking difficult concepts into ideas that are easy to understand.

Out of creativity and out of sheer necessity, the opportunities for people with teaching skills and knowledge have begun to be explored. Still there are lots of opportunities to be uncovered. The only people who can create a vision for education outside of the classroom walls are educators who listen to the needs of the world and who help others find a place to live within the world outside of the classroom. These are people who can be helpful by helping

young teachers learn to market their services to people who may not know yet that they need these skills.

Teachers Can Teach Outside of Schools

We know of some university-trained "teachers" who have broken free of the wax mold of the classroom. Many of them have simply transposed what they have learned in their teacher education programs onto new settings outside of schools. Without much alteration, even the old schoolish traditional notions of learning, instructional activities, the role of the teacher as knowledge disseminator, activity designer, and coordinator have worked successfully. If this is true, imagine what would happen if teacher educators understood the opportunities creatively.

There are many examples of teachers creating their own jobs to provide what they discover to be a new and marketable educational service.

"The Imagination Market," a company founded by a couple of teachers, collects industrial waste products from companies to use in workshop activities for kids and for corporations (i.e. team-building workshops) where participants play together creating new things out of discarded industrial spools, fabric ends, cardboard tubes, pieces of rubber and Styrofoam. "Dynamic Learning" is a company in Vancouver, BC. developed by an elementary teacher who, after raising her children, decided to begin offering time management workshops for various groups. Like many other good teachers who provide educational consulting services, the demand for her business expanded quickly to include a variety of topic areas and to hire teachers to facilitate workshops. "The Canadian Home Tutoring Company" based in

Edmonton, Alberta is a profitable business initiated and run by teachers who can design and carefully monitor tutor services for children needing special remedial help and caring. "Seascape" is a flourishing enterprise in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, the brainchild of secondary teacher Bruce Smith . His company employs his skills in physical education to take groups of people on kayak tours: tourists, youth at risk, senior high students studying the environment, and corporations seeking team-building exercises.

These examples of teachers using what they have learned suggests that education is a valuable commodity in our society. The "vision" of education graduates to serve society does not exclude the profit motive. Sometimes this profit motive is necessary to encourage new teachers taking the initiative to create their own employment opportunities?

Where are further opportunities for young teachers with initiative and creativity? Tourism needs educators. Young teachers need to know that they can generate a story out of anything, anywhere, to make a "tourist attraction." There is good business designing educational tours into or out of Canada. Learning brochures must be created by museum designers. One group of women worked with museum people at National gallery to design learning programs for visitors. She teamed up with government agencies to develop tourism.

Gerontology is an area where teachers can work with retired people to design new learning opportunities for people with dollars to spend and time to do it. Newspapers create packages and programs for teachers, and many small community newspapers have not yet been approached by educators willing to

interest them in undertaking the development of these packages. Some filmmakers now have available educational packages for teachers; others can be shown ways to help market their products or services by turning them into educational ventures.

Community development, prior learning assessment, writing materials for teachers and learners, government and teacher associations, and publishers who create monographs all need teachers to design ideas and activities, write and publish books, and take advantage of computer technology to electronically convey materials from one place to another. Distance learning packages and computer learning software has traditionally been controlled by people without a clue about how people learn. This is why there is so much drill and kill software.

Instead of training teachers for old systems, teacher educators need to think of education in terms of entrepreneurialship. Those of us who teach young teachers need to help them learn how to see opportunities. We need to talk to each other as teachers of student teachers and encourage each other to break out of traditional teacher models of classrooms. Instead we need to help our young teachers see education as a vocation, not a job.

Too frequently we train our students to see that the only place they can work is in schools. We need to help our young teachers keep their idealism and add the insight of business. They need to become proud to be a teacher, but more proud to be an educators. Until we can do this, we are putting new wine into old skins. The result is that the skins will burst and the labor will spill out, wasted to the ground.