

Educational Reconstruction and Today's Teacher Education

By Frank Andrews Stone

Most teacher education is now being redesigned and substantially changed. Yet, based on experiences with one innovative program, I contend that many procedures and much that is being taught remains the same. Although the format of instruction may be different, the conventional theoretical rationale is remarkably persistent. Therefore, some aspects of the new teacher education demonstrate in practice educational reconstruction's emphasis on social theory and action, but with considerable ambivalence and inconsistency.

Beginning Interns

On Thursday, September 9, 1993, I am hurrying across the campus through a light rain for the first seminar with juniors in our teacher education program. Last spring they applied for admission into the three year teacher education sequence as sophomores. Their being selected requires that they have better than average academic achievement and have a successful interview with a faculty screening committee. Now, as I walk through the classroom door a few minutes before the 3:30 p.m. schedule, I'm surprised that most of the students are already there. There are 14 women and three men

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when all have arrived. As they introduce themselves, they name their liberal arts undergraduate major field of study at the University. Aside from one person in special education, they seem to be evenly divided between future careers in elementary and secondary education.

The basis on which they have been grouped into this particular seminar is the geographical location of the Professional Development Center (PDC) where each student will be interning one day a week this semester. Most are assigned to an elementary school, the Middle School, or the Edwin O. Smith High School, all in Mansfield, Connecticut, the hometown of the University. Several will be working in nearby Ashford, a relatively rural community, and one in Tolland, a next door "bedroom" suburb of Greater Hartford.

These young people appear to be the products of having been raised in towns similar to those where they will be interning this semester. They all seem to be of European extraction, although, knowing something about the cultural diversity in Connecticut, I suspect that plenty of variety exists among them. I'll have to get to know them better, but doubtless several are the children of recent immigrants. Others will probably be of Yankee stock resident in southern New England since the colonial era. They identify themselves as being socio-economically middle class, which isn't surprising because most of the people who prepare for careers as educators come from this stratum of society.

All of the students in my class are new to teacher education, so I take a minute to explain to them how the components of our Holmes Group-type program interface. Two early mornings each week, in addition to their liberal arts classes, these young people have already begun attending core courses. The first semester of the junior year, for example, they begin by studying a one credit module, "Learning I." It is an introduction to behavioral and cognitive psychology. They will also have two other core modules on "Multiculturalism, Equity and Excellence," and "Exceptionality I." Subsequent core instruction will concern educational technology, the social context of schooling, and assessing learning. As university seniors they will study a module on "Philosophical Tools for Teachers," and have more advanced instruction on "Assessment of Learning" and "Exceptionality." Their teacher education core as seniors, additionally, includes subject specific pre-preparation to be elementary, secondary, or special educators. This new format, in operation only since fall 1991, integrates their Bachelor's and Master's degrees into a five-year program. Each individual earns a degree in the liberal arts and sciences followed by a graduate year of full-time study in education leading to certification and a Master of Arts in Education degree.

The core courses, which all of our teacher education students take together regardless of their anticipated educational specialization, are one of the three major components. The other vital aspects of the new teacher education are the students' clinical experiences as interns at PDCs throughout a three-year period. Everybody interns in a variety of social contexts. An important part of their clinic experience

will be in inner city/urban settings such as East Hartford, Hartford, or Windham. This extensive three-year student teaching component is designed to have four phases: introductory (where this group of juniors is beginning), initial teaching, take-over, and wrap-up. The phases are analyzed in the handbook that each student receives (*Teacher Education Preparation Handbook*, 1993).

The weekly hour and a half long seminar, I tell the students, is supposed to be the “peanut butter” joining their core and clinic work. Three types of activities occur in the seminars. First, all students are asked to maintain a cumulative Pedagogy Journal throughout their junior and senior years of clinics and student teaching. It is in the seminars that the internship experiences that have been recorded and interpreted can be shared and compared. The student journals are to contain written reflections and analyses. Their basis is the conviction that by thinking about and deliberating on our actions as educators, we can bring about “change in education—on a personal, classroom, and school level” (*Teacher Education Preparation Handbook*, p. 9).

Each of the instructors or instructional teams of a core module drafts some possible discussion questions concerning issues that were raised in class that week. These can be the basis of some of the seminar interaction. I also offer to the people in my group to focus on concerns that the student interns may be having that aren’t directly related to either their journal entries or the core material. I explain, for instance, that I have found other types of psychology besides behavioral and cognitive theories helpful in my own teaching. I briefly describe humanistic psychology, gestalt, and phenomenology. Several students express their interest in knowing more about how these alternatives operate in classroom management and as learning strategies. If we’re able to examine them a bit, I think, this may help to loosen the tenacious grip that the advocates of behaviorism have on our current teacher education program.

The seminar students are then asked to express some of the things that they hope to learn as interns at their PDCs this semester. I write their responses on the chalkboard. They say that they hope to learn how to work well with their cooperating teachers. They hope to find out how to communicate effectively with parents. They would like to be able to overcome their initial nervousness and stage fright.

The conversation slows down as the initial speakers have their say. At that point, I ask if they aren’t also anxious to learn how to relate well to students who have different socio-cultural backgrounds than theirs. Don’t they hope to be able to teach inner city African-American and Puerto Rican kids? How about refugees and new immigrants? Or children of single parent families on welfare who live in housing projects? One young woman replies that these issues are on her mind because she plans to have a career in urban education. Another person correctly points out that their first PDC assignments are in middle-class, white suburbia. Soon the room is silent until I take out my camera, asking that students photograph one another for the seminar log.

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What the seminar members have said is true, but it has impressed me how, at least in the beginning, these 17 teacher education students are focusing primarily on the microcosms of immediate interpersonal relations and classroom dynamics. They don't also want to take into consideration the institutional structure of the local school. Not much attention is paid to the neighborhood or community as the sites of much informal learning. They don't talk about the social crises being encountered in our state and nation. I don't hear much of a global perspective being articulated either. Hopefully, these broader social and intercultural dimensions will be recognized as the students proceed with their teacher education. For many reasons, however, that is not their starting point.

The Social Context of Our Teacher Education

The professional preparation of new teachers takes place in a framework that is much broader than any one university, school, or particular classroom, cooperating teacher, and group of students. What happens in immediate interpersonal relations, in fact, is always being affected by the larger flow of events. It is necessary in order to comprehend the motivation for reforming teacher education to know that an Educational Enhancement Act was passed by the Connecticut State Legislature in 1986. It mandated substantial increases in Connecticut teachers' salaries, while offering only temporary state grants to assist towns to implement this policy. Thus, for the first time, a teaching career began to appeal to young people as being as financially remunerative as many other competing options. Subsequently, when the recession deepened and town budgets became hard-pressed, there was an ambivalence about the wisdom of this decision, but it is still in force.

As a result of the Act, however, teachers now had to be able to demonstrate enhanced qualifications and effectiveness. They were required to either score above average on the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) or pass a basic competencies examination. It is also now necessary that they succeed on examinations of their subject area knowledge. After being hired as beginning teachers, each individual is provided with an experienced teacher as a mentor. Certification has also become differentiated, with participation in inservice professional development activities required for renewal. Teaching in a Connecticut public school system after the late 1980s, therefore, has become much more demanding and challenging than it was previously.

Most of these changes, of course, are not unique to our state. Rather, they are linked to national and global innovations that followed the public's becoming aware of the educational crisis with the publication of *A Nation At Risk* and similar reports starting in 1983. Suddenly, people realized our national problem of extensive functional illiteracies. They began to recognize that too few in the American work force had been prepared to cope well with rapid technological change. Most of our citizens lacked adequate skills for critical thinking, and

frequently their moral development had been neglected as well. They knew little about world geography or global economics. Most of our citizens were standing helplessly by while thousands of production jobs were transferred overseas. The end of the Cold War, for instance, left Connecticut still dependent on defense industries that were now outmoded.

Many Americans continue to lack fluency in the foreign languages that are vital if the United States is to function in the global marketplace. Thus a new generation of professional educators have to be prepared who are capable of addressing these urgent problems in our society. This is certainly part of the rationale for developing the Holmes Group-type of teacher education that was introduced at the University of Connecticut in 1989.

The difficulty now being encountered, however, is that the high academic achievers who are being admitted into the teacher preparation program are the products of 1970s and 1980s schools. Their own formative learning may not have included dimensions that are now considered essential. Worse, in most cases today's teacher education students attended schools that were defacto racially and socio-economically segregated. They grew up in an American society that is, overall, multicultural and pluralistic, but they were raised in homes and neighborhoods generally more culturally homogeneous than heterogeneous. They have inherited an informal legacy of white, middle-class cultural hegemony, of which they may not even be aware, that is difficult for them to loosen and shake off.

Yet, concurrent with the beginning of our new approach to teacher education, what promises to be a landmark school desegregation case was being opened in the Connecticut Superior Court. Supported by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), ten families became the plaintiffs in *Sheff vs. O'Neill* (the former Governor of Connecticut). Their suit aiming at court ordered desegregation of the Greater Hartford Area schools has gone to trial, and the decision should be handed down this fall. It concerns the very PDCs where our students are interning and is based on this rationale:

Racial and ethnic segregation in the schools of Greater Hartford is obvious, flagrant, and getting worse. Well over 90 percent of Hartford's school children belong to minority groups. Well over 90 percent of the schoolchildren in suburban towns surrounding Hartford are white. One-third of the educators in Hartford's public schools belong to minority groups. In only one suburban school system does the number of minority educators exceed 5 percent.

The underlying cause of segregation in Hartford and everywhere else is racism. Even in the absence of malice, segregation is sustained by the legacy of centuries of racist attitudes and by institutionalized racial discrimination.

The pattern of separate and unequal schools in the Hartford area is not new. Nor is awareness of the pattern new. Since the mid-1960s Connecticut governors and other state officials responsible for public education have known about the school

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segregation problem. The U.S. Civil Rights Commission has documented the problem and called for solutions. School superintendents, the Hartford Board of Education, the State Board of Education and the Connecticut Legislature have at various times noted the problem, investigated it, and proposed remedies.

These public officials have had the power to correct racial imbalance in the schools. But they have failed to act. The pattern of segregation is today far worse than it was when officials first began deploring it a quarter of a century ago. ("Court Action Needed...", 1989)

Sheff vs. O'Neill achieved extensive coverage and debate in the mass media. The testimony given at the trial portrayed the negative impact of defacto segregation on the region's schoolchildren. A module of instruction about multicultural education was included in our new teacher education program from the beginning, but it never produced either a careful examination of the *Sheff vs. O'Neill* press coverage or attendance at the trial during the months when it was going on in nearby West Hartford. Twenty-three articles, mainly from *The Hartford Courant* from 1989 to 1993, were compiled and arranged chronologically for use in a small graduate seminar on "Contemporary Theories of Education" that I taught last spring. The argument for them being analyzed by these graduate students was that they contained philosophical content and were "illustrative of the development of lines of argumentation and logic in *Sheff vs. O'Neill*" (Stone, 1993).

The findings of the seminar were that originally it was being argued that the suburban schools were just as culturally imbalanced as were the inner city institutions. This position, however, changed as the evidence mounted that comparable instruction and resources weren't being provided in the urban schools. It also became apparent that far more of the minority children in the Hartford Public Schools were underachieving in the basics: reading, writing, and arithmetic. The plaintiffs in the lawsuit claim that voluntary school desegregation plans are insufficient because basic constitutional rights are at issue. They don't want to prescribe how to achieve it, but believe that court involvement is needed in order to create "an integrated system of quality public education for all the schoolchildren of Connecticut" ("Court Action Needed...", 1989).

Among the possible remedies that Judge Harry Hammer could require might be intra-district, regional schools, magnet schools, and suburban-urban-rural regions. Extensive testimony by many nationally recognized experts such as William Trent of the University of Illinois and Gary Natriello of Teachers College, Columbia University, is found in the transcripts of the trial. The data that they give and their recommendations would be valuable for our teacher education students to know. Although copies of the anthology of *Sheff vs. O'Neill* newspaper clippings were shared with teacher education colleagues, it seems that little of its contents ever reached our preservice students (Noel, 1992).

The *Sheff vs. O'Neill* case, however, brought about "An Act Improving

Educational Quality and Diversity” passed by the Connecticut Legislature to take effect on July 1, 1993. It does not dictate a state school desegregation plan, nor is it a mandate for forced busing. Rather:

the new plan sets forth a process through which local officials, parents, teachers, students, and business and civic leaders meet in each community to assess the needs of the school district and discuss proposals for contributions the school district and community can make (toward quality integrated education) to the region. (*Questions and Answers*, 1993, p. 3)

Eleven regions are established in Connecticut, and the local community phase this fall is to be followed by regional planning sessions. A “voluntary, cooperative interdistrict Education and Community Improvement Plan” is to be the outcome of this 18-month process (*Questions and Answers*, 1993).

Thus, the state authorities tried to get a head start prior to the handing down of the *Sheff vs. O’Neill* decision. The process that is enjoined in the newly passed act provides a prime living laboratory for teacher education students. Efforts will be made to inform them about the issues at stake and facilitate their participating in the community and regional planning processes as a logical extension of their interning in local schools (PDCs).

The Educational Reconstruction Connection

Recently educational reconstruction has been interpreted as a perspective that is based on four premises.

First, advocates of educational reconstruction assert that all philosophies, including educational ones, are **culturally based**; such philosophies grow out of identifiable cultural patterns that are shaped by living in a particular place in the world at a given time.

Second, culture is a **dynamic process** that constantly grows and changes.

Third, human beings can and do refashion their cultures to promote more **optimum possibilities** for humanity’s development and fulfillment.

Fourth, education—broadly conceived as popular, lifelong learning as well as schooling—is a powerful means of **radical social transformation** (Gutek, 1974, p. 163 as adapted).

In the announcement of an essay competition celebrating the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Society for Educational Reconstruction, it is said that educational reconstruction:

...is articulated in the writings of Theodore Brameld, George S. Counts, and William O. Stanley. Other voices of educational reconstruction include Kenneth D. Benne, Elise Boulding, William Boyer, Morris Mitchell, and Myles Horton. Some of the characteristic diction and typical concepts of these writers include the recognition of our current **global crisis**, the advocacy of involving educators and educational programs in **resolving social problems**, the viewing of conflict as a

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potentially valuable vehicle through which **operational consensus** can be obtained, and the commitment to engage in **utopian thinking** and **anthropotherapy**. Educational reconstruction is distinguished from many alternative views by its insistence that rhetoric and theory are insufficient until applied and tested in action. Its locus is not discourse, but planned, intentional praxis that is refined and improved through collaboration and reflective experience. ("Announcing An Essay Competition...", 1992, pp. 1-2)

This way of thinking and acting, to some extent, could be claimed as the basis for Holmes Group-type teacher education. The new programs are much more activist than were the old ones. University faculty now collaborate with the professional teachers of the PDCs. Most teacher education professors are now spending at least a fifth of their working time in the school, rather than in their offices or classrooms on campus. So the question can be raised, "Is educational reconstruction the un-named philosophy underlying Holmes Group-type teacher education?"

We cannot, of course, generalize from a case study of only one teacher education program. Yet some of its aspects probably are fairly widespread. Also, it was not feasible to conduct extensive research regarding the role of educational reconstruction even in this single instance. Interviews, however, were conducted with two educational studies colleagues, a younger male and an older female professor. They have both been very active in our new teacher education program as core instructors, seminar leaders, and resource people at PDCs. It happens that the schools where these two people have been working are both in inner city Hartford.

The male informant said:

The foundations component of teacher education at the University of Connecticut takes place basically in four one credit modules...The four courses are "Multicultural Education," the "Social Context of Schooling," "Philosophical Tools for Teachers," and "Professional Ethics for Educators." And that's spread out throughout the three years of the teacher education program. The common thread that holds all these four courses together is absolutely consistent, in my view, with a social reconstructionist view. We're really teaching the only courses in the teacher education program, so far as I know, that envision students working in a socio-economic, cultural, political sort of context. In a sense, all the other courses, as useful as they may be, are technical courses. And, perhaps, "technicist" courses.

He goes on to say:

And, in my view, only in educational studies courses are students asked to look beyond that and examine issues from a critical perspective. You know...not just, "How can I teach the curriculum better?" but, "What is in the curriculum? Why is it there? How does this fit with making the society a better one?"

Later on in the interview this informant was asked:

...How do you think that teacher education students—we've now had three years of this program, so we're fairly well into it—how would you think that they would be aware or conceive of educational reconstruction? If that term is encountered, what do they think about it? Do they have anything that they would conceive to be reconstructionist in nature?

The reply was:

They have heard the term. Whether they remember the term is a different matter. But they would feel, I think, if you asked them what education is all about, the vast majority will articulate a view of learning and the educated person that is essentially an educational reconstructionist position. (Interview with Timothy G. Reagan, 1993)

This professor goes on to mention the participation of some of our teacher education students in a pilot program for inner city students from Hartford. It was held at Paul Newman's "Hole-in-the-Wall Gang Camp" in rural Ashford. The aim is to take "at risk" urban kids out of the city and give them several weeks of learning to get along with each other and relate better to other people. The program has an academic component, but it is really about socialization. Our second-year teacher education students were helping to provide these inner city youngsters with the kind of middle-class experience that they otherwise would not have. This commitment on the part of our students was above and beyond their regular clinical interning. It demonstrates that they do respond to opportunities to engage in socially relevant action, although they probably don't associate this with educational reconstruction.

Another project in which this professor has been involved is developing a global studies curriculum with faculty members at Bulkeley High School in Hartford. After more than a year of planning and studying about world issues, the new program will be introduced at the high school this year. It has been especially designed for students who are predominantly African American and Puerto Rican. Bulkeley High School is located near the South Green and "Frog Hollow" neighborhoods of the city where there has been gang warfare this fall. After four shooting deaths of gang members, the state police had to be called in to help the city force bring the situation under control. This, then, is part of the reality that an effective global studies curriculum must address.

The new global studies curriculum at Bulkeley High School contains a unit on the processes used to bring an end to apartheid, the official policy of racial segregation in the Republic of South Africa. The students also study about human rights issues in other African countries. There is instruction regarding Asian affairs, in particular issues in China, Japan, and the Philippines. Another aspect of this program is examining the impact of world religions, particularly the rise of more strident forms of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. All of these faiths are now represented by good-sized communities of believers in the Greater Hartford area.

Another extensive interview was also conducted with a female professor who

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has had several years of experience with the new teacher education program. She talked about her work at an inner city elementary school in Hartford:

I decided to go into Maria Sanchez (Elementary School) this year because it is a brand new school, just off of Park Street in probably the worst part of Hartford. It is a beautiful physical facility. When you walk into the school, it is gorgeous, and they have a parking lot under the school. For a number of reasons, they do it that way. I had students in my junior seminar who were interns there, so I had to observe them anyway. And there was one master's student who was there on a special project.

I got talking to these people, realizing that this is a very good situation for our students to go in and learn about education. Sanchez is 95 per cent Hispanic. When the school was set up the principal, at least people say, had her pick of teachers for the new school. So she picked...she had been an assistant before...so she picked those who she believed were the very best people. So you have a very dynamic faculty. You go around talking to the teachers, and there is a real spirit that they are putting together something new....

This informant goes on to interpret what she observed in the field:

Basically what they are doing in the school is that they are participating in what is happening at a lot of schools around the country. That is restructuring or participatory management. Teachers have much more voice in policy decisions. But at the same time the principal has to be comfortable with that. Some rule over schools like they were their own fiefdom. The idea is to work together with teachers.

Well, they brought in an outside consultant at Maria Sanchez, and she set up all these meetings. They have grade-level and inter-grade meetings, as well as subject area meetings. So that it facilitates faculty cooperation. In the first year of operation they are trying to do a lot. At the school they are trying to come up with a completely different mode of decision-making....

On the one hand you see a lot of excitement about decision-making. But on the other hand you see quite a bit of stress on the part of the teachers. (Interview with Patricia S. Weibust, 1993)

A large part of the interview concerns this informant's activities at this inner city elementary school. She recounts visiting class, conferring with administrators, talking with the school psychologist, and interacting with the schoolchildren. She also had many conversations with the teacher education students interning at the PDC. Thus, she believes that considerable change was happening not only at this new institution, but also in the processes related to our teacher education program.

The diversity of special needs among the children who attend the Maria Sanchez School is a topic that this person spoke about. Children come, she says, with many cultural, economic, emotional, mental, and physical inhibitions to learning. While trying to recognize, diagnose, and meet these challenges, she is

convinced that the future educators are becoming much more sensitive and skilled than if their student teaching had been limited to suburban, white, middle-class America.

A special education center that has been established in the school is described. At first the approach was to keep the special needs children in their regular classrooms. The special education teachers would come there in order to help the classroom teacher. This, however, didn't work out well because the exceptional child wasn't receiving sufficient attention. So an alternative approach was instituted that seems to be more effective in this situation.

This professor hopes to be able to collaborate with teachers at the Maria Sanchez School who want to do some qualitative research. The teachers want to investigate what the impact of the school's policies and practices are on the children. The problem has been, however, that during the first year they were simply too busy to implement their desire to become teacher researchers.

When asked to give her personal perspective of educational reconstruction, this informant, who is professionally an educational anthropologist, replied:

...My comprehension of it is that reconstruction is involved with education—formal, informal and so on—with the aim of social action for change. And my understanding is that there is no (predetermined) agenda for that change....in other words, one could be engaged in a whole lot of different goals for change. The fact is that it is active and affecting the change process directly. It reminds me of what the Quakers do...direct social activism.

Regarding the influence of educational reconstruction on the teacher education students, she concludes that they are proudly committed to change in the schools. But they actually know very little about educational reconstruction as a broad social philosophy. There is plenty of active participation on their part, in other words, but most of it isn't directly linked with any theory in the individual's thinking.

Tentative Conclusions

It is obvious from the information and interpretations presented in this article that teacher education takes place in a dynamic socio-cultural context. Considering the apprentice-like heritage of traditional student teaching, however, it is not surprising that students who are entering the Holmes Group-type teacher education program still focus primarily on the immediate classroom and particular cooperating teacher to whom they have been assigned as interns at a PDC. Only later, especially when they are working in an inner-city setting, are they likely to become aware of the broader cultural, economic, and political aspects of the public schools in American society.

A clear finding is that some philosophical tension exists among the teacher education faculty. The dominant perspective remains that of conventional scientific positivism. This is what the future educators are inducted into, although many of

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them articulate a much more social activist posture. Referring to their educational formation, one of the informants asserted regarding our students that:

...they'd be more likely to use the terminology of behaviorism because semester after semester, not only from their educational psychology courses, but they also hear it in schools. They are using the terminology and arguing about the terminology in ways that are really not behavioristic in nature. (Interview with Reagan, 1993)

This same professor recognizes that little tangible is currently being taught about educational reconstruction. He claims, however:

In a sense, what I think we have managed to do successfully is to subvert what they are learning in other courses.

His contention is explained by pointing out that many of the students' field experiences contain touches of educational reconstruction. Unnamed, he perceives it is implied in the issues and innovations that they encounter. This teacher educator concludes:

It might be nice for them to have all the terminology that we might think of. But on the other hand, if I have to choose between them having the knowledge and the values, I prefer them having the values.

His perspective is doubtless a comforting outlook for faculty engaged in teacher education. It points up, however, two pressing needs. First, much more dialogue and collaborative work might produce sufficient operational consensus so that teacher education could cease being intellectually bifurcated. Second, teacher education materials in the 1990s ought to include clear, up-to-date articulations of educational reconstruction as a cultural philosophy option. There must also be engaging accounts of this rationale in action. Lacking them, it is unlikely that this potent method of applied inquiry will be of much benefit to the new generation of professional teachers.

My mind swings back to the 17 neophyte interns I began meeting with in a weekly seminar at the start of the fall semester. They are very talented students, but they are getting mixed messages. Little in the program encourages them to do the critical thinking and reflective social analysis advocated by educational reconstruction. Several weeks ago, for example, they were totally unaware of the new state legislation requiring discussions about how local school systems can best achieve quality, integrated education. When they did begin to inquire about what is happening regarding this mandate in their PDC, it seems that little is yet taking place.

The message being relayed to our seminar is that in these suburban communities and institutions the issues that are the basis of *Sheff vs. O'Neill* aren't considered to be very important. So, lacking another influence on their thinking and conduct, these prospective teachers are being inducted into the educational establishment. They, too, along with the authors of *A Nation At Risk*, will conclude that the crisis

has to do with winning a global competition and re-establishing economic dominance, rather than changing our fundamental educational processes to make them more just and empowering for all of our citizens.

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