Is the Trouble with Ed Schools?

By Robbie McClintock

The Trouble with Ed Schools by David F. Labaree. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Refreshingly, in *The Trouble with Ed Schools*, David F. Labaree seeks to explain problems confronting schools of education, neither to attack nor to defend them. Labaree's recent book, based on articles he published over the prior decade, starts with the observation that schools of education now have – and have long had – very low status in the view of both academe and the public at large. He aims to explain the sources and consequences of this status problem. Unfortunately, his explanation is unsound and its consequences far too passive.

Two matters are particularly troubling about *The Trouble with Ed Schools*. First, Labaree's analysis has a tone that is entirely too meek and apologetic. Throughout his analysis of status, Labaree fails to challenge himself or his readers to look beyond the schools of education and the literature pertaining to them. Looking only inward and seeing no grounds for overcoming the weaknesses from which ed schools suffer, he grants too much to the critics of progressive pedagogy in order, from a position of weakness, to quiet criticism. Second, and most seriously, by sticking closely to the perspectives internal to schools of education, he fails to perceive the way schools of education can, and must, overcome the trade-off between academic excellence and professional relevance that has so long beset them. The trouble is not simply or primarily status; the trouble involves deficient organization and a confusion of functions, all of which is susceptible to effective corrective measures.

Readers of Labaree's previous book, *How to Succeed in School without Really Learning*, will find aspects of his argument in *The Trouble with Ed Schools* familiar, for Labaree reuses much of Chapters 6 and 9 of the previous study, almost verbatim, as he explains the status problems of schools of education in the current book.[1] Here, after an introductory chapter framing his argument, Labaree presents, in chapters 2 through 6, an historical-structural explanation of the status problems in ed schools. These show how historical conditions pressed schools of education to the bottom of the academic status hierarchy and how structural conditions associated with their low status continue to prevent significant improvements.

Chapter 2 starts the analysis with an historical survey showing how market forces drove the development of ed schools, but served them badly. They emerged to meet the demand for the numerous teachers needed to staff an emergent public school system, primarily young women who would stand at the bottom of the

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[1] See David F. Labaree, *How to Succeed in School without Really Learning: The Credentials Race in American Education* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), esp. pp. 129-159 and 223-249.

professional hierarchy. Normal schools offered just enough preparation and school districts just enough pay to provide the nation's expanding schools sufficient staff at minimal cost, and the status of normal schools was no better than the teaching profession and its prospective recruits.

In due course, the normal school became the ed school, a component of new four-year colleges and then local universities, with new types of students who lacked the posh status of students who had traditionally attended the elite colleges. As normal schools had done, these institutions offered a wider range of usable knowledge to more and more students. When knowledge is merely usable, it is low-status knowledge, according to Labaree. Throughout the expansion of higher education, teacher education provided the members of a semi-profession with knowledge that was merely usable and the complicated array of market pressures driving its development "left it with a disabling legacy." As a result of these developments, education schools "continue to occupy a status at the lower end of the educational hierarchy, which has both undermined their ability to carry on sound programs of professional preparation and interfered with efforts to strengthen these programs."(38).

Once historical conditions had established the low status of ed schools, structural difficulties impinging on them have precluded any possibility for improvement. Labaree analyzes these structural impediments in three chapters by examining three "peculiar problems," the problems of preparing teachers, of doing educational research, and of preparing educational researchers. These functions are peculiar in two senses. They belong distinctively to ed schools and they are, relative to other components of higher education, rather unusual, even eccentric. And Labaree perhaps characterizes them as peculiar, not unique or distinctive, to capture a third sense suggesting how low in status ed schools stand, for the phrase resonates with the heritage of exploitation and rejection chronicled so well by Kenneth Stamp in his study of slavery in the antebellum South, *The Peculiar Institution*.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the first of these peculiar problems, preparing teachers. Teaching differs from other professions, which look difficult and even dangerous, for instance, surgery. In contrast, "teaching is an enormously difficult job that looks easy"(39). As a result, the public comes to condescend towards teachers, as everyone has observed the work of quite a number up close for extended periods in their role as students. If people believe that teachers in general are doing a lousy job, they infer that the ed schools must be miserable if they cannot engender competence in such a simple endeavor.

However easy teaching may have looked from the student's vantage point, Labaree points out that teaching is uniquely difficult. Success depends on the client's cooperation, which is especially difficult to secure with a compulsory clientèle. Most professionals deal one to one at an emotional distance with a client. In contrast, teachers work in isolation, trying to motivate 20 to 30 or more people emotionally to master a prescribed set of curricular materials. Further, in most

professions success or failure is clear cut – the plaintiff wins or looses; the patient lives or dies. In contrast, success or failure in teaching is difficult to discern. A particular teacher contributes a small, distinctive part to the complicated development each student undergoes. Deciding whether a teacher is effective, we might say, is rather like determining whether a particular piece in a complicated mosaic is good or bad. How can one assess the contribution of the single piece to the complex work as a whole?

In the end, preparing teachers is peculiar because "teacher and teacher educator put themselves in a position that diminishes their own status and power in order to enhance the capacity and independence of their students. This distinctive mode of professional practice helps explain much of the disdain that both professions must endure, but at the same time this quixotic selflessness also endows teachers and teacher educators with just a hint of frayed nobility"(61).

In the next chapter, Labaree compares peculiarities in educational research to other forms of research. These aggravate the status problems of ed schools. Labaree uses two polarities to characterize research results – hard versus soft knowledge and pure versus applied knowledge. Hard knowledge claims to be "verifiable, definitive, and cumulative;" soft knowledge involves "description and interpretation" and soft fields recurrently recapitulate themselves. (63) The work of pure knowledge consists primarily in the construction of theory; the work of applied knowledge in the ad hoc solution of practical problems.(65-6) Educational research tends to be both soft and applied, a prescription for low status in academic hierarchies. A third polarity between exchange value and use value has particular importance throughout Labaree's study. Exchange value enables one to exchange something for something else of intrinsic value "such as a good job or a nice standard of living." Use value provides "a set of skills and an accumulation of knowledge that will prove useful"(69). Educational research has low exchange value because it is both soft and applied, and its value lies in its uses, which are unfortunately uses that generally carry low prestige. Labaree examines at some length the organizational consequences of these values, some of which he sees as negative and others positive.

Labaree's third peculiarity concerns the preparation of educational researchers, the topic of Chapter 5. Doctoral programs in schools of education "aim to turn experienced educational practitioners into accomplished educational scholars"(83). Hence, they encounter peculiar difficulties arising from the need to convert teachers into researchers. It does not seem to have occurred to Labaree to ask why in education it is typical to expect educational researchers to have had significant prior preparation and experience as educational practitioners. Many other professions develop people to be either researchers or practitioners.

Be that as it may, teachers bring some advantages as prospective researchers, among them maturity, professional experience, a sense of dedication, and good academic skills. But the ethos of teaching differs significantly from that of research.

As a result, the doctoral process needs to effect four conversions: first, the normative concern of the teacher, who seeks to do good for the student, becomes the analytical style of the researcher, who seeks valid explanations; second, the taste for person-to-person interaction transforms into a preference for intellectual argumentation; third, an instinct for action on particulars broadens into a search for universals, for concepts, generalizations, and theories; and fourth, the experiential domain of the teacher gives way to the theoretical realm of the researcher. These shifts are difficult, and rarely does the prior education of teachers prepare the ground well: usually they have a limited foundation in the liberal arts and a professional preparation that downplays both research skill and achievement. Consequently, the preparation of quality researchers through schools of education is peculiarly difficult compared to preparing researchers in other components of academe.

Having surveyed these three peculiarities, preparing teachers, doing educational research, and preparing educational researchers, Labaree culminates his analysis of status problems in Chapter 6. Structural difficulties confront education professors with intractable status difficulties, a trade-off that they cannot resolve well. Ed school professors stand at the bottom of the academic pecking order, a position that studies of the professoriate confirm and peers make plain. Further, debilitating status differences among education professors result as some engage in doctoral preparation and serious research and others concentrate on teacher education and curricular development. As a group, they must pursue excellence in both directions, but cannot, for progress in one direction undercuts that in the other. Wannabe efforts to improve status in the research university generally lower the credibility of the ed school faculty among practitioners, while efforts to win the respect of practitioners diminish its standing in the university. "The middle position is a difficult one to sustain, as the two poles draw ed schools to cast their lot with either the university or the schools but not both"(128).

Here Labaree ends his analysis of the status problems that ed schools suffer, leaving the education professoriate caught on the horns of the dilemma: either academic excellence or professional effect, but not both. True, he had been explicit at the outset – *The Trouble with Ed Schools* is "not a reform document, proposing the changes that are needed in order to rescue the education school from its present sad state. It is not intended as an attack on this institution, a defense of it, or a prescription for it. . . . The aim is to explore the roots and the implications of education's problems of status and function and not to cure these problems"(9). Forewarned, we have few grounds to object as Labaree leaves us stuck with the situation. Yet, his intent to avoid prescription incites some resistance, especially while reading his two concluding chapters, which follow as a sort of denouement. In these, Labaree slips into a mode of mild prescription, one that seems wrongheaded and insufficient, in effect a quiescent apology for the status quo.

A well-intentioned scholar, Labaree avoids blaming the victim by eschewing a

reform agenda, concentrating on explanation without criticism, defense, or prescription. But there is a risk, for the result merely reconciles readers, those in ed schools and those without, to a debilitating situation. Through the first six chapters, the analysis amounts to a lament: we suffer from a problem we neither made nor control. Then, in his two concluding chapters, "with just a hint of frayed nobility," Labaree voices a bleak positive message – *let us carry on*. To those within the ed schools, the message is Stoic, let us *carry on*, exerting more care not to raise the hackles of our critics; to those outside the ed schools the message is more plaintive, please, *let us* carry on with what we do through the ed schools, for they have necessary, yet humble uses in the fulfillment of which they can do little harm.

A big jump takes place between Labaree's discussion of the dilemma facing professors of education, which culminates his analysis of status, and the next chapter, the longest, on the ed schools romance with progressivism. At first, this chapter seems disconnected to his overall argument, for the question of status disappears. Labaree opens by observing that ed schools generally propound a progressive vision of education. He then notes that "the relationship between education professors and our beliefs is particularly important in the current politics of education, because a number of critics blame education professors and our progressive ideology for many of the ills that afflict American schooling."(129)

A long analysis of how progressivism gained dominance in schools of education, largely based on the secondary literature from Lawrence Cremin's *Transformation of the School* onward, then follows. Labaree distinguishes between two strands of progressivism, pedagogical progressivism, rooted in romanticism and wedded to both developmentalism and the project method, and administrative progressivism, whose vision was "strictly utilitarian," promoting social efficiency by making schools efficient in their own operation and making them operate efficiently to meet the economic and social needs of society.(146) By 1940, administrative progressivism had become the standard mode of operation in the nation's schools, although its hold on ed schools was marginal. In contrast, by early in the twentieth century, pedagogical progressivism had become the rhetoric of ed schools, a rhetoric instilled with a minimal purchase on practice. Despite this ineffectuality, the rhetoric of pedagogical progressivism has persisted because it legitimates the way schools of education concentrate on educational process while deemphasizing educative content. The rhetoric is merely cosmetic, Labaree contends, and it causes trouble by goading critics to blame ed schools for the ills that they believe are ruining American schools. How does the romance with progressivism relate to the problem of status?

In the last chapter, Labaree draws the primary analysis of status together with his secondary survey of progressivism. He declares partial agreement with the critics of pedagogical progressivism, particularly E. D. Hirsch. In Labaree's view, Hirsch correctly demonstrated how progressive ideas could weaken the content of the curriculum. But possibilities do not automatically become actualities, Labaree observes. Correct in theory, Hirsch, Diane Ravitch, Jeanne Chall, Chester Finn, and

other critics have not demonstrated that the progressive cant purveyed by ed schools has in fact had any effect on school practice, good or bad. Furthermore, close observers of historical practice such as David Tyack suggest that pedagogical progressivism has not shaped classroom practice. Thus, Labaree in essence grants to critics that their arguments are theoretically correct, but adds that in practice the influence of ed schools was too weak to cause the problems for which the critics hold them responsible, "dumbing down learning and stratifying curriculum."(194)

Don't blame the ed schools for what is wrong. Others did it: the administrative progressives ensconced in the schools and the rampant consumerism of the public itself. And if the ed schools have wrought little harm, do not expect them to do much good. On current issues, questions of standards, school choice, and teacher preparation, the public rightly discounts their voice as too self-interested on such matters. Hence, the ed schools have little effect in public debate about the big problems of school practice. Not only are they irrelevant in setting public policy about school practice, they also have little influence on intramural issues within the universities. Schools of education might exert exemplary leadership within higher education by helping the university imbue other programs high in exchange value with a modicum of use value. Exchange value rules in higher education as students pursue prestige, flocking after credentials high in exchange value and paying excessive tuitions for knowledge devoid of real use. For Labaree, ed schools are a humble archipelago offering "traditionally low-cost programs that are explicitly designed to be useful, both to students and to the community."(203) Ed schools could be exemplary, but the rest of academe is likely to shun their example. Since ed schools stand at the bottom and get no respect, the university is unlikely to learn from them. All the more reason to, please, let us be.

We learn a lot about the status problems of ed schools and their faculties from Labaree's book, but do we learn enough? I think we do not. Labaree's thesis is too wilting, too accommodating, too reconciled to the discontents and disabilities of the status quo. Over and over, Labaree speaks of the "lowly status" of ed schools. Why lowly?[2] A "lowly status" would seem to mean a meek and humble status, as distinct from a status that is simply low. Repetition of the term makes the discourse cringe, as if ed schools are some stooped figure, undernourished, shoulders bent forward, head tucked protectively, hat clutched in both hands and crumpled to the chest,

[2] "Lowly status" is a phrase that Labaree uses throughout *Trouble*, in the titles of the first two chapters and repetitively in the text. The phrase appears in the title of a chapter in *How to Succeed in School*, and in the title of the chapter Labaree contributed to *Teacher Education in Industrialized Nations* edited by Nobuo K. Shimahara and Ivan Z. Holowinsky (New York: Garland 1995). Labaree seems to have started using it on the most interesting of his articles on teacher education, "Power, Knowledge, and the Rationalization of Teaching: A Genealogy of the Movement to Professionalize Teaching," *Harvard Educational Review* (Vol. 62, No. 2, Summer 1992) p. 133.

hesitant to make a mild request, apologetic that they should even exist. Schools of education do not have a lowly status. It is something else, something more serious, but something for which there is a remedy.

Low status, systematically endured, is not lowly; it is oppressive, and a terrible feature of oppression, well examined by Paulo Freire in his great essay on *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is the way the oppressed internalize the views and assumptions of their oppressors.[3] Without bringing those internalized views to consciousness and overcoming them from within, the oppressed cannot assert themselves as free, independent subjects, peers to all. Labaree serves too much to encourage those in ed schools to internalize their oppressive status. One wants more fight, some alternative vision. Is it really the case that we can take no actions to improve our status other than to hold back on our progressive cant, hoping not to roil our critics? In the end, Labaree seems to want us to learn to put up with our situation and to content ourselves by asking the public why it should insist on picking on us lowly folks – we do no harm and offer little help. We understand our position at the bottom; we ask for little – just let us be.

Some may think such humility prudent, protecting ed schools from public criticism, but it will further debilitate education professors and exacerbate our problems with an oppressive status. Labaree's book exemplifies, without analyzing, some serious costs some of our oppressive status. Chronically suffering from it, education professors have developed an enclave mentality; we isolate our work and protect ourselves from the full rigor and scope of academic exchange. The way Labaree analyzes the ed school's romance with progressivism exemplifies that mentality. It is an exculpatory apology, which comes down to saying to the critics of progressivism that yes, they would be right were there more substance to what we say, but after all, it is mere talk, no reason to get so hot and bothered. This position is much too narrow and grants far too much. Progressivism was a big, complex movement with significant effects in schools and schools of education, and also in emerging universities and twentieth-century society. Might the trouble with ed schools look different in this larger context?

Assessment of pedagogical progressivism would be very different, particularly in relation to professional education. In trying to finesse criticism, not meet it, Labaree works from a restricted body of scholarship, one produced only by our kind, by scholars based in schools of education. We would do well to pay more attention to the parallel development of medical education. Labaree acknowledges the potential pertinence of medical education, for he takes it up briefly in criticizing proposals for improving teacher education advanced in 1986 by ed school deans, the Holmes Group. For Labaree status controls standards and low status brings low standards. Therefore, the Holmes proposal to raise standards in teacher education on the model

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[3] See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Myra Bergman Ramos, trans., New York: Continuum, 1970, 2000, esp. chapter 1, *passim*.

of medicine and law will not work, for "medicine and law are high-status professions, I would argue, not because they have rigorous programs of professional education but the other way around. They have highly selective professional education programs because the professions are enormously rewarding and therefore draw many more candidates than can be accommodated."(123) This glib dismissal literally stops inquiry, for Labaree first advanced it years earlier, giving no evidence for it either then or now.[4] Presumably, since 1995, no one has taken Labaree up on the point he would argue. Let us do so. Is rigor in medical education in fact a consequence of the elevated status of medicine?

Kenneth Ludmerer, a distinguished historian of medical education, demonstrates precisely the opposite, and in doing so, he presents the transformation of medical education as a triumph of progressive pedagogical reform. Ludmerer's account, like Labaree's, starts in the mid nineteenth century. Doctors were in atrocious repute after a devastating Civil War in which the care of the sick and wounded was far more deadly than enemy bullets. Medical schools were a travesty, proprietary profit mills, at their best with a faculty of seven or so, offering a curriculum of seven courses, by lecture alone, over a four-month term, to most anyone willing to pay, even illiterates. Through the second half of the nineteenth century and beyond, reform consisted in measures that were prudentially risky but intellectually sound. Ludmerer recounts how physicians vastly improved their professional status, and the status of their professional schools, by reforming medical education with high standards and a progressive pedagogy.

Starting in the 1870s, a very few medical schools rapidly raised entrance requirements and extended the duration of a medical education. They expanded the knowledge encompassed in the curriculum, while giving it a scientific and clinical grounding. As medical research was becoming progressive, growing in scope and continually changing, the well-prepared physician had to have learned how to learn, particularly from his own experience and from the apparatus of the field. Leading medical schools added to what had been formerly mastered through memory, if mastered at all, a great deal of knowledge and know-how to be learned through activity in the laboratory and the clinic. They capped it all with an extended, comprehensive internship, in which the advanced student spent a year learning by doing, gaining clinical experience across the full range of medical care performed in better hospitals. Medical educators even required prospective specialists to undergo a prolonged residency following completion of the M.D. "A revolution occurred in pedagogic style: the role of the student changed from passive observer to active participant in the learning process." One of the innovators summed it up as "self-

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[4] This point, and the surrounding 6 pages or so, derive verbatim from Labaree's 1995 essay, "The Lowly Status of Teacher Education in the United States" (compare Shimahara & Holowinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-8 and *Trouble*, pp. 121-7; and the same material also recycles in *How to Succeed in School, op. cit.*, p. 246; cf. pp. 243-9).

education under guidance."[5]

Learning by doing in the laboratory and the clinic, at the operating table, and throughout the hospital has become thoroughly essential to the professional preparation of physicians and surgeons. Atul Gawande gives a vivid portrayal of how medical self-education under guidance currently takes place in his striking essay, "Education of a Knife." Gawande unforgettably shows how learning by doing for the novice surgeon is susceptible to its form of high-stakes testing. His learning aligns ever so well to medical objectives – he knows what the procedure is and must go do it because there must be a first time that he must do it or he will never become a surgeon – yet his learning must adapt exactly to the persons involved – he will do it the first time on this patient who, yes, happens to be obese, making the procedure more difficult, but that is the way it is, for each patient is a particular patient, not some generalized norm. A rigorous progressive pedagogy pervades medical education as novice physicians are required to act repeatedly in situations where the task is new, difficult, yet necessary, and when its consequences are both substantial and real.[6]

To be sure, problems exist in medical education too, but closer attention than Labaree gives to it shows there is no need to apologize for pedagogical progressivism. Many of the cliché criticisms of progressive pedagogy look stupid when put in the context of medical education. To be sure, there is much information that medical students must master, but mastering it lockstep for demonstration on norm-referenced tests is not the mark of a good medical education. Good medical education involves learning by doing medicine with living patients, with all the separate aspects of the curriculum integrated in the person of the patient. The teacher stands in the background, observing the student, available, if necessary to protect the patient from the student's incapacity, should that become manifest. The situation involves diverse manipulatives, which the student must acquire the knack

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[5] See Kenneth M. Ludmerer, *Learning to Heal: The Development of American Medical Education* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, 1996), pp. 9-20 for a description of mid-nineteenth-century medical education prior to reform and pp. 63-71 for analysis of the progressive pedagogy of the reform movement, concluding, p. 71, "progressive medical education became the ideal to which medical educators have aspired from the pioneering period through the present." In Ludmerer's other major study of medical education, *Time to Heal: American Medical Education from the Turn of the Century to the Era of Managed Care* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), he reiterates the commitment to a progressive pedagogy central to modern medical education, pp. 8-10, and concentrates on showing how it remains a controlling ideal as medical practice and preparation adapt to the complexities and scale of current medical practice (pp. 307ff).

[6] In Atul Gawande, *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science* (New York: Picador, 2002), pp. 11-34.

of using. The work is individual, even when involving a small team in the operating room. Students move from case to case, working sometimes alone, sometimes together, sometimes with seasoned experts, seeking to build skill and judgment. The time is flexible, both extended and intense, driven by the routines of clinic and ward as these intersect with the needs of patients. Success is in the deed, not the grade, and evaluation turns on how the novice performs the procedure. Some get it quickly, others more slowly, but they must get it or drop out.[7] Why be defensive about pedagogical progressivism? Education professors need to understand pedagogical progressivism more deeply, to get it right, to put it in its full context – something that may not have been done so well in schools of education, where practice is rarely progressive and the picture of the process habitually parochial. But such observations move from issues of status to ones of substance, a move that Labaree seeks throughout to avoid.

By concentrating only on questions of status, Labaree frames his argument in a way that both excuses us from responsibility for our status and enfeebles us in doing anything about it. Like other forms of oppression, oppressive status leads to a fatalistic consciousness, which Labaree's argument reinforces. "In short, market pressures have in large part led to the low status of teacher education and have contributed significantly to its inability to carry out its functions effectively."(18) Labaree recognizes that concentrating on the status of ed schools leads him to gloss over their substantive performance. It is not that what ed schools do and do not do is unimportant, but what they can and cannot do is largely a function of their low status, which market forces imposed on ed schools and which market forces perpetuate, limiting what ed schools can a cannot do. We cannon change the givens; we must adapt; let us carry on.

Much of the "frayed nobility" that Labaree finds in ed schools derives from their putative commitment to usable learning in a world of higher education where everyone else attends assiduously to the exchange values that open doors, disbursing degrees that holders can "cash in for a good job and a comfortable life,"(167) degrees that are scarce, high in repute, however vacuous. Ed schools are losers because their degrees, which have some use-value but low exchange-value, stand at the bottom of a pecking order that discounts use-value while it rewards exchange-value. There we stand; there we stay. This argument strikes me as

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[7] On page 132 of *Trouble*, Labaree gives a table contrasting "Traditional vs. Progressive Instruction" with respect to Curriculum, Role of teacher, Materials, Range of activities, Grouping of students, Teaching target, Movement, Time, Evaluation, and Progression (based on one that Jeanne Chall gives in *The Academic Challenge: What Really Works in the Classroom* (New York: Guilford, 2000), p. 29). With slight changes of terminology, the description of medical education here uses the practices summarized under progressive instruction in Labaree's table, for these give a far better description of the practices common in medical education than would he summarizes for traditional instruction.

flabby, an argument framed in the expectation of the forbearance that we lowly folks characteristically grant to one another.

Having framed his task as one that eschews questions about the substantive content of educational programs, Labaree makes it hard to substantiate his claims about use value and exchange value. He offers little substantive evidence that the programs offered by schools of education attract students who recognize high use value and prefer it relative to exchange value. Likewise, he does not demonstrate that high-status professional programs are less effective in imparting use value to their students. Labaree does not investigate the connections between use-value and exchange-value, and he looks at exchange-value only from the point of view of the privileged elites, which leads him to overlook significant complications.

For instance, exchange value may motivate people across the full hierarchy of status distinctions, not only at the upper end. Numerous recipients of degrees in teaching do not take up classroom jobs where the putative use value of their degrees would have some use, and many who do, soon quit. Labaree does not ask an important question in the face of these non-starters and early leavers. If use-value is the value determining the choice of those who decide to earn bachelors and masters degrees in teaching, why do so many of them drop out of the profession so quickly? Might it be that many who earned degrees in teaching were seeking an exchange value? Low on the hierarchy, many can gain some relative prestige in a social stratum whose members would be impressed by the possession of a college or post-graduate degree, albeit one from a field with low prestige in the view of power elites.

For another instance, one out of seven doctorates earned in the United States is in the field of education. Labaree does not ask an important question in the face of this apparent profusion of educational scholarship. Why do so many seek advanced credentials in this field relative to others? There are 1.7 times the number of doctorates earned annually in education than in all the physical sciences and 1.5 times those earned in the biological and life sciences.[8] It would seem implausible that the aggregate use value of all those dissertations written in the field of education is so much greater than that of either of these two broad domains of science. Why then are so many people seeking doctorates in education? Surely, some of those, perhaps many of them, are not seeking to make an original advance in useful knowledge about education; they simply seek a degree that they perceive brings some prestige among family and neighbors and access to a secure job and a more comfortable life, Labaree's criteria of exchange value. In short, in a world of status, what has exchange value for whom is a highly relative matter.

By itself, status does not suffice to explain the trouble with ed schools. Content

[8] See National Center for Educational Statistics. *Digest of Educational Statistics, 2002*. Chapter 3, Tables 254, 279, 282-287, 292-293, and 296. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d02/.

matters with respect to status. Improving use value of an educational institution can radically enhance its exchange value. As we learn from Ludmerer, in the nineteenth century, the American Medical Association tried consistently to raise the status of the profession by pushing status-oriented reforms and it got nowhere in the process. Real change took place as proponents of scientific medicine systematically improved the use value of medical education.[9] By not considering the interactions between changes in use value and changes in exchange value, between substance and prestige, Labaree leaves himself and his readers with a static, fatalistic vision of possible prospects for schools of education. The trouble with ed schools is not that their status is low. The trouble is that they have not acted to improve the use value of the programs they offer. Labaree points clearly to the mechanism that impedes such efforts, but his obsession with status leads him to misdiagnose its causes and to prescribe a useless palliative for it.

As we have seen, Labaree concludes his analysis of status problems by describing a trade-off familiar to anyone who has spent time on the faculty of a school of education.

> Those few institutions that seriously try to maintain credibility with both of the ed schools' main constituencies [academic peers in the university and professional clients in the schools] find themselves in a particularly difficult situation. For them, it is a hard sell to convince either constituency of the ed schools' allegiance, since the relationship with one undercuts that claim in the eyes of the other, which means they need to be twice as academic and twice as professional to overcome this doubt. Under these circumstances, the middle position is a difficult one to sustain as the two poles draw ed schools to cast their lot with either the university or the schools but not both. As a result, the default position leaves professors at education schools distant from one of these two constituencies and treated with suspicion by the other.(127-8)

Here the analysis of status stops. Improving education as an academic study within the university will undercut its value in the field. Strengthening professional preparation for the realm of practice will weaken the position of ed schools in the university.

From here, Labaree turns to the ed school's romance with progressivism, advising the extirpation of progressive rhetoric from schools of education, at best a weak and unnecessary prescription. If the whole problem of ed schools is a problem

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[9] Ludmerer, *Learning to Heal*, esp. pp. 61-2: "In the twentieth century, the Council on Medical Education of the AMA was to become one of the most potent forces for reforming medical education, and its views of medical education were to be very sophisticated. However, in the 1870s and 1880s, the AMA had not yet entered the modern era and played no role in the innovations of that period."

of status and if that problem is rooted in history and the structure of institutions, making it impossible to overcome, then a policy of hunkering down and disengaging critics might make some sense. But we would be wise to ask why we face the trade-off between academic rigor and professional effect in the work of schools of education?

Let us look this question as one of content, not of status, in a context that reaches beyond the horizon of the ed schools themselves. What is at issue is not status, but content, the question of what sort of intellectual work the ed school should foster. In Labaree's view, scholarship that will impress the academic elites in the university will strike professionals in the field as esoteric and impractical, and work that practitioners in the schools will highly value will appear to the academic elite as low-brow stuff of little intellectual interest. All this Labaree lays out, but he does not come to grips with the problems of academic and professional substance at issue in the dilemma.

To do so, let us turn to a critique that is nearly the polar opposite to Labaree's analysis of status. Arthur Levine, President of Teachers College, Columbia University, has recently issued a report on an important component of the professional preparation offered through schools of education, *Educating School Leaders*.[10] For Levine the problem is not simply one of low status, but one of the regrettable earning of low status as schools of education have offered chronically weak programs to ill-prepared students. The result is what he calls "a race to the bottom."(23-48) Levine's report, the first of four, concentrates on education school programs preparing school leaders and presents a devastating critique of their substantive shortcomings:

> Their curricula are disconnected from the needs of leaders and their schools. Their admissions standards are among the lowest in American graduate schools. Their professoriate is ill equipped to educate school leaders. Their programs pay insufficient attention to clinical education and mentorship by successful practitioners. The degrees they award are inappropriate to the needs of today's schools and school leaders. Their research is detached from practice. And their programs receive insufficient resources.(23)

In Levine's view, schools of education continue to make these chronic weaknesses worse and worse, spurred by perverse public incentives and university policies that poorly support schools of education, or worse, that extract surpluses from them to support other parts of the university. We need to ask, however, whether Levine's analysis identifies causes powerful enough to produce the pervasive weaknesses that he chronicles.

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[10] Arthur Levine, *Educating School Leaders* (Washington: The Education Schools Project, n.d. [2005]).

Levine depicts a world in which schools of education are competing for students in a way that drives down quality; they set up off-campus programs, perhaps a good thing, but then staff them poorly and offer an educational experience inferior to their on-campus programs. Schools that lack the requisite staff open doctoral programs. States and school districts proffer salary incentives that create a pool of unmotivated students in search of easy credits. Universities, reluctant to fund their schools of education and eager, when possible, to squeeze out some surplus for general revenues, encourage high enrollments and a low-cost staff. Undoubtedly, all these influences are at work, but do they suffice to cause the race to the bottom that schools of education find it hard not to join?

Consider Teachers College, which Levine excludes from his study, partly because, as its President, he wants to avoid the appearance of bias, and partly because it is (more or less) a freestanding school of education responsible for its own finances. Yet, as a long-time faculty member of Teachers College, I must admit that we participate in the race to the bottom, ever anxious about enrollments and too often willing to admit poorly prepared doctoral students. Yet by Levine's account, it is difficult to understand why we do this, for the causes that push schools of education into a race to the bottom, according to Levine, do not seem to apply, strongly at any rate, in the case of Teachers College. TC has no satellite campuses and its staff is diverse and strong, suited for doctoral instruction. As a relatively high-tuition school of education, TC is not a prime target for students in search of a low-expectation, cost-effective source of credits towards a salary increment. Finally, Columbia University cannot easily squeeze Teachers College, an independent corporation, for a quick buck with which to underwrite more favored operations. Indeed, Columbia provides the College substantial library and information services for a nominal fee, relative to what they would cost TC to provide, and in this way, one might hold that Columbia subsidizes TC, albeit marginally.

Leaving it there, however, would miss one big burden that universities place on their schools of education, a burden that even Columbia lays upon its quasi-independent affiliate, Teachers College. This burden is much more substantial than holding back on the funding for the ed school or treating it as a "cash cow," skimming off some transfer payments. To see the burden clearly, we need to ask why other professional schools do not have the dilemma that Labaree found confronting professors in schools of education. Recall that that dilemma pitted academic excellence against professional relevance with a gain in one direction entailing a loss in the other. This trade-off creates a steady seesaw of mediocrity. Pursuit of academic excellence cuts the professional school off from its profession; concentrating on professional relevance weakens academic scholarship and often appears merely pretentious to practitioners in the field. All who work in schools of education know the existential reality of this dilemma and to understand its roots we need to ask why colleagues in other professional schools face it, either not at all or to a far lower degree.

Why do faculty members in a business school need to worry less about the trade-off between academic and professional stature? The answer is evident if one looks, not within the business school alone, but at the way that the university as a whole institutionalizes its work with respect to productive material activities – there is an academic department of economics and a professional school of business. The economics department takes care of the academic study of the domain and the business school the professional preparation of practitioners for it – each can clearly concentrate on its appropriate task.

Such an arrangement is standard operating procedure in universities. It runs across a very wide range of inquiry and practice. In addition to the pairing of economics department with a business school, a department of religion does academic scholarship while theological seminaries concentrate on the professional preparation of pastors. A department of sociology studies social phenomena while schools of social work educate professionals for the field. A department of political science advances knowledge about political processes and governmental experience while law schools and schools of public affairs prepare the prospective professionals who will deliver legal and governmental services. Departments of art history, music, and literature advance the academic understanding of their fields while schools of the arts, conservatories, and architecture educate artists, writers, musicians, and architects. Diverse physical sciences perform basic research while engineering schools prepare the professionals who will apply much of this knowledge to practical life. Consider, finally, the array of departments and programs in the arts and sciences that complement professional education at a major school of physicians and surgeons – for instance, at Columbia, anatomy and cell biology; biochemistry and molecular biophysics; biological sciences; biomedical informatics; cell biology and pathology; cellular, molecular and biophysical studies; genetics and development; microbiology; neurobiology and behavior; physiology and cellular biophysics; immunology; and vision sciences.[11] In short, universities prevent the dilemma faced by schools of education from arising in other domains of human concern by maintaining both an academic department and a professional school relevant to each. But not in the field of education.[12]

Here, in actuality, is the key to the trouble with ed schools. From one campus to the next, the university seriously exploits its schools of education, requiring them to do double duty in a way that other professional schools do not. This exploitation has

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[11] These are Columbia University Ph.D. programs run by its Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at its Medical Center. See www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/gsas/ac_programs/index.html.

[12] I have examined the anomaly in how the university supports work in the domain of education at greater length, mainly from the perspective of the university, not the schools of education, in *Homeless in the House of Intellect: Formative Justice and Education as an Academic Study* (New York: Laboratory for Liberal Learning, 2005).

a devastating effect on schools of education and forces them to underwrite what we might call "opportunity savings." With ed schools doing double duty, savings accrue to other parts of the university through the fortuitous absence of substantial expenditures that they need not make because schools of education are covering both the academic and the professional treatment of the field. This exploitation involves big bucks and has serious effects on quality in schools of education, the size and depth of which we can glimpse through a little thought experiment.

Take the pairing of departments of economics and schools of business. For me, the particulars of Columbia University are close at hand. Columbia lists 46 current faculty members in its economics department, a good one aspiring to keep rising to the top. The list of 46 probably translates into a somewhat lower number of full-time faculty, say for this experiment, 35. Now imagine – perish the thought – that Columbia were to close its department of economics, offering to move faculty members to its graduate school of business. Surely, thoroughly outraged, some would pack up and go elsewhere, but we might imagine that some, preferring an established life in New York to a new one in Duluth, would be willing remain at Columbia; let us assume 20 of the 35. The Graduate School of Business had 126 full-time members in 2003. Under these assumptions, closing the department would cause Columbia's effort in academic economics to decrease considerably, by over 40%, as 15 of its 35 professors took themselves elsewhere. At the same time, the addition of 20 economists to the business school faculty would significantly increase the salary costs there, by nearly 16%. To be sure, the new faculty members would pull weight in the business school, but they would often seem esoteric to the school's professional students and the economists would both be down in numbers and would loose academic visibility as well, attracting fewer students of their own and less research funding. The business school would find it difficult to increase its income 16% to pay the economists' salaries and related costs.[13]

At this juncture, for its part, the university, forever protective of its quality as measured in research output and intellectual prestige, would start complaining that its standing in the academic study of economics was plummeting. In response to such complaints, the business school would perhaps decide, despite the income pressures, to add more new lines for economists, reestablishing the level of effort set before the economists had been moved out of the arts and sciences, but then the business school would need to increase its income, not by 16%, but by almost 28%, and with such a large effort in academic economics, prospective students would start to wonder whether the business school was a professional school or an academic component of the university. Either way, word would get out to potential students that the programs in the business school had an increasing amount of theoretical stuff, abstract and difficult, that had little to do with the practicalities of business. Applications would start to drop and the school would have to start lowering

[13] Over time, the total costs of an academic unit will be a direct function of the cost of professorial salaries, or close to it.

standards to meet its expanded income needs. A race to the bottom would be on.[14]

Schools of education have trouble because they underwrite a substantial opportunity savings for other parts of the university, particularly the arts and sciences. No other professional school has to do this to anything approaching the extent that schools of education do. It is not hard to estimate that faculty salary costs in schools of education are 25% higher than they would be if the academic work on education and related matters, for instance, some areas of psychology and health, were situated, as it belongs, in the arts and sciences, and in many of the stronger schools of education, the proportion is probably higher.[15] Were the faculty of arts and sciences to do for education what it does for economics, politics, society, religion, art, biology, chemistry and physics, and all manner of other domains that are simultaneously matters of basic intellectual interest and of significant professional practice, the dilemma faced by ed schools could be greatly diminish.

This solution would require the move by many faculty members now carried by schools of education into the arts and sciences. Faced with such a move, many on

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[14] One could extend the thought experiment considerably, making the effects on the business school much worse. For instance, the economists added to it would complain that the students they might recruit cannot pay the pricey tuition that the business school professional students are willing to pay, expecting to recoup their investment through high corporate salaries. Hence, pressure would mount to hold down tuition rates creating a need to admit more students to meet income needs. Seeking to recruit more students from a falling applicant pool would further increase these downward pressures on tuition, and over time, a school that once flourished by serving a high-end professional clientèle would need to admit growing numbers of less able students. With that, working conditions for faculty members would deteriorate and the school's research productivity would decline. We need not go on, confident that Columbia is highly unlikely to close its department of economics.

[15] For instance, my institution, Teachers College, Columbia University, has a full-time faculty of approximately 145. Let us assume that the University and the College decided to shift faculty members who were primarily academic research scholars by training and interest into the appropriate departments in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, creating a department of education there similar to a department of political science in its internal sub-programs. 27 members of the current Teachers College faculty have appropriate backgrounds for that new department and let us assume that 16 of them join it. In addition, let us assume that 10 of some 40 research psychologists would join Columbia's psychology department and 10 of the 25 members of health oriented programs would move into similar arts and sciences programs existing at the medical center. That would constitute a 25% reduction in the College's faculty, and an even more thorough shift of those at Teachers College engaged primarily in academic research and instruction to the arts and sciences is imaginable, which would reduce the College faculty even more.

the faculty of ed schools would surely say that their work benefits from proximity to the realm of educational practice, but that proximity can thrive just as well with the academic work on education transferred to the arts and sciences. For instance, Columbia University has two campuses for the arts and sciences, the main one on Morningside Heights, and a second, substantial one for the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Columbia University Medical Center, which offers the Coordinated Doctoral Program in the Basic Sciences – "Your Place in the **Forefront of Science**," as its web site states.[16]

By situating academic research and instruction in basic sciences related to health in the faculty of arts and sciences, not in the college of physicians and surgeons, the university does not distance the academics from health-related phenomena, but it clarifies missions, permits useful distinctions, and facilitates the adaptation of budgetary models to actual functional needs. For well over 100 years, the faculty of the College of Physicians and Surgeons has designed and redesigned its curriculum with the unambiguous, unequivocal purpose of preparing practitioners – physicians and surgeons. The Coordinated Doctoral Program in the Basic Sciences is clear and plain in its purpose, academic research and instruction. Both share one realm, each with distinct purposes, procedures, standards, and expectations. Together they are the two sides of Labaree's dilemma and the tug and pull between them is minimal compared to that which takes place within schools of education.

In the ed schools, the tug and pull in their dilemma is thoroughly destabilizing and consequently ed schools stagger into Levine's race for the bottom, unable to get out of it, for the trouble is not with them, but with the failure of the arts and sciences to provide for its part in the study of education. Why have the arts and sciences not done their part? Here Labaree might point to a problem of status suffered by the study of education but it would be a somewhat forced argument. The lineage of the status problem, as Labaree traces it, is the lineage of teacher preparation running from the normal schools through the emergence of mass higher education. The development of normal schools into local universities is not the line of development relevant to the emergence of new departments in the arts and sciences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The academic study of education failed to achieve a place in the arts and sciences in research universities for reasons other than low status.

New subjects and departments in the arts and sciences took form in elite institutions, colleges in the process of becoming research universities. Within this process, it is hard to argue that education as a potential academic field of study had a status problem in the nineteenth century. Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, who first acted to develop it, were men of cultural standing. Prominent figures in the late-nineteenth-century study of education would include William Torrey Harris, William James, and G. Stanley Hall. The main intellectual impetus behind the

[16] http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/gsas/.

development of Teachers College was the young Nicholas Murray Butler, spurred on by Frederick A. P. Barnard, then president of Columbia College. Such men did not lack status and in no way were they lowly spirits. If not status, what?

Labaree suggests a compounding factor. He implies that schools of education acquired the dilemma arising from their encompassing both the academic and professional aspects of education because they were "latecomers to the major university faculties."(126) Indeed, schools of education were latecomers relative to medicine and law, but certainly not relative to business schools and schools of public affairs and many others.[17] When universities included schools of education among their constituent components is not the important question. Why departments of education, or let us say departments of pedagogical science, did not develop in the arts and sciences is. Another way to ask the question is to ask how schools of education became comprehensive entities, encompassing both the academic study of education and the professional of practitioners, making unnecessary an academic department of education in the research university.

Here the answer may be less that education was a latecomer, but the opposite. In all probability, anomalies with respect to education arose because the effort to include it in the arts and sciences came too early. In the late 1880s, Butler and Barnard made a serious effort to start a course of pedagogy in Columbia College, something for which President Barnard had groomed Butler as an undergraduate, a doctoral student, and through post-doctoral work in Germany and France. They did not have in mind a professional school for teacher preparation, but a professorship for an academic student of education, someone studying education as an important human concern that merited systematic, reflective study.

In the 1880's, specific subjects in the social sciences and humanities were in the process of taking scholarly shape and being incorporated into to the structures of higher education as colleges like Columbia transmuted into universities. As academic subject areas precipitated out, each had to overcome a basic institutional conservatism in order to gain an autonomous place in the arts and sciences and to have one or more faculty specialists appointed for it. The trustees of Columbia

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[17] For instance, at Columbia, Teachers College became an affiliate in 1893, after well after Law (1858) and Engineering (1864) started, but not long after the College of Physicians and Surgeons, a proprietary school going back to 1767, became part of Columbia in 1891, followed by Nursing in 1892. But a whole array of schools came on the Columbia scene later than Teachers College – Architecture (1896), Social Work (1898), General Studies (1904), Journalism (1912), Business (1916), Dentistry (1917), Public Health (1921), International and Public Affairs (1946), the Arts (1948), and Continuing Education (2002). If coming late to the university is the cause, there should be more company in the ed schools' misery. See Columbia University, Office of the Provost. "FACTS 2004: Schools & Colleges," http://www.columbia.edu/cu/opir/facts.html?schools.

College fastened on a then powerful reason for saying no to the inclusion of a course on pedagogy. Barnard and Butler had thought that a course of public lectures on pedagogy would make a good debut for the new subject and Butler had delivered one to large audiences, many of whom were women, who found the topic of education particularly interesting. Ironically, that demonstration gave Columbia's trustees the reason they needed to rationalize their conservatism and reject the proposal – co-education might come in its train. The failure to start a course on pedagogy in Columbia, which by the nature of the process going on would have led to an academic department of education in the arts and sciences, thus had far more to do with gender, than with status.[18]

With the rejection of a course of pedagogy at Columbia in 1887, Nicholas Murray Butler, not a man easily dissuaded from a chosen goal, became the first president of the Industrial Education Association, a philanthropy recently founded to promote manual education. Between 1887 and 1891, he transformed it into the New York College for the Training of Teachers, soon to become Teachers College, and committed the institution to a course of development along comprehensive lines, encompassing within it both the academic and professional study of education.[19] That model, essentially an historical accident, has become the model reproduced in almost all in research universities that include schools of education, but it is a model used by them only in the field of education. The decision to encompass both the academic and the professional in one school is the root of the weaknesses that observers have persistently found in scholarship on education and in the professional preparation of educators. Over the years, its costs in poor professional preparation

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[18] It would be a serious mistake to take the role of gender in this development as a mere surrogate for low status. The women attending Butler's lectures, who might bring co-education to Columbia, would not have been low-status women, but the sisters of Columbia men, generally a *haut bourgeois clientèle.* And the status of those proposing the course on pedagogy could not have been much higher, the President of Columbia and his protégé, a prize graduate, who would in his turn become president of Columbia, perhaps the most influential one in all its history. Since these events, the status of education as an academic study has declined, while the role of women in higher education as improved. The chauvinism expressed by the Columbia Trustees was not driven by status fears, but by gender discrimination, and to conflate the two would undercut a significant distinction, one useful in understanding the problem and in perceiving its solution.

[19] For a concise summary of these events, see Lawrence A. Cremin, David A. Shannon, and Mary Evelyn Townsend, *A History of Teachers College, Columbia University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), pp. 18-27. Butler's transformation of Teachers College into a comprehensive school of education, providing for both the professional preparation and the academic study of education, immediately triggered tensions with the original founders, but the scope Butler mandated took hold and has spread and endured.

and weak scholarship have far outweighed whatever benefits it may have brought by outflanking the chauvinism of Columbia College's trustees in 1887.

Neither low nor lowly status is the problem. Anomalous, ineffective academic organization is. The trouble is not with ed schools, but with the persistence of an expedient mistake in the way universities have organized their work in the domain of education. Ed schools alone cannot solve the problem. But that is not reason merely to carry on, for the problem arose from the failure of universities, first Columbia and then others after it, to act wisely. It is not too late in their historical development for research universities to take measures to correct an evident error. Columbia and all of higher education has become securely co-ed. It is time to rectify an absurd *bêtise* of chauvinism in higher education.