

Time Capsule: Artifacts for Documentation of the Paradigm Shift

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This issue of *Educational Considerations* is comprised of three manuscripts offering different applications of the tools of the historian within education.

Educators have a long and unfortunate history of ignoring their own history. Time and again, we pay a price for this in a variety of ways.

On the surface, we pay lip service to the intellectual, philosophical, and historical foundations of education in both undergraduate and graduate preparation. Few of us escape with graduate degrees in education without at least one entry with the word “historical” noted on our academic transcripts. Most of us have encountered the Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647 somewhere along the line, and we received a timeline of major figures and events in the history of education from that foundational piece of legislation to the present.

But that is history at 30,000 feet. We rarely pay attention to the history of instructional practices at the classroom level. New ideas emerge on the scene with evangelical fervor. They sweep through our practice. They are eventually discredited. They fall out of favor, and we pretend they didn’t happen. And we move on to the next Big Thing in popular culture pedagogy.

We neglect these profoundly powerful and important curricular trends that shape the experiences of students at the classroom level, and we do so at our peril. My point is that we claim pride in our profession by insisting that what we do be cataloged and documented, that the materials we use be preserved, and that we both celebrate and scrutinize what we do. We need a pervasive sense of the importance of historical documentation throughout education.

The lead manuscript in this issue by Alan English provides a compelling case for the power of oral history technique to both bring content to life for students and to build bridges between the school and the community. While reading Alan’s work, I could not help but think about how our current time period will be viewed by future observers. This speculation is ripe with possibility.

We live in interesting times, as at least three on-going factors have become interlocked in ways with dangerous consequences.

- We have the worst public health crisis in a century.
- We see the most contentious political climate since the Civil War.
- Our lived experience is mediated through communications structures that facilitate the amplification of misinformation.

As always, the schools of America are a key battlefield on which the armies of the culture war engage. As I write this, Critical Race Theory is on the frontline of the on-going culture war. To my point about the importance of our own history, we can see many of the same rhetorical moves (and some of the same players) from the reading wars (e.g., Nicholson) of the last

generation of educators. Or, we could go back another generation and see yet another battle in the same war. To better understand the foundation on which the Critical Race Theory conflict was constructed, I highly recommend an amazing book about a prior conflict, this time in Kanawha County, West Virginia. *Storm on the Mountain: A Case Study of Censorship, Conflict, and Consciousness* (Moffett, 1989) provides a kind of prequel and certainly a framework to understand where we are today. My point is that it is always instructive to look back at prior conflicts to better see the contours of a contemporary struggle. Time and again, we neglect to do this.

Regardless, it is difficult, for me at least, *not* to imagine how future educational practitioners and historians will look back to our current period with fascination. It is difficult to imagine that this current period will *not* be viewed by those who will follow as a transitional time that established patterns and processes that would remain influential for years to come.

Toward that end, I would pose a question: What simple artifacts could we select to leave our future colleagues a sense of this current period in American education? What from the present moment in American education should we leave in the historical time capsule to help the future interpret early 21st century American education?

As a starting point, I might suggest we have tucked away on countless hard drives hours of recorded sessions captured during remote meetings and classes. I suspect years from now scholars will look back to this moment in education as the point when we were forced to break from the physical classroom toward remote and hybrid structures. I'm imagining a doctoral student 50 years from now doing an analysis of video remote teaching sessions from the COVID era.

Beyond that preliminary example, I would challenge all of us to re-envision our day-to-day practice from the perspective of an educational historian who has not yet been born. I suggest we need to show our work respect, respect from the assurance that what we are doing has consequences not just for our students and our colleagues in this moment, but in the decades to follow.

The three manuscripts in this issue provide glimpses into that mindset.

References

- Moffett, J. (1988). *Storm in the Mountains: A Case Study of Censorship, Conflict, and Consciousness* (1st edition). Southern Illinois University Press.
- Nicholson, T. (1992). Reading Wars: A Brief History and An Update. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 39(3), 173–184.
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