

**The Trouble with
Ed Schools**

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Yale University Press
New Haven and London

something to say about the major educational issues of the day, even if no one is listening.

In light of all these troubles with American ed schools, then, it's no wonder why a layman like Bob Thompson feels comfortable about bypassing these institutions, ignoring the so-called expertise of the education professors who inhabit them, and, as a businessman, proposing his own answers to the problems of education.

Chapter 2 Teacher Ed in the Past: The Roots of Its Lowly Status

The roots of the American education school are in teacher education.¹ Preparing teachers was the ed school's original function, and this function has continued to the present day as the primary focus of its institutional effort and its primary identity in the eyes of the public. In this chapter, I examine the historical roots of teacher education's lowly status. There are already a number of good general accounts of the history of teacher education,² so I don't intend to repeat that history here. Instead, I focus on the way this history brought about many of the status problems that currently plague the ed school. Teacher education, it turns out, is at the heart of the trouble with ed schools.

Despite what critics often suggest, the lowly status of American teacher education is not a simple reflection of the purportedly low quality of professional preparation that it offers. Rather than being a natural consequence of failure, this status is a primary cause of the kinds of failure that teacher education has experienced over the years. The evidence shows that market forces have treated teacher education quite badly over the past 150 years, assigning it to a position of meager prestige and influence and forcing it to adopt practices that have fre-

quently proved educationally counterproductive. 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.

For the purposes of this book, I am defining a market as a social arena in which individual and organizational actors competitively pursue private gain through the exchange of commodities (the buying and selling of goods and services). The value of these commodities, and thus the degree of benefit enjoyed by producers and consumers, is established by the relationship between supply and demand rather than by any intrinsic qualities in the goods or services themselves: This means treating the market analytically—as a mechanism for shaping the behavior of individuals and organizations and for establishing the economic value of goods and services—in the manner employed by Max Weber in *Economy and Society*, Randall Collins in *The Credential Society*, and Karl Marx in his essay “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Treatment Thereof” in volume one of *Capital*.³ This analytical usage of the term *market* is quite different from its deployment as an ideological epithet in much of the current literature in critical theory, where the term carries the freight of moral disapproval of the social exploitation attributed to neoliberal economic policies.⁴

By choosing to focus on the status of teacher education rather than its social role, I skip past a wide range of important issues. For example, a status perspective naturally leads me to concentrate more on the position that teacher education occupies in the social and educational hierarchy than on the quality of its performance in carrying out professional education, to focus on matters of form more than content. This means that I say little about the content of the curriculum in teacher preparation programs and a great deal about the prestige of these programs and the way in which they became placed within the stratified array of educational options. To take this approach is not to deny the significance of the curriculum but to assert that curriculum issues have often been shaped significantly by the status concerns of the various parties involved in teacher education.

A status perspective tends to treat teacher education as a marketable commodity, whose function is to meet the status needs of the educational consumers who acquire it, rather than as a process of socialization, whose function is to transmit useful skills to prospective teachers. From this angle, then, the key measure of the worth of teacher education is its exchange value, which is determined by factors of supply and demand in the market for educational credentials. This exchange value may fluctuate according to market conditions and quite independently of the program's use value, which is a measure of the usable

practical knowledge acquired there and applicable to the work of teaching. Again, the point here is not that the degree of useful knowledge acquired in a teacher education program is irrelevant to the work of teaching but that it may well be irrelevant to the social position occupied by teachers (or teacher educators). In fact, I suggest that the focus within American teacher education on practical knowledge over high-status liberal learning has had a negative effect on the exchange value of the credentials of its graduates. Further, I argue that concerns about exchange value have had a powerful effect in transforming the formal setting within which teacher education takes place (from the normal school to the university) and also in diluting the professional content of its curriculum.

By examining the market factor more closely, we can gain insight into some of the characteristics that distinguish American teacher education from similar programs in other countries. Of the nations with the highest degree of economic development, the United States is the most market-oriented and has been since the mid-nineteenth century. Nowhere else has the doctrine of *laissez-faire* attained such earnest and long-lasting acceptance. No other industrial power has so persistently protected private enterprise from public interference, so effectively fragmented the state and limited its power, and so prominently elevated the idea of market competition to a central ideological principle.

In such a market-centered society, it is not surprising that education too finds itself subject to a wide range of persistent market pressures. Consider the example of the high school. As I have argued elsewhere, early in its history the high school emerged as a valued commodity that gave some consumers the means to enhance or reinforce their social position.⁵ As a result of this market pressure, high schools became stratified—across programs within individual schools and across different schools within a community—according to the exchange value of the credentials offered by each program or school. Martin Trow and others argue that higher education in the United States has been particularly sensitive to market forces, especially given the glut of colleges and universities, the lack of centralized state control over this sector, and the resulting dependency of these institutions on the consumer preferences of students.⁶

Given the market-saturated environment in which it arose, American teacher education throughout its history has been subjected to a degree of market pressure well beyond that experienced by teacher education in other societies. As a result, focusing on market effects may well inform our understanding of the special character of teacher education in the United States from a comparative perspective. One theme in this history is the problem posed by the

insatiable demand for teachers from a burgeoning public school system. Another is the problem of how to meet the social aspirations and credentialing requirements of students who entered normal schools. A third is the impact of these problems on the evolution of teacher education from its original setting in the normal school to the teachers college and eventually the university, and, in turn, the impact that this evolution had on people, programs, and status. With regard to the present, the question becomes how much market conditions have changed and the implications for teacher education today.

A SHORT HISTORY OF MARKET INFLUENCES ON TEACHER EDUCATION

Market pressures have affected teacher education in three ways: by pushing the education school to become a teacher factory, by encouraging it to evolve into a people's college, and by elevating it to the university level. Let us consider each of these in turn.

The Teacher Factory: Filling Empty Classrooms

The biggest single problem facing American school officials in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had nothing to do with curriculum or pedagogy. Instead, the persisting challenge was to find a way to build enough classrooms for all the students who required education and to fill these classrooms with teachers. The aim of the common school movement, which swept out of New England and across the country in the years before the Civil War, was to have each community establish a publicly funded system of elementary schooling that would provide a common educational experience for all of the young people in that community. In keeping with the American suspicion of centralized state power, the responsibility for paying for the new schools and hiring the new teachers that were required by this expansion fell primarily on local government.

By 1870, when the federal government began gathering data on schools, there were already 200,000 public school teachers in the United States, and the number doubled by 1900. At this point, when the supply of elementary schooling was finally beginning to catch up with demand, the sudden growth of high schools set off another dizzying spiral of educational expansion, which by 1930 once again doubled the size of the public school teaching force, bringing the total in that year to almost 850,000.⁷

In the mid-nineteenth century, the insatiable demand for teachers—combined with the radical decentralization of control over schools and the absence of consistent standards for certification—meant that the emphasis was on finding warm bodies to fill classrooms rather than on preparing qualified professionals. The following examination of a teacher candidate in a New England town during the 1860s was not unusual:

CHAIRMAN: How old are you?

CANDIDATE: I was eighteen years old the 27th day of last May.

CHAIRMAN: Where did you last attend school?

CANDIDATE: At the Academy of S.

CHAIRMAN: Do you think you can make our big youngsters' mind?

CANDIDATE: Yes, I think I can.

CHAIRMAN: Well, I am satisfied. I guess you will do for our school. I will send over the certificate by the children tomorrow.⁸

As Sedlak concludes in his review of teacher hiring in this period, "A general teacher shortage combined with wildly fluctuating and inconsistent prerequisite qualifications, virtually assured any prospective teacher some sort of job, and secured someone for most communities needing a teacher."⁹

It was in the midst of this difficult period in the history of the market for teachers that the American normal school appeared on the scene. By many accounts, the first public normal school opened in 1839 in Lexington, Massachusetts, under the leadership of Cyrus Peirce.¹⁰ Looking back on this experience a dozen years later, Peirce spelled out the aims of his pathbreaking institution in a letter to Henry Barnard, sounding themes that defined the core concerns of the whole normal school movement.

I answer briefly, that it was my aim, and it would be my aim again, to make better teachers, and especially, better teachers for our common schools; so that those primary seminaries, on which so many depend for their education, might answer, in a higher degree, the end of their institution. Yes, to make better teachers; teachers who would understand, and do their business better; teachers who should know more of the nature of children, of youthful developments, more of the subject to be taught, and more of the true methods of teaching; who would teach more philosophically, more in harmony with the natural development of the young mind, with a truer regard to the order and connection in which the different branches of knowledge should be presented to it, and, of course, more successfully.¹¹

This was a tall order indeed. And although "the formal history of American teacher education and professionalization is conventionally a story of one tri-

umphal march,"¹² the reality was a story of rear-guard action by the stalwart normal school advocates while the opposing heard swept around them on both flanks. By the time of the Civil War, there were only twelve state normal schools in existence in the entire country,¹³ so that in spite of the high ideals of these institutions, their actual impact was minimal at best. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the large majority of teachers entered into the classroom without benefit of a normal school diploma. There was a wide range of ways for a prospective teacher to acquire training and obtain a job. The larger cities often set up their own normal schools to supply teachers to the local elementary schools. High schools frequently offered a short course in pedagogy toward the same end. At an even more rudimentary level, local school districts would provide a brief preparation in the grammar school so that graduates could almost immediately return to their old classrooms as the teacher. A widespread network of teacher institutes offered training during the summer, both for new teachers and, after the fact, for teachers already on the job. But there were also a large number of teachers who were hired and kept on the job with no formal training and no qualifications at all except the ability to make the "big youngsters mind."

Consider the problems that this situation posed for the status of the normal school. In order for a form of professional education to attain a high status in the educational marketplace, it must meet two primary prerequisites: monopoly and selectivity. The current situation of law schools and medical schools serves as a case in point. Each of those types of schools has established itself as the only door through which a person can gain entry to the profession. And each has made it difficult to get through that door, by instituting restrictive admissions and rigorous programs of study. When Cyrus Peirce and Horace Mann and others established the first normal schools, they chose to ignore the market situation and concentrate on developing a sound program of professional preparation for future teachers. However, the problem was that the professional schools they nurtured into life ran the risk of being completely irrelevant to the realities of the job market for teachers. Since no one had to attend a normal school in order to teach and since all the alternative modes of access to teaching were easier and less costly, the normal school leaders found themselves standing on the sidelines while the real work of training and hiring teachers played out before them.

In short, normal school leaders faced a choice between selectivity and monopoly. They could remain as elite institutions providing an idealized form of professional preparation for a small number of aspiring teachers—"teachers

who would understand, and do their business better," in Peirce's words—and allow other routes to teaching to remain dominant. Or they could expand the system to meet the demand for teachers, establishing an eventual monopoly over access to the profession while risking the dilution of the normal school ideal in the process. They chose expansion.

Between 1865 and 1890, the number of state normal schools grew from 15 to 103.¹⁴ A key element in this expansion was the growing tendency for state governments to employ certification as a mechanism for restricting the pool of teacher candidates from which local districts could hire their faculty and to employ teacher education as a criterion for certification. "By 1875, according to a leading analyst of this issue, policy deliberations were beginning to recognize credentials from normal schools as 'professional licenses,' and several states were relying on them as the basis for certification. By 1897, twenty-eight states accepted normal-school diplomas, and by 1921 all but one state "recognized graduation from normal schools and universities as evidence of qualification for certification." By the World War I era, therefore, certification policies that bestowed licenses on the basis of credential acquisition had become the rule nationwide."¹⁵ The expansion of normal schools and their growing monopoly over access to teaching was accelerated "as graduates of professional programs assumed leadership roles in state departments of education."¹⁶

Once normal schools moved toward establishing a monopoly on access to teaching, they also took on the responsibility for meeting the full weight of the market's demand for teachers. The natural result was that teacher education came under intense pressure to produce large numbers of teachers as quickly and cheaply as possible. Two factors served to intensify this pressure. One was the feminization of the teaching force and the kind of career pattern that accompanied this shift. The standard pattern in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was for young women to enter teaching for a half dozen years or so, beginning in their late teens and ending with marriage. The short tenure in the classroom for the average teacher meant that normal schools had to produce large numbers of graduates in order to keep replacing young teachers who were leaving the classroom. The other was a fiscal problem. If teacher training took on aspects of mass production, and if the product was not expected to last very long anyway, then the cost of producing each unit had to be kept down in order to sustain the operation. Under these circumstances, an intensive and prolonged process of professional education was difficult to justify to legislators and taxpayers.

The pressure for warm bodies to fill empty classrooms continued through-

out the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the impact on both the content and the status of teacher education was devastating. All three problem areas in teacher education that were identified by James Koerner and Judith Lanier in the passages quoted in the previous chapter—faculty, students, and curriculum—have their origins in considerable degree in this pressure to meet the demand for teachers. The burgeoning normal school system had to mass produce faculty members to staff its own classrooms, without the luxury of being particularly selective about whom to admit into these positions or of being especially thorough in the preparation of these people for the role of teaching teachers. As for students, the rapid expansion of normal schools in the late nineteenth century necessarily meant that these schools had to open their doors wide to admit the flood of candidates that were required to meet demand. The normal school became, as Herbst points out, a true people's college, which offered a chance at advanced education to a wide range of the population that had previously been confined to a grammar school education.¹⁷ And the curriculum felt the effects of this market pressure as well. The need to produce a large number of teachers quickly meant that normal schools could not enforce an extensive and rigorous professional education. These schools operated under the constant threat of being bypassed. If they made access to or completion of teacher education very difficult, the number of graduates would decline and school districts would be forced to find other sources for teachers. One way or the other, the classrooms would be filled, and the normal school leaders chose to fill them with their own graduates, whatever the cost.

The cost, I suggest, was high. A thinly educated faculty, academically weak students, and a forthrightened and unchallenging curriculum—all were consequences of the effort by normal schools to meet the continuing high level of demand for teachers. As a result, the normal school became a kind of teacher factory, mass producing as many practitioners as the market required. But by pressing the normal school to choose quantity over quality, the market exerted an impact on the status of this institution as well as its content. Selectivity is a crucial component of the status of an educational institution. The current status hierarchy of American higher education is closely related to the degree of difficulty students experience in gaining access to credentials of individual colleges, which range from highly selective Ivy League-type schools at the high end of the scale to open-admissions community colleges at the low end. The normal school was the community college of the late nineteenth century, easily accessible and thus lacking in distinction. By choosing to meet the demand for teachers, this institution gave up any claim it might have once had for elite sta-

tus. By becoming socially useful, it lost social respect. What this suggests is that much of the scorn that has been directed at teacher education over the years can be traced to the simple fact that it has earnestly sought to provide all of the teachers that were asked of it.¹⁸

The People's College:

Meeting Consumer Demand

We have already seen that one market influence on American teacher education came from *employers*, as school districts demanded a large number of teachers and normal schools chose to supply this demand in spite of the negative impact on both the content and the status of teacher education. But another market influence came from educational *consumers*, as students demanded a particular kind of educational product and normal schools chose to give it to them. The first imposed a *social-efficiency* function on these schools, which required them to subordinate concerns about institutional status and effective professional education to the pressing social need for teachers. However, the second market influence imposed a *social-mobility*¹⁹ function, which required the schools to provide the kind of educational choices that would best serve the needs of students who were competing for desirable social positions.

The reverence for individual freedom of choice—construed both as political choice and consumer choice—has deep roots in American cultural history. Louis Hartz, in his classic *The Liberal Tradition in America*, defined the issue this way: "Here, then, is the master assumption of American political thought, the assumption from which all of the American attitudes discussed in this essay flow: the reality of atomistic social freedom. It is instinctive to the American mind, as in a sense the concept of the polis was instinctive to Platonic Athens or the concept of the church to the mind of the middle ages."²⁰ This assumption is at the heart of the market as a social institution. In a market system, consumers exercise individual freedom of choice by expressing their personal desires, and entrepreneurs prosper by more efficiently meeting these desires.

As Martin Trow has put it so succinctly, in America "the market preceded society," with the result that the consumer has long been king.²¹ This central characteristic of American social life has been a powerful force contributing to the distinctiveness of American educational institutions, which have been shaped by consumerism to a far greater extent than educational institutions elsewhere in the world, as Trow explains: "We in the United States, surely the most populist society in the world, accept a larger role [than do Europeans] for the influence of consumer preference on cultural forms—even in the provision

of what and how subjects are taught in colleges and universities. Europeans try to reduce the influence of consumer preference in a number of ways. Most importantly, they try to insulate their financing of institutions of higher education from student fees. By contrast, in the United States, enrollment-driven budgets in all but a few institutions, both public and private, ensure that most institutions are extremely sensitive to student preferences.²² In a setting where the educational consumer is highly influential, educational leaders are compelled to respond in a thoroughly entrepreneurial fashion if they wish to thrive or even survive. If they fail to meet consumer demand, students will vote with their feet by enrolling elsewhere in a school that is all too eager to give them what they want.

This was the situation facing normal school leaders in the second half of the nineteenth century.²³ More specifically, they had to confront two characteristics of the educational market during this period. First, anyone who wanted to become a teacher could do so without ever attending a normal school. Although gradually, through increasingly restrictive certification requirements, teacher education would attain a monopoly over access to the teacher workforce, this was a long time in coming. Second, there was a glut of post-grammar-school educational institutions that were competing for the student's tuition dollars. In 1880, for example, there were more than sixteen colleges and universities for every million in the population, the highest ratio ever in American educational history.²⁴ As a result of these market conditions, the potential normal school student had a variety of options for becoming a teacher and for receiving advanced education, options that allowed her to bypass this institution altogether. Therefore the normal schools had to find a way to make their programs attractive to prospective consumers, and this meant listening very closely to the educational preferences being expressed by students.

What students were saying was clear. They didn't want to be trapped in a single-purpose school that provided them with a narrow vocational education and then channeled them into a single occupational slot. Instead they wanted an advanced educational setting that would, in the classic American fashion, provide them with the maximum degree of individual choice of programs and with access to the widest array of attractive occupational possibilities. In short, they wanted to pursue social mobility and wanted educational institutions to facilitate this pursuit. But this was not a vision that fit comfortably with the alternative visions of the normal school that were also in place: The founders of normal schools saw them as places for instilling sound professional skills; school districts saw them as one among several sources for warm bodies to fill

empty classrooms, and students saw them as one among several places where they could acquire the credentials that would enhance their future status. The possibilities for conflict over the purposes of these schools were great, leaving them subject to an array of competing pressures.

In spite of efforts to put normal schools into the service of teacher professionalization or social efficiency, social mobility quickly emerged as a central function through the medium of students exercising their consumer choices. And this form of pressure was there from the very beginning. Cyrus Peirce ran into the problem shortly after he opened the first normal school in Lexington. "Peirce's frustrations increased as time went on. He was particularly chagrined to find that some of his students did not even want to become teachers, and others did not have the necessary ability."²⁵ When Herbst examined the records of Wisconsin's first state normal school in Platteville, he found that, between its founding in 1866 and 1880, "on the average no more than 45 percent of all attending students were enrolled in the normal classes."²⁶ Bowing to this demand for a broader and less vocationally oriented educational experience, normal schools began to offer increasing numbers of liberal arts courses. The consequences are described by Altenbaugh and Underwood:

Many students, especially those who lived near the colleges, came for those courses rather than the teacher training curriculum that formed the original mission of such institutions. Other students used the normal school as a "junior college," completing its program as a step toward enrollment at a state university. To ensure that students who entered the normal departments would actually teach, Illinois Normal not only required that they pledge their intent to teach for three years after graduation; students also had to report their employment, whatever it was, to the state superintendent of public instruction. Signing a pledge to teach and signing a contract with a school district were two different matters. Records at Illinois indicate that only 30 percent of the alumni during the 1860s spent any time in teaching.²⁷

For many American families, who otherwise would never have considered pursuing advanced education, normal schools provided an opportunity to gain social advantages that previously had been restricted to the more privileged members of society, who could afford to send their children away to college. In the eyes of these families, the normal school became more than a place for training teachers; it became a kind of people's college. Herbst puts it this way: "Normal schools, rather than the land grant universities, were the pioneers of higher education for the people. Almost everywhere the state universities and agricultural and mechanical colleges were developed at a central location or state capital, whereas the normal schools were scattered to the small country

towns across the prairies."²⁸ These schools "took higher education to where the people lived and worked."²⁹

While some normal schools tried to remain focused on their original professional mission, most gradually yielded to the pressure to broaden their vocational curriculum in order to meet the persistent demand for general academic education and social opportunity. The lure of expanding enrollments was difficult for them to resist, especially in the tuition-driven educational economy in which they had to operate. In addition, shifting in the direction of servicing the community rather than simply training teachers also gained them the support of legislators, who found that promoting people's colleges was good politics.

What effect did this consumer pressure have on normal schools? Essentially, it served to undermine, marginalize, and diffuse the goal of teacher professionalization that had led to the creation of these schools in the first place as well as the professionally oriented curriculum that had accompanied this goal. Normal schools were evolving away from single-purpose vocational schools toward general-purpose schools of advanced educational opportunity, within which teacher education was just one program, and not necessarily the most popular or prestigious one at that. One result was a growing confusion about the identity of these schools: Were they teacher training schools or people's colleges? Another was a watering-down of the professional curriculum. It was difficult for normal schools to maintain a rigorous and focused program of teacher preparation when many, often most, of the students wanted something different and when even prospective teachers intended to move on to business and professional careers after a short stint in the classroom.³⁰ This curriculum diffusion problem was exacerbated by social efficiency pressures, which prodded normal schools to turn out graduates in large numbers.

Under these circumstances, normal schools were under considerable market pressure to make teacher education as undemanding as possible. In their twin roles as teacher factories and people's colleges, these schools were compelled to make the teacher preparation program: easy, so students would be encouraged to sign up for it rather than other potentially more attractive but also more difficult alternatives; flexible, so they could fit it into a larger set of studies that would grant them opportunities outside of teaching; and inexpensive, so the state could afford to produce teachers at a unit cost commensurate with their brief shelf life in the classroom, and so students would consider the program a worthwhile investment, given their modest commitment to a career in teaching.³¹

All in all, the impact of the market on American teacher education has

hardly been elevating. The pressure from both the job market and the credentials market, from both employers and consumers, has tended to marginalize, minimize, and trivialize the process of educating future teachers. And, as we will explore later, this disabling legacy continues to affect the way in which teacher education carries out its work. But first, we need to examine the impact of these market factors on the status of teacher education.

From Normal School to University:

Effects on Status

Between the 1890s and the 1970s, market factors propelled the normal school through a process of institutional evolution that eventually transformed it into a general-purpose university. The consequences of this change for the status of teacher education were both profound and profoundly mixed. To put it simply, the institutional status of the normal school rose dramatically during this period while the status of teacher education within the institution declined just as dramatically. Let us consider the causes and effects of this transformation.

The outlines of this evolutionary development are clear. Normal schools experienced a remarkably linear process of institutional mobility. In the words of William Johnson, "the history of twentieth-century teacher training can be seen as a series of institutional displacements, with normal schools becoming state teachers colleges, then multipurpose liberal arts colleges, and now, in many instances, regional state universities."³² But, as Alrenbaugh and Underwood note, "Normal schools actually began this transition well before the turn of the century." As they expanded their academic course offerings and broadened their appeal, normal schools "began to raise admission standards, requiring high school diplomas, and to extend the program of study." During most of the nineteenth century, normal schools had been operating at the same level as high schools, taking in grammar school graduates and sending them out with something like a high school diploma. But by 1900 these schools were beginning to look more like junior colleges, and "after 1920, two- and three-year normal schools evolved to four-year teachers colleges." One indicator of the rapid pace of this change is that between 1920 and 1933 the number of state and city normal schools fell from 170 to 66 and the number of state teachers colleges rose from 46 to 146.³³ By 1940, the term *normal school* had become obsolete. . . . State teachers' colleges likewise experienced a short life, since by the 1960s they had begun to evolve into multipurpose state colleges or state universities, which granted liberal arts and other degrees as well as education degrees.³⁴ At the same time that normal schools were turning into universities,

already-existing universities were incorporating at least an attenuated form of teacher education within their own programs.

Market factors are what propelled this remarkable process of institutional mobility, whose final outcome was to move teacher education from its own niche at the lower fringe of American higher education and lodge it firmly within the confines of the university.³⁵ Later the fiscal cost and social inefficiency of the transformation became clear (more on this subject later). But this elevation of the status and function of the normal school took place primarily because of the overwhelming demand for it that developed from all sides. It seemed to benefit everyone concerned. Through the mechanism of the expanding and rising normal school, citizens received access to higher education far beyond what was available through state universities and land grant schools. Legislators won a politically popular program on which voters were eager to spend tax dollars. For students, the upward movement meant that they could gain the advantages of both a normal school education (accessibility, low cost, and teacher certification) and a college education (bachelor's degree, institutional prestige, and access to a wide range of white-collar jobs beyond teaching). For teachers, the change meant a symbolic elevation, as a college diploma came to represent the minimum educational requirement for entry into the occupation. Teacher educators found themselves evolving from trade school instructors into college professors, a heady increase in occupational status. And universities found in teacher education a lucrative cash cow, which attracted large numbers of students, and a political blessing, which demonstrated to the state legislature the practical benefits of a university education.³⁶

Compare this market perspective on the evolution of the normal school to the traditional view of this transformation that has been espoused by the educational establishment: Merle Borrowman captures the essence of this view: "The formal history of American teacher education and professionalization is conventionally a story of one triumphal march from Samuel R. Hall's Concord, Vt., normal school in 1823 to the modern National Education Association and the great graduate schools of education. This version of history is misleading."³⁷ What is misleading about it is the assumption that the institutional elevation of teacher education represents progress, that is, a steady and ineluctable improvement in the quality of teacher education and (consequently) of teaching. Instead, I suggest, the elevation of the status of the normal school and the incorporation of teacher education within the university have less to do with the quantity of the professional education of teachers than with the quantity of

consumer demand for higher education and the market conditions that encouraged educational institutions to meet that demand. Thus the content of teacher education was less important to this process than its institutional form, and preparing people effectively to carry out the role of a teacher was less important than simply providing them with the status of a college graduate.

The transformation of the status and locus of teacher education had wide-ranging effects. It reduced the social efficiency of these programs, undermined their ability to provide professional preparation, stratified the way in which they were delivered, and marginalized them within their home institutions. Let us consider each of these points in turn.

First, the elevation of normal schools and their transformation into general-purpose universities signaled the subordination of the original social efficiency goal of the normal school to the social mobility goal that came to dominate American higher education more generally. While providing enhanced educational and social opportunities for a wide array of Americans, this change introduced a radical degree of social inefficiency into the task of preparing teachers. Providing individuals with open access to higher education through an expanded and broadened system of teachers colleges may be very attractive to the individuals who benefit from it and may be justifiable politically as an effort to democratize the delivery of education, but it is hardly an efficient investment of social resources. This educational expansion was not based on the social need for skills that could be provided only through a college education but on the individual desire for improved personal status. And it did nothing to meet the need for qualified teachers to staff the nation's classrooms. The normal schools that were created to meet the latter need were thus subverted by the market, transformed into institutions of general education in response to pressing consumer demand. In short, teacher education ended up subsidizing individual ambition and social opportunity at the expense of preparing teachers.

Second, this reorientation of the normal school away from social efficiency and toward social mobility also had the effect of undermining professional education. Originally, these schools were seen by their founders and by many of the students attending them as places that focused on providing a practical education in the knowledge and skills required to be an effective teacher. That is, their function was to provide an education with considerable use value. However, this function changed when consumers asserted their strong preference for an institution that would provide them with educational credentials carrying substantial exchange value. This inevitably shifted the focus within the

schools from the content to the form of education, since increasingly students attended them less for the kind of usable knowledge they could acquire there than for the kind of social advantage they could gain by attending.

In this manner, the transformation of the normal school was a key step in the commodification of American higher education during the twentieth century, as status attainment shouldered aside learning as the central aim of students and as colleges and universities quickly adapted themselves to this changing consumer demand.³⁸ In this commodified setting, the kind of practical learning represented by teacher education lost appeal because students were driven by concerns about the marketability of education more than its applicability. From the consumer's perspective, who cared what you learned in college as long as your diploma gave you access to a good job? Under these circumstances, the former normal schools that became state colleges and universities had no market incentive to sustain a rigorous program of professional teacher preparation. As a result, it is not surprising that even sympathetic observers have often found these programs feeble and undemanding.³⁹ The market-centered environment of American higher education has provided little incentive to make them otherwise.

Third, the evolution of the normal school also tended to reinforce the stratification of the various functions of professional education. In a market setting, where entrepreneurial educators needed to be concerned about maintaining the exchange value of their educational credentials, there was a strong incentive to focus an institution's attentions on those parts of the educational task that would bring the greatest prestige and influence. As Herbst has pointed out in some detail, this meant, as much as possible, turning one's back on the low-status task of preparing elementary teachers and catering to the more prestigious parts of the education market.⁴⁰ Even the early normal school leaders in Massachusetts tried to adopt this strategy. "The educators . . . tended to assign the preparation of elementary teachers to short-term city training schools. Most of the educators preferred to use their state normal schools for the training of secondary school teachers and administrators as well as educational specialists."⁴¹ By the early twentieth century, however, the structure of teacher education had become considerably more complex and more stratified, with the result that the various professional preparation functions were allocated across a wider span of institutions. Normal schools, as the lowest rung in the ladder of teacher education, were responsible for the education of elementary teachers, the group no one else wanted. Colleges and universities dominated the market for preparing secondary teachers. And the new graduate schools of education at

leading universities took on increasing responsibility for the preparation of school administrators and nonteaching educational professionals.⁴² However, when normal schools evolved into general-purpose colleges and universities, the distinction between the two lower rungs of the ladder became unclear. The preparation of both elementary and secondary teachers became the responsibility of four-year institutions in general, with the primary distinction being that former teachers colleges drew a larger share of teacher candidates of all types.

This led to a fourth effect of the elevation of the normal school. The incorporation of teacher education within the university meant that the tendency to stratify teacher education functions now became an internal matter defining the relationships between university departments. The result was that teacher education came to occupy a marginal status in the academic hierarchy of the university. This is even true to a significant extent, as Goodlad has noted, within the universities that were once teachers colleges.⁴³ One reason for this marginality is that teacher education programs concentrate on providing students with usable knowledge about teaching. In the commodified setting of American education, usable knowledge is low-status knowledge. The more removed knowledge is from ordinary concerns and the more closely associated it is with high culture, the more prestige it carries with it. Just as the low-track English class in high school focuses on reading job applications while the high-track class focuses on Elizabethan poetry, at the university teacher education is seen as following the low road of practical instruction while the arts and sciences departments pursue the high road of more esoteric knowledge.⁴⁴

Another reason for the marginal status of teacher education in its new home in the university was that it was designed to prepare students for a marginal profession. Medical schools and law schools both provide intensely practical education to their students, but this does not harm the high standing of these schools because of the elevated status of the professions for which they are preparing students. In this sense, then, the high exchange value of a medical or law degree—measured by the high status of the positions to which these degrees provide access—means that no one considers these programs "vocational" in the pejorative sense that is applied to programs in auto repair and hairdressing or, at a more middling status, in nursing or teacher education. In part, then, the status of teacher education in the university has been inseparable from the status of teaching in American society.

Teacher educators therefore have come to be doubly stigmatized within the university, because of their association with low-status professions and

because of their association with an occupation seen as a semiprofession. In combination this has put them at the lowest tier of the academic hierarchy. "It is common knowledge that professors in the arts and sciences risk a loss of academic respect, including promotion and tenure, if they assume clear interest in or responsibility for teacher education. Professors holding academic rank in education units are in even greater jeopardy of losing the respect of their academic counterparts in the university, because their close proximity makes association with teacher education more possible. And, finally, those education professors who actually supervise prospective or practicing teachers in elementary and secondary schools are indeed at the bottom of the stratification ladder."⁴⁵

DEALING WITH THE LEGACY: CHANGING CONDITIONS

Given the market influence in shaping the history of American teacher education, a key issue is to define to what extent this legacy is still exerting a lingering impact on American teacher education. Have things changed substantially, or are many of the same market factors still exerting pressure on these programs?

Social efficiency: Many of the factors that promoted the original social efficiency pressures on teacher education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have indeed changed. There are periodic teacher shortages (including one at the start of the twenty-first century), but these shortages are no longer chronic. The rapid growth in enrollments that drove so much of the demand for teachers has been replaced by a more stable demographic situation. Also, although turnover remains relatively high and commitment to the job remains relatively low, teaching is no longer the temporary pursuit that it once was. Since World War II, teaching has turned into a career that women and men with growing frequency have pursued all the way to retirement. In large part this is because of the gains in pay, job security, and fringe benefits that teacher unions achieved during this period.

However, in spite of these changes, social efficiency pressures on teacher education still exist, albeit in reduced intensity and altered form. In 1993 there were 2.8 million elementary and secondary teachers in the United States, and replacing those who quit or retire requires about 15 percent of the entire crop of new college graduates every year.⁴⁶ Teacher education, as always, is under pressure to meet this continuing demand. It holds a stronger monopoly over access to teaching than it ever did during the normal school era, which intensifies the

bers themselves are not expanding at the same rate. And reinforcing this pressure is an old threat that has returned in recent years, the threat of bypassing teacher education in the hiring of teachers. A number of state legislatures have put in place or proposed plans for "alternative certification," that is, certifying teachers based on work experience or academic major but without benefit of traditional teacher education. Market rhetoric has supported these plans as ways of restoring choice and opportunity to a teacher job market too long constrained by the education school monopoly. Reinforcing this trend is the move toward mobilizing market forces in K-12 education through such mechanisms as schools of choice and charter schools, which could free schools to hire teachers without the usual restrictions imposed by certification rules. The message seems to be that if teacher education fails to become more efficient in cranking out teachers, the state or the market will find other ways to fill classroom vacancies.

Fiscal pressure on state universities has also intensified in the last few years as state appropriations have leveled off or even declined, which has left universities more dependent than ever on tuition as a source of revenue. Under these circumstances, universities are unlikely to do anything to undercut the traditional profitability of teacher education programs, with their high enrollments and low costs. The result is a familiar pattern: Teacher education is being asked to produce a large number of teachers as efficiently and inexpensively as possible or else these teachers will be hired elsewhere. There is little in this market situation to encourage teacher education to move away from its historic pattern of maintaining programs that are easy, flexible, and cheap.

Social mobility: Teacher education is no longer asked to serve as the conduit for Americans' social aspirations. There are now a large number of people's colleges—including a thousand community colleges and a wide array of nonselective four-year colleges and universities (the latter drawn largely from the ranks of former normal schools)—through which people can gain a chance at social mobility. But the long-term effect of consumer pressure on the normal school and the teachers college (the pressure to provide students with marketable credentials that can be exchanged for a good job) has been to locate teacher education within an institution, the university, where it is looked upon with disdain. In the stratified world of contemporary American higher education, teacher education occupies an anomalous position. It is the low-status option for students in the high-status institution; it offers a practical education in a decidedly academic setting; and it sells itself as a provider of occupational use value in a market that ranks educational products on the basis of exchange value.

In this commodified educational world that consumer demand helped create, teacher education finds itself thoroughly marginalized. The preparation of teachers is no longer under its control but is spread across the various colleges within the university, where it is shaped by a number of people who view the whole enterprise with suspicion. As a result, its purposes are diffused and teacher educators find themselves marginalized even within the teacher education program. It is not surprising, then, to find that there is little incentive within the university to enhance the quality, tighten the focus, heighten the field-experience component, or raise the standards of teacher education.

SERVING STIGMATIZED POPULATIONS

This historical analysis suggests that market pressures have seriously undercut both the status and the role of teacher education—that is, both teacher ed's location in the hierarchy of higher education and its ability to carry out its educational functions effectively. Aggravating these problems still further is the fact that teacher ed has been asked to serve a wide array of stigmatized populations.

One such population is *women*. At the point in American educational history when the goal of universal enrollment first emerged (in the middle of the nineteenth century), teaching came to be defined as women's work, and it has largely remained so ever since. (Currently, about 70 percent of teachers are women.) One reason for this was ideological, since nurturing the young and providing moral education were seen as naturally within the female sphere. Another was practical, since women would work for half the pay of men, and they thus helped subsidize the rapid expansion of school enrollments. But the end result is that teaching, like nursing and secretarial work, have been indelibly identified with women. And this has made the task of educating teachers less prestigious than the task of preparing practitioners for traditionally male-dominated occupations, such as law, medicine, engineering, and business.

Another stigmatized population served by the education school has been the *working class*. Teaching has been and continues to be in many ways the archetypal middle-class job—respectable knowledge-based white-collar work. But at the same time, it has offered modest pay and no career ladder for future advancement. (The starting teacher and the veteran of thirty years both occupy the same position; the only chance for "promotion" is to leave the classroom and enter administration.) The result is that teaching has often been more attractive to candidates from the working class, for whom it represented an accessible way of attaining middle class standing, than for middle-class women

and men (especially men) who had other prospects. This means that education schools that taught these students have been seen by others in the university as bearing the stigma of the parvenu. Not only are education schools latecomers to the university, but also their own students have often come from a lower class background than the average liberal arts student.

A third stigmatized population served by the education school is *children*. The status hierarchy of education is clear in linking the status of the teacher closely with the age and academic stage of the student—from doctoral study at the high end of the scale all the way down to preschool at the low end. Anyone who doubts the lowly status associated with working with children should only consider the pay and prestige of the child-care worker, who stands at the bottom of this particular age-graded spectrum. Part of the problem with education schools, therefore, is that they are indelibly associated with children, in a society that rewards adult-contact work more than child-contact work and in a university setting that is more concerned with serious adult matters than with kid stuff.

Finally, there is the uncertain position of the *teacher herself* in American life. It is not enough that teachers carry stigmatized associations of gender, class, and age, but they also suffer from an American bias in favor of doing over thinking. Teachers are the largest and most visible single group of intellectual-workers in the United States—that is, people who make their living through the production and transmission of ideas. More accessible than the others in this category, they constitute the street-level intellectuals of our society. In fact, teachers are the only intellectuals with whom most people will ever have close contact. Therefore teachers take the brunt of the national prejudice against mere book-learning and those pursuits that are scornfully labeled as only "academic." Whereas real professions transplant hearts, defend criminals, design skyscrapers, and build businesses, teachers worry about textbooks and tests and homework exercises. Of course the work of the lofty university professor is even more academic in all senses of the word, but it so thoroughly abstruse as to be out of reach and beyond the experience of the ordinary citizen. The education school professor, however, is associated with the practitioner of what are apparently the most mundane of intellectual tasks, which are seen as neither particularly useful nor especially obscure.

Consider some other reasons for the relatively low status of teaching in the United States. First, with 2.8 million teachers on the job at any one time, teaching is a mass occupation and as such cannot credibly claim to be an elite profession. And with more than 150,000 new recruits called for every year, teacher ed-

ication is never going to be an exclusive form of professional preparation. Second, since teacher salaries are dependent on the public purse, and since voters have the opportunity to express their preferences about school funding through frequent millage elections, there is an effective ceiling on what members in this occupation can make. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that American teachers will ever be able to earn an income that puts them substantially above the level of the average taxpayer. And third, public school teachers suffer from the negative image of public employment that characterizes this market-oriented society. Market ideology in the United States labels private-sector workers as productive and public employees as drones. The high professions have played into this ideology effectively by identifying themselves as mini-entrepreneurs operating under the fee-for-service model. Teachers cannot make this same claim.

My point here is a simple one: Market pressures have played a significant role in shaping the distinctive history of American teacher education, and they have left it with a disabling legacy. Education schools have been, and continue to be, torn between competing concerns about social efficiency and social mobility. And they 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. In the next chapter, I examine the nature of teacher education as a mode of professional practice and the things about it that make it so difficult for education schools to carry out effectively.

Chapter 3 Teacher Ed in the Present: The Peculiar Problems of Preparing Teachers

The problems that afflict teacher education are not only the result of a history of being battered by market forces but also the result of the peculiar nature of the task itself.¹ Preparing teachers, it turns out, is extraordinarily demanding, in large part because of the complexities of teaching itself as a form of professional practice. The core problem is this: Teaching is an enormously difficult job that looks easy.

Both parts of this proposition have caused severe difficulties for teacher education. The sheer complexity and irreducible uncertainty surrounding teaching as a practice have made it unusually difficult for education schools to develop effective programs for preparing practitioners in the field. And this difficulty is exacerbated by the common perception, among prospective teachers and the public alike, that learning to teach is no big deal. As a result, although teacher education programs struggle mightily and often in vain to prepare teacher candidates for the challenges they will face in the classroom, they earn only disdain for their efforts. Both teacher candidates and educational observers berate these programs for making a simple induction process unnecessarily complicated. Only a relentlessly wrongheaded institu-