

THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION: AN INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY AND PURPOSES

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The Faculty of Education (FOE) is unique among all Western faculties both because of its origins and because of the intricate web of linkages that binds it to the Provincial Government, the professional organizations (unions, really) and the school boards.

There are three basic reasons why the FOE is different from any other faculty. One is due to the way this Faculty—and any other FOE in Ontario – has been founded and the legal-political ramifications of that fact. The second is rooted in what may be called either an intellectual identity crisis or ascribed to be the academic ambiguity surrounding education generally. Finally, the Faculty reflects the special—and crucial—role that education plays in societies of the modern state.

THE LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

Unlike all other faculties at Western, FOE was not established by the University on its own; it was created as a result of an Agreement between the Minister of Education and UWO on April 16, 1963. The Agreement is still the foundation of the Faculty, though it was modified in 1973 (by an Order-In-Council) and in 1987. Although two other institutions entered into similar agreements with the Province in 1963 (Queens and Toronto), Western's agreement was the worst of the three from the point of view of the University. For example, the Agreement stipulated that "all land, buildings and equipment so provided for shall be and remain the property of the Province of Ontario." The content of courses was subject to joint decision of the Minister and the University. And the Dean was appointed "by the University with the concurrence and approval of the Minister." And there was to be an Advisory Committee made up of the Dean, 4 members appointed by the Minister; 4 by the University; and 3 by the Ontario Teachers Federation (the union) that was to "make recommendations in matters concerning admission requirements, curriculum, examinations and other matters affecting the College."

In practice some of the most objectionable parts were ignored due to the political skills of the first Dean of the Faculty, W. Turner and, in 1973 a new Agreement was signed that reflected such practice. It was also this Agreement that incorporated the London Teachers College (Elborn) into the Althouse College and created the Faculty of Education.¹ Many of the links between the Faculty and the Government were retained. For example, the Advisory Committee is still functioning—with the Ministry's appointees being replaced by representatives of Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) and Ministry of Education (MOE)—and it still includes the Ontario Teachers Federation (OTF) members. Moreover, in 1975 Council of Universities (COU) (I presume with our consent on our behalf) and the Ministry of Education signed a new Agreement on Reviews of Programmes Leading to Ministry of Education Teaching Certificates that called for such a review by a 10-member committee on which the University had two representatives and the COU one; the rest come from the Ministry, unions and supervisory officials with school boards.

The Ministry of Education is increasingly curious about the activities of the Advisory and Review Committees. The former Dean of this Faculty, for example, has been hired to prepare a report on how reviews of FOEs should be structured. To make matters worse, OCUA has recently issued an edict modifying the approval process for new programmes. From now on all of these programmes will have to

¹ Interestingly enough, the UWO Senate Committee that dealt with this matter was obviously aware of the dangers that these agreements posed to the University autonomy. Its Report of July 9, 1970, clearly recommends that the Advisory Committee be responsible to the Senate or the Board and it comments: "If the recommendation in 3(a) is adopted, the autonomy of the Senate and the Board is assured."

be approved not only the OCUA and MCU but by MOE as well. These agreements and links bind the Faculty and limit its freedom of action. Apart from the direct effects these agreements have on us there are others that flow from such general restrictions. Among the most important are the following:

Regulation 269

Regulation 269 is issued by the Minister under the power delegated to him/her by the Education Act. This Act alone, 615 pages long in its bilingual version, is a thicket full of surprises and traps, but its relevance to FOE centres on the power it gives the Minister to issue licences to teachers (OTC). Normally, as far as our graduates are concerned, these are issued on the recommendation of the Dean of FOE.

Regulation 269 is called “Ontario Teacher’s Qualifications” and in its 1986 version covers 37 pages. It includes Schedules A,C,D,E and F that stipulate categories of teachers. This Regulation has a pervasive effect on the Faculty. For example, the recent change in Schedule C (effective July 9, 1991), combined some 70 categories of technical training into 5 broad categories of technologies. It is not clear what the implications of this policy change are, but from the point of view of FOE it means providing training/education in areas that are not conceptually clear, have no definite demarcation and lack any indication of what kind of qualification our instructors may need.

Because Regulation 269 stipulates what kind of qualifications are necessary in order to become a teacher (in whatever category), it also stipulates what kind of admission requirements FOE must demand from the applicants for admission. Not surprisingly, there are cases of graduates with Gold Medals in particular subjects that do not gain admission – because they lack the necessary courses stipulated by Regulation 269.²

How Regulation 269 can be changed is one of the mysteries of the universe. My understanding is that at least one former Deputy Minister tried to streamline the process by attempting to change another Regulation, 262, and thereby circumventing in part Regulation 269 – he was not successful.

Practicum

Practicum is also covered in Regulation 269³, and its existence is at the heart of some of the most disputed issues regarding the preparation of teachers. The roots of practicum are to be found in the origins of the teaching craft via apprenticeship. It has been taken for granted that it is both desirable and necessary for future teachers to spend some time in schools while preparing to be teachers. There is no evidence that this is pedagogically sound; at the same time, there is no evidence that it does any excessive harm. In one of the FOE programmes (PEMSTEP), the students are sent out immediately after coming to the Faculty and they spend the whole semester in schools. This obviously undesirable sequence is now being revised.

Regulation 269 calls for students to spend at least 8 weeks in schools; our students in the regular programme spend 10 weeks. Almost all reviews of our programmes urge an increase in the time our students spend in the schools. Until this year, the supervision of these students while in schools has been done either by members of only one Division (Curriculum) or by part-time help (usually retired teachers). These faculty supervisors of students travel all over Southwestern Ontario, visit the schools, sit in on one or more lectures, talk to the Associate Teacher (to whom the student was assigned) and evaluate his or

² The excessive specialization of many Honours BAs and B.Sc.s prevents many good students from entering the teaching profession. This is a topic that should be a subject for a review by the Deans of the Faculties of Arts, Science and Social Science.

³ Section 1, (k)(vii) says: “a minimum of forty days of practical experience in schools or in other situations approved by the Minister for observation and practice teaching” must be included if a programme offered by a FOE graduate is to qualify for OTC.

her performance. It is a wasteful and inefficient system that must be reformed. The cost of that enterprise to the Faculty is about \$800,000 per year (i.e.: about \$1,300 per student).

The Faculty is trying to get away from this system; but any reform runs into vested interests, deep ideological divisions and sheer prejudice. The obstacles we face are not only in the Faculty; they are also to be found outside where the practicum is considered sacred. If the system can be reformed, the Faculty will be on its way to a major departure in its delivery of programmes.

Admission

To a large extent admission to the Faculty is also determined by Regulation 269. We are, however, free to set the academic—or any other—qualifications once the Regulation 269 criteria are met. The FOE at Western is proud to be the only Faculty in Ontario to stress academic qualifications. This has earned it much criticism—most of it unjustified. It has also shared in the general and vague anti-intellectualism that permeates the education system in Ontario and that, in the case of admissions, led one of the innumerable bodies of the provincial government to state the following: “Selection for admission to teacher education programs (the first step toward entry to the profession) is a responsibility which should be shared among government, universities, faculties of education, teachers, and school boards.”⁴

Although universities and faculties of education have representatives on Teachers Education Commission of Ontario (TECO), there were no objections from any source to this presumptuous arrogation of power. Indeed, when the Deans of Education protested this, the COU bureaucrats cautioned us against protesting too much! Yet, it would be hard to find any greater invasion of university autonomy than the claim that admission to it should be shared by governments and unions.

OTF

Another unusual aspect of the FOE is the active participation of the teachers' union in the development of our educational policies. The most visible example of this is the mandated presence of OTF representatives on the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty. The constituent federations of the OTF also have a strong presence on all the review committees that the Ministry establishes from time to time. This is deemed both desirable and necessary because the Faculty needs the cooperation of teachers in the placement of its students in schools. I cannot think of any other faculty at our University that would have a member of a union (or, if that word offends, profession) so intimately involved in the development of its educational policies. [The presence of teachers on these committees is often accompanied by representatives of the Supervisory Officers—i.e.: Supervisors and Directors of Education.]

Tradition

Less tangible, but nevertheless just as real, are the conflicting values that former members of the London Teachers College on the one hand, and Althouse College on the other, brought with them into the new Faculty of Education in 1973. The merging of the two institutions was a traumatic affair with far reaching consequences. While Althouse College was established to prepare secondary school teachers by stressing the academic and thus looking to the University for standards and inspiration, the inclusion of teachers from the Teachers College introduced a tradition based on the civil service status of the teachers, a preference for the apprenticeship model, a willingness to carry out the orders of the Ministry, and a general sharing in the prejudices of the government and the unions. That tradition is still with us—though it is slowly being phased out as these teachers retire (often at the age of 55—being the beneficiaries of the rich retirement scheme of Ontario teachers) or is being remedied through the implementation of differential workloads negotiated under the ACORD policy (I suspect that we have more of these than any other faculty). But because the Faculty is governed as any other faculty, many divisions and disputes have their root in these often conflicting traditions.

⁴ Italics mine. TECO, Report of the Task Force on Admissions, 1991, p.7.

THE INTELLECTUAL CRISIS

The intellectual crisis has a number of manifestations. For example, it is not clear whether teaching is a profession or a trade. This ambiguity is reflected not only in the uncertain character of the teachers' federations and their activities—are they professional associations or trade unions?—but in the continuous debate over teaching itself. For it is not settled, even among educators themselves, whether teaching is a craft that is best taught by example or a profession with a coherent theory at its core. Within FOEs this lack of commonly agreed upon “theory” can be detected in the perennial discussions whether “education” (pedagogy) is an academic discipline in its own right or merely a field to which other academic disciplines bring their specialized knowledge and skills. This quandary propels the question of what is the proper relationship between the Faculty and the profession into the centre of the debate.

Although there are many aspects of our relations with the profession that are deplorable, there are some that are both necessary and unusual if viewed from the perspective of the university. One such aspect is the hiring, evaluation and promotion of our faculty members. Perhaps the best way to describe the difficulty is to offer the following set of facts. During the last three years, the average age of faculty members who received tenure in this Faculty was 44; this year, the average age of those who are on the probationary contracts is 44. Judging from my previous experience in Social Science I would gather that this about 10 to 15 years above the average age of faculty members in similar positions in that Faculty. The reason for this discrepancy is the perceived need to hire faculty members who have both experience as teachers in the schools and the necessary doctorate. The result is reflected in the age characteristics of those eligible for and receiving tenure.

There is one more consequence of this difference between FOE and the rest of the University: the expected academic publication record for promotion and tenure is blurred by the kind of things that professors in faculties of education did before they came to the University, while doing their doctorates (often in Education, rather than in an arts, science or social science discipline), and what they are expected to do while members of FOE. Perhaps the most obvious difference concerns the participation of the faculty members in the development of curricula in their respective fields. This is almost a mandatory task. It may contain academic endeavour—and members of the Faculty P & T Committee and our Merit Committee (who evaluate their colleagues every year) are knowledgeable enough to assess the record.

Another form of activity that is expected from members of this Faculty is their participation in the development of Ministry of Education policy statements. I suspect that there is hardly any member of this Faculty who, over the past ten years or so, has not been a member of one or more provincial bodies dealing with his or her area of specialization. These are very heavy commitments in terms of time—especially in the bureaucratized Ministry of Education.

These differences make it very hard to do justice to our faculty members when it comes to promotion and tenure. The record is replete with innumerable and lengthy memos from this Faculty to the appropriate Senate committees, with subsequent and frequent trips to explain the memos—and with the inevitable sense on our part that the differences are being judged more as undesirable deviations rather than as the natural consequences of the characteristics of our profession and our relation with it.

The differences and the difficulties explained above have their counterpart in financial area. Perhaps the best example of this is our increased inability to hire practicing teachers on secondment contracts: we simply cannot afford them. Yet, because there is a need to keep in touch with what goes on in the schools, most faculties of education have to rely on the secondment. This, of course, complicates our problems when it comes to hiring (why should I come to FOE if I can earn more money as a consultant or other non-teaching “teacher” for a school board?). For although it is easy to separate salaries from ranks, tenure, etc., in our minds, it is more difficult to do so in practice.

These activities demonstrate the pervasive nature of our linkage with the field. Education, to repeat, is not like any other faculty; not even any other professional faculty. I have already mentioned on reason for this difference (the history of our legal foundation); another reason, I suspect, is the limited time that FOE has in which to prepare the future professionals: we have our students in our Faculty for the grand total of 20 weeks! The remaining 10 weeks are spent in the schools doing practicum. Because most of our students are highly qualified academically, they have no difficulty meeting the academic requirements. The only

way they can fail is by not completing the practicum. The result is that the practice of teaching not only attracts them (it is understandably exciting for them to observe and do the actual teaching) but also tilts their notion of what is and what is not important. In that, of course, they are strengthened both by their experience in schools and by the preaching of some of our faculty members who share the traditional view of the preparation of teachers as an apprenticeship. It is sad to report that although there has been many attempts to extend the length of professional education, they have all come to nought—both because of financial considerations and because of the deeply held prejudices on the part of those who make decisions in the Government.⁵

We are now approaching what I suspect is at the bottom of many of these issues: an “identity” problem of the Faculty of Education—indeed, of all schools that aim to prepare teachers for their profession/craft/art. This existential ambiguity has many ramifications and manifestations. The heart of it is our uncertainty in answering the question “what is it that this Faculty does?” At first blush the answer may appear to be simple: to prepare future teachers and to do research in the relevant areas. Difficulties, however, appear as soon as one asks what is it that the preparation is suppose to do? What, to put it differently, is good teaching? What are the characteristics of good teachers? One may think that, after all these decades—indeed, centuries—of “education”, there would be some universally acceptable definition and/or description of what good pedagogy is. In fact, there is none. The field is rife with disputes about almost any basic characteristic or category that would make pedagogy a discipline comparable to one in science, social science or arts. There are, of course, those who offer definitions of “good teachers” or “good teaching”. But these efforts invariably consist of mindless and undifferentiated catalogue lists of characteristics and activities that the result is meaningless.

Perhaps a couple of illustrations may help. What makes a good teacher? Are the characteristics of a good teachers teachable? Are they “mechanical” in nature—and thus teachable? Or are they inherent in most human beings—and hence need not be taught? And if the definition falls somewhere in-between, where does it become “teachable”?

Or, to cite another example, take our PEMSTEP programme. This is one in which the incoming students spend a few days with our Faculty in late August and then go out to schools for the whole semester. They return only in January. This wholesale abandonment of any kind of a theoretical preparation of future teachers is very popular with the teaching profession, school boards and the students. It is, on the face of it, the most wrong-headed way to introduce aspiring teacher to the profession (would one send a medical, musical or legal student out to the profession without first “educating” him or her in some professional fundamentals?). Indeed, not only is the practice apparently professionally unique, it also leads to an early indoctrination of future students into the existing modes of teaching. And yet—if we object to the sequence, we do so presumably on the assumption that a) there is a body of knowledge that future teachers should have before they arrive in the schools; and/or b) that the FOE has a model of good teaching that is superior to that existing in the schools (which we are fearful the students would copy). If either of these assumptions is correct, it would be nice to see the arguments articulated somewhere; I am not aware of any.⁶

The problem of evaluating what is or what is not good teaching goes, needless to say, beyond our Faculty. Are there, in fact, any useful measures of evaluation of good teaching? There are some who would argue that the best way to judge good teachers is by the results achieved by their students—that is, by how much the students have learned. Suppose, however, that one devised such a system (and that—even less likely—the unions would agree to its use), do we really believe that what students learn is the result of teaching? Is it not possible to argue that what students learn is largely (if not totally) independent of their teachers? Of course, bad teachers may hamper the acquisition of knowledge and

⁵ See the TECO Report cited earlier.

⁶ There are those who argue that teaching is not a profession comparable to medicine, nursing or law but that it is more akin to the calling of those who serve a deity. This is a tempting analogy that ought to be resisted, if for no other reason than that, in our secular world, it would mean that the role of the church would be performed by the state.

skills—but a) how bad do the teachers have to be to have such an effect; and b) how strong is this correlation anyway?

The ambiguity surrounding education is reflected in the very dispute whether education is a discipline or merely an area to which other disciplines bring their particular expertise. These are important questions that have not been resolved and to which answers have not been universally agreed upon. The result is a conceptual diversity, if not confusion, that permeates not only the academic aspect of the teacher education but the whole educational establishment. What appears as, and often is, ignorance and anti-intellectualism of teachers and educational bureaucrats is thus, perhaps, only a reflection of the genuine dilemma that the whole education system faces; for not only is there a natural and legitimate debate about the purposes of education, there is even greater dispute about the means through which these goals can and should be pursued. This dispute, of course, has wider ramifications than the preparation of teachers (it also concerns the structure and curricula of schools, for example) but it is certainly an inextricable part of that problem.

THE STATE AND EDUCATION

Underlying both the legal and intellectual difficulties of the FOE is the importance and all-pervasive nature of education in the modern state and society. Education is perhaps unique among the social institutions of the modern state because it is so central to the future of its citizens and economy. The goals of education, therefore, are not only educational but social. These purposes can be determined only on political and moral grounds and thus by political and moral authorities. Nowadays, this means the state: the education system has been (and, in spite of all efforts to privatize it in some jurisdictions, it will remain) an essential instrument of the society and state.⁷

This dependence on and control by the state, the all-pervasive presence of the state in our schools, makes the educational system unlike any other in: from the certification of teachers (which, unlike in other professions, is done by the Government) to the control of curricula to the structure and administration of the schools, the state is the final arbiter and decision-maker. Not surprisingly, therefore, the selection and preparation of teachers within such a system is important to governments. Indeed, the earlier cited TECO assertion of shared responsibility for admission to FOEs by the Government, unions, school boards as well as the universities is not so much an expression of a conspiratorial design as an honestly held opinion by the representatives of the non-university people. And, it should be noted, it is based on the unarticulated but assumed recognition of the role education plays in our society.

The fact that we at the university think the desired social goals can be best achieved by respecting our autonomy should not blind us to the validity of concern on the part of the wider community. Nor should we ignore the possibility that the values held by those outside the academia may come into conflict with the values we hold. Thus the inevitable conflict between the essentially meritocratic (easily interpreted as elitist) nature of our work and the strong desire of at least the current government to sacrifice that value on the altar of its conception of equity will be difficult to resolve.

It will be especially so in the FOE where, to repeat, the outside interests have both greater influence and certainly greater legal justification for interference. The preparation of teachers for the school system is not the same as the preparation of lawyers, doctors or musicians: the interest of the society and the state in our profession is not the same as its interest in other professions. To paraphrase an old saying, the education of teachers is too important to be left in the hands of educators alone—or so the argument runs.⁸

⁷ Perhaps one of the best ways to verify this is to think of the financing of the educational system—and of the regulations that governments impose on those schools that are private.

⁸ And it is not so left. What other profession has a political body to administer its system comparable to local boards of education—democratically elected and with control over finances and curricula?

The plausibility of the claim for greater participation in the shaping of programmes in and admission to FOEs by the outside interests also helps to explain the confusion about the same issues within the Faculty. The previously described confusion that surrounds the nature of teaching, for example, also influences the conflict about the social purposes of education (as opposed to the pedagogical purposes). This influence is further strengthened by a mistaken, but widely held and often repeated belief that “education is an agent of change”—meaning social change. This rhetoric is embraced partly in the sincere belief that education is essential in the creation of a better society, partly because it can serve as a potent justification for public funds. But regardless of the motive, it leads to claims of effectiveness by the education system in areas that sober second thoughts would warn against. Thus, for example, the current trend toward extending the school system to even younger children is justified not so much on educational grounds as on the social desirability of such an extension. Similarly, the public debate about the drop-out rates seldom mentions the pedagogical reasons for increasing the participation rates. Rather, the argument is made on the vague assumption that future labour markets will demand higher (i.e., longer in terms of time) levels of education.

It is not clear how the FOEs will respond to these issues—or, for that matter, that they can or should. It is even less clear that we are the social organization that is better qualified to respond to these questions than are the school boards or the provincial governments. This, of course, creates additional uncertainties and stress within the Faculty, for the Faculty members are just as unclear and uncertain about their proper role as is the educational establishment—if not the whole society.

Faculties of education are thus mired in the confusion about the means (i.e., teaching) of education; they are also perpetually confronted by the shifting sands of public policy on the purpose of education. There is no public system of education in the world that is not being used for social as well as for education ends. In Ontario, the explicit purpose is the preparation of children for their roles as citizens and productive members of our economic system. But education is also used as an instrument of what may be called social engineering (e.g., racial quotas, creation of desired social attitudes, etc.). The interrelation of the social and education goals often leads to conflicts—and these, in turn, intensify the disputes about the means (such as teaching) and, just as importantly, the very personnel of the teaching profession through which these goals should be pursued.

CONCLUSION

None of this should be interpreted in a perverse way as an attack on the need for the academic (scientific, scholarly) study and teaching of education. On the contrary, the intellectual haze and the bureaucratic morass in which the present education system seems to meander cries out to high heaven precisely for such an endeavour. There is work to be done and it is hard to think of a better, more qualified place for it than a Faculty of Education within a university. But that work will bear fruit only if the FOE is protected from the external threats by the shield of university autonomy (especially in the case of admissions and content of programmes) and, just as importantly, by an understanding by the academic community of the difficulties facing the Faculty of Education.

BBK
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SUMMARY

The enclosed paper is far too long to be read by busy people in its entirety. I have, therefore, decided to summarize the relevant issues. If they are not clear, perhaps a look at the whole paper may help.

The Faculty of Education is unlike any other faculty at UWO. There are three basic reasons for this: the way the FOE was established; the ambiguous nature of teacher education (both as an academic enterprise in a university setting and in the educational system as a whole); and the social purposes for which education is used in modern societies.

1) The FOE was not created by the University on its own; rather, it is a creation of a formal Agreement between the University and the Minister of Education (all FOEs in this Province are in a similar position). The Agreement of 1963 was extended by an Order-In-Council in 1973. Therefore, the Government of Ontario has legal rights vis-à-vis the Faculty and the University. It also means that the FOE is governed in many of its policies by the Minister, the Education Act, and the various Regulations issued by the Minister under the Act, that do not apply to other faculties. Among the most important aspects of this control are admissions to the Faculty programmes, certain aspects of these programmes (both via Regulation 269), mandatory reviews of the Faculty and its programmes (by committees on which outside representatives have a majority), an overseeing Advisory Committee (again, with a majority of outsiders), and an official representation by the OTF on our Educational Policy Committee.

On top of these formal links, there are many other pressures, influences and controls that either stem from these formal documents or are deeply imbedded in the day-to-day practice of the Faculty. These ties range from providing In-Service courses to teachers in this region to reliance on school boards and schools for helping us with placing student-teachers in the schools for teaching observation and practice teaching (the so-called practicum—mandated by Regulation 269).

2) Faculties of Education in Ontario are fairly recent additions to universities and are still searching for their appropriate academic roles. It was only in 1963 that Althouse College was created at Western (it was to prepare teachers for secondary schools) and only in 1973 that the existing Faculty of Education was established (and absorbed the London Teachers College). Along with the difficulties associated with any new faculty, this Faculty did not have any academic models to study or imitate. Two or three decades is a very short time in which to develop an academic tradition.

The absence of tradition is not helped by the lack of consensus on some very basic questions about the teaching profession. Indeed, the very definition of the occupation of teachers is open to dispute: is it a profession or a trade? This ambiguity is reflected not only in the structure of the teachers' organizations—are the federations professions organizations or trade unions?—but at the core of this Faculty, for the very education of teachers depends on how the occupation is viewed. If it is trade, then an apprenticeship model may be best; if it is a profession, then an academic preparation is more suitable. Moreover, if teaching is a profession, what is the core of it? What is the theoretical foundation of it? If it is a trade, where does university education fit? Adherents of one or the other view have, inevitably, different conceptions of what and how the FOE programmes should be structured. Because the two conceptions are held by people within FOE as well as those in “the field” (populated by people outside the FOE, including those in the Ministry and the schools), there is a constant struggle (inside and outside the Faculty) about most aspects of our programmes: admissions, content, practice, etc. Indeed, the essential ambiguity can be seen in the structure of the FOE programme: our students spend 20 weeks in the Faculty and 10 weeks doing practicum. That, in the hearts, minds and pockets of the Government and, regrettably, most teachers, is supposed to be the right preparation for a life-long profession (if it is a profession!).

The lack of consensus about the nature of the teaching occupation is complicated by lack of agreement about the academic character of the work and study done by members of faculties of education. The essential issues here can be summarized in one question: is there an academic discipline called “education”? There are those who would argue that “education” is not a discipline but a field to which other academic disciplines bring their own expertise and skills. Most obviously, and most frequently, this

question comes up when University-wide committees evaluate and judge members of this faculty for promotion and tenure.

The view that this faculty is deviant in the academic procession is strengthened by the kind of people we hire. We often demand – and in light of the government regulations and policies we have to demand— that our faculty members have a number of years experience in the schools as well as the university-required Ph.D. (or Ed.D.) for probationary appointments. The results can be seen in the average age of the faculty members who have gotten tenure during the last 3 years (44) and in those who now hold probationary appointments (also 44). This is probably about 10 to 15 years above the average age of faculty members in similar positions in the core faculties.

3) The FOE is also a more integral part of the educational system as a whole than are our sister professional faculties in relation to their fields. Unlike other professions or disciplines, education is considered by societies in modern states as an essential instrument for other, non-educational goals: a democratic citizenry, a productive labour force, social equality, etc., etc. These goals are often considered to be more important—or at least just as important—as are the education goals themselves. Inevitably, this has direct influence on what we at the FOE do, whom we hire and whom we admit. A current case may illustrate: a recent government report proposed admission quotas for visible minorities and, at the same time, a devaluation of the academic background for all applicants for admission (i.e., by allocating 40% of admission criteria to academic records and 60% to something called “life experience” profiles).

Finally, the FOE is not only a part of the University; it is also a part of the educational establishment of Ontario. This is a huge, unwieldy and costly enterprise that has developed into an inter-locking system of vested interests (indeed, some would call it incestuous). The system is characterized by lack of accountability (due to fuzzy jurisdictional lines) and over-grown bureaucracy. It is also constantly being criticized for these shortcomings, but with no apparent effect.

It is within this system, with its conflicting goals, that the Faculty faces its own uncertainties and confusion. And yet, if there is hope, if there is an institutional base for such hope—it is surely the FOE. For it is here where an academic (scholarly) dissection of the problems can be combined with a healing process based on sensible and sound discussion of alternatives. But we need two conditions in order to carry out this task: we must be protected from the inimical outside influences by the shield of university autonomy, and we must receive from our colleagues the long-overdue recognition of our academic work.