Reflecting From the Margins of Education Faculties: Refiguring the Humanist, and Finding a Space for Story in History

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Abstract

Notwithstanding their traditional characterization as a foundations subject, history of education courses are marginal in pre-service teacher education. This marginalization is framed here in light of a broader concern for the discipline’s turn away from the humanities. History of education’s fundamental purpose, it is argued, lies in the exploration of what it means to be human, and how education has historically been shaped by our values, authority, contexts, and norms. Using stories drawn from literature and memoirs in the teaching of educational history is one means of exploring intersections of education with human cultures and societies across historical contexts. History is etymologically linked with story telling, and both history and literature share narrative features; the two should not be conflated, however, due to distinctive disciplinary features of history, such as the requirement that any claims to truth require what John Dewey referred to as warranted assertability.

Keywords: history of education, teacher education, educational foundations, humanities, literature, historical mindedness, John Dewey.

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Introduction

History of education courses occupy such a peripheral position in the curriculum of teacher education programs that the entire discipline’s relationship to educational inquiry must be challenged. While crises in the humanities, real and imagined, have ebb and flow throughout the last century, the solutions to these are contingent upon the contemporary context. This article shall address the marginalization of history within teacher education, which is contextualized in light of the peripheral status of humanistic study within teacher preparation. I shall argue that historical fiction and memoirs can be used as sources prompting the exploration of stories, voices, and contexts in educational history. Literary sources are depicted as means of intimately relating the study of human values, social norms, language, and authority to educational themes requiring further historical analysis. The discussion here follows for a broader argument developed in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (2009) exploring the decline of history as an educational foundation, using Ontario as an illustrative case.

First, this article shall briefly revisit the subjects of discussion introduced in 2009, summarizing five reasons postulated for the marginalization of history in teacher education, which are framed in terms of a broader misconception regarding the relationship of theory to practice. Second, it assumes the challenge offered to seek strategies for revisiting the purposes and means of instruction in history of education that will make more explicit the relationship between the discipline’s core questions and the educational aims of promoting critical and reflective inquiry. This necessitates, I argue, two shifts in the ways that educational historians think about and teach the discipline. One shift involves recasting educational history in terms closer to its disciplinary roots, as a humanistic discipline liberated from the frames imposed on it by postmodern, sociological, and Foucaultian theories; a second shift involves the use of stories and historical fiction in the teaching of educational history to introduce themes leading to historical examination of the human, cultural, and personal stories that are largely absent in textbooks and in academic texts.

These shifts are not posited here as magic bullets that might immediately shine light on educational history and convince administrators, teacher candidates, and scholars that the history of education must feature more prominently in Faculties of Education; they do, however, address a crisis in the field, where explorations of the history of ideas and contexts shaping the contexts in which we educationists work are marginalized. In many respects, this article looks cautiously and nervously inwards, reflecting from the margins of teacher education at the ways that educational foundations have been overturned, so that history is no longer understood as a vital and powerful means enabling educationists to explore their own educational and social contexts critically in means derived from explorations of past contexts. Bereft of the stories that imbue history with narratives exploring who we are on this earth, and overburdened with theoretical frameworks that impose meaning on the past from above, educational history is unrecognizable as a humanistic study; unless shifts occur within the field, it perhaps not worth saving, as it will have no appeal or purpose outside of itself or to any educationists beyond its practitioners.

At present, with the history of education, one of the traditional pillars of teacher preparation, peripheral, the language that all teacher educators use to discuss the
educational foundations in teacher education should be called into question; the de facto
foundation of teacher education curricula are curriculum courses in various content areas. As first posited in 2009, “architecturally, it would seem folly to make the foundation of a structure narrower and feeble than the building that it supports” (574). Consequently, it is both prudent and pressing that teacher educators, particularly educational historians, reconceptualise educational history’s purposes, place, content, and means of instruction in Faculties of Education.

The discussion in this article should be seen as situated more broadly in terms of debates concerning the fundamental purposes of teacher education; the arguments that follow assume the premise that teacher candidates must not only prepare to face the contemporary and sometimes technical realities of classroom teaching. Education involves a broadening, not a narrowing of perspectives. Thinking about how this are educationally is in itself insufficient. Educational history is, when framed as a record of the past, a broad testament to how much, and how dramatically, practices and policies in pedagogy change. The history of education liberates us educationists from assuming that the educational institutions and aims with which we operate are the only, or best, ways of educating. How things are—with respect to the structure, governance, administration, and aims of education—is certainly not how they always were, nor are things necessarily as they ought to be.

**Revisiting the Decline of History as a Foundation**

If teacher educators believe that teacher candidates no longer need to know anything about teaching and learning in the past, and if thinking historically about practices and social contexts of education is not meritorious of a fixed place in a curriculum already congested and overburdened, then the death of historical inquiry in teacher preparation should be properly announced and a formal ceremony held. Neither begging such questions nor mournful laments will restore educational history to a central position in the studies that teacher candidates undertake, for both the discipline and the field of teacher preparation have evolved to such an extent that they are no longer recognizable to one another. I explored history’s marginalization in teacher education curricula within a broader historical context in an article titled “Gone but not Forgotten: The Decline of History as an Educational Foundation” (Christou, 2009).

This article, while using Ontario as an illustrative case, demonstrated that “the humanities and, more particularly, the social foundations of education, are in crisis” and witnessed in the marginalization of these subjects within teacher education curricula and in educational policy documents across North America (Christou, 2009, 570). Five factors potentially contributing in various measures to the demise of history’s foundational role were explored. The first concerned an accountability shift in teacher education, which due in part to shortened programs and congested curricula, funding being tied to outcome measures, and increasing rationalization and centralization of decisions, represents a relatively recent, sometimes tacit, requirement that disciplines prove meritorious of space in teacher education (Bales, 2006; Bredo, 2005).

The second factor concerned the methods and means of instruction in educational history, which all too frequently depends upon textbooks treating educational foundations and academic articles; there is no literature supporting hope that there has been any
dramatic change in the teaching resources used in instruction, which is profoundly problematic due to the often superficial and sometimes banal treatment of educational history that textbooks employ. The third factor postulated that the transfer of teacher education in Ontario from normal schools and teachers’ colleges to faculties of education in universities carried forward “a tradition of training candidates for the practical realities of the classroom” (Christou, 572), by concentrating upon initiation into appropriate methods and strategies for classroom teaching. This tradition is in essence antithetical to the purposes of educational history, which largely concern reflection on the inevitability of change rather than training for extant circumstances, and the examination of educationists as instruments of change via the exploration of past contexts.

Historian Herbert Kliebard (1995) explained this reflection by arguing that educational history’s purpose pertains less to the curriculum design, lesson planning, and classroom administration as it does to the habit of deliberative and critical reflective inquiry into educational contexts:

It is the habit of holding up the taken-for-granted world to critical scrutiny, something that usually can be accomplished more easily in a historical context than in a contemporary one. Ideas and practices that seem so normal and natural in a contemporary setting often take on a certain strangeness when viewed in a historical setting, and that strangeness often permits us to see those ideas and practices in a different light (Kliebard, 1995, p. 195).

Kliebard’s position follows from that of Emile Durkheim (1977), who held out the promise that studying the history of education would teach them neither to revel in the past, nor to be seduced by whatever is new or technological. Durkheim depicted educational history as an antidote to narrow and technical training of teachers, which he described as “simply instructing our future teachers in how to apply a number of sound recipes” (Durkheim, 1977, p. 8). History of education, alternatively, was a means of leading future teachers “away from the prejudices both of neophobia and neophilia: and this is the beginning of wisdom” (Durkheim, 1977, p. 9). The study of educational history demonstrates that pedagogical change may not be linear and progressive, nor may it be predictable, but it is unavoidable.

The fourth factor concerning the marginalization of history implicates the involvement of government and the Ontario College of Teachers in the certification and regulation of education faculties in an emphasis upon standardization and control of what subjects teacher candidates will study. Not only do the mandatory courses teacher education programs must include crowd out the traditional foundations subjects, including history, they leave less room for the study of historical parallels and narratives that challenge contemporary educational practices as well as any sense of their inevitability and permanency. The fifth and final factor discussed concerned the yoking of educational history in ‘foundations’ courses with disciplines including philosophy, sociology, and psychology of education. Each of these areas has a different disciplinary structure, various means of understanding, and distinct questions it concerns; the blurring of borders between these disciplines led to the dissolving of each area of study as a distinct subject, conflating different means and methods of studying education. History, as a foundations subject:
Became disconnected both from the curriculum as an independent discipline and from the concerns of its ‘parent’ discipline [history]. This latter disconnect undermines the very aims of historical inquiry by requiring that it concentrate on contemporary issues and debates rather than on the past for its own sake. With the emergence of postmodern critiques of power and knowledge bases, the foundations model (and with it, each of the humanities and social science topics involved) was interrogated and attacked. Why did foundations courses focus heavily on the ideas and texts inherited from ‘dead European white men’? Where were the female, international, and minority voices in the foundations syllabus (Christou, 573)?

The plight of history as a marginalized subject in contemporary teacher education curricula has been the plight of each foundations subject, particularly sociology and philosophy. Some of the postmodern critiques were particularly valid; in particular, the matter of including multiethnic, multicultural, and multigendered voices will be treated later in this paper in the argument that stories need to be central to the exploration of history.

The History of Education as Humanism

Historians of education need to turn a careful and penitent eye inwards, seeking, firstly, self-recognition. More than seven decades ago, L. J. Bondy of St. Michael’s College in Toronto, Ontario soliloquized as follows: “I wonder how far we must go before we begin to realize that modern education is gradually turning its back on all that is cultural and thereby betraying its most fundamental purpose” (Bondy, 1938, p. 121). Educational historians, it is argued here, must evaluate the purposes of their discipline in relation to contemporary teacher preparation, and consider the fundamental purposes of history anew.

History’s fundamental purpose rests not with the memorization and recall of facts, figures, and dates; no matter the potential of common cultural memory for social cohesion or citizenship, memorizing materials documented in foundations textbooks is very far from humanistic study of the purposes and contexts of our educational past. Likewise, history education conceived of as dispositions, skills, and abilities, regardless of whether these constitute the habits practiced by historians in their craft—the most robust and applicable framework to exemplify this approach is the Historical Benchmarks project developed by Peter Seixas (2006)—can amount to reductions to technical habits unless concentrated upon questions exploring our humanity, values, relationships, and the relation of these with our environments. As Ken Osborne (2001) notes, historical study is most meaningful when exploring our worldviews and the meanings of what it means to be human. Rosa Bruno-Jofré and Karen Steiner (2007) posit the aim of exploring our humanity via the study of our history as vital to the fostering of educative experiences in history, which are rooted in ethically defensible aims and ideals. The fundamental purpose of historical study must concern our wondering about how to live well and ethically. History is a means of engagement with who we are – individually, collectively, culturally, diversely – on this planet.
Further, it bears emphasizing that the marginalization of educational history within Faculties of education is neither indicative nor representative of a general trivialization of history in other social contexts. The warrants for claiming that interest in and study of history in Canadian society are actually flourishing outside of education faculties are recoverable through a casual exploration of the shelves of any local bookstore, where works of national, international, political, social, and military histories, in addition to historical fiction, are regularly produced and consumed. History of education’s peripheral status is an exception rather than the norm. The aberration is more alarming in light of large scale projects, centres, and networks that have received substantial funding grants to research the teaching of history, historical consciousness, and the complex relationship between the past and our present identities. In the Canadian context, of note are the Canadians and their Pasts project, The History of Education Network, and the Centre for Historical Consciousness. Canadians’ interest in and study of history does not seem to be translating into a renewed interest in or revival of educational history in Canadian teacher education programs. Rather, the alternative appears to be the case.

**Stories and Educational Histories**

In response to the challenges facing the marginalization of educational history in teacher education framed above, I suggest that the history of education must rely more heavily on story. History is not literature, I shall argue, but the two are intertwined, most notably in the etymology; the Greek noun *historia* (ιστορία), denotes both a narrative and events that have come to pass. These stories can be drawn from voices and contexts outside the traditional canons represented in anthologies of education heavily biased towards Western European and Caucasian educationists. These stories can draw out dilemmas, problems, and cases outside the local and particular experiences teacher candidates have had in their own learning and teaching contexts. These stories can introduce the necessity of understanding education as a complex enterprise implicated within broader cultural, economic, social, and political forces. As historian Ludmilla Jordanova explains, history as a discipline must engage extensively with the wider world:

> The study of history is intimately bound up with social, political, and economic institutions, such as museums, the educational system, and government. It is equally closely connected with cultural life, that is, with television, fiction, drama, poetry, radio, film, art, and so on (Jordanova, 2000, 2).

With respect to the history of education, stories drawn from various sources, particularly literature and historical fiction, can be powerful prompts to introduce and frame historical themes, contexts, subjects, and sources, which shall be examined further in the course.

Using stories and literature as ways into historical analysis and study is not tantamount to replacing historical method with literary analysis, nor is it collapsing the purposes and means of two disciplines, literature and history. Two aims for educational may be stated here, each supports the use of stories in exploring history, and each opposes potential claims that history of education is merely useful for the derivation of common knowledge or for the construction of canonical texts to read or reference.
Firstly, history of education offers teacher candidates opportunities to think critically about pedagogy by considering contexts of study not delimited by contemporary practices, standards, and curricula, and envisioning the aims of teacher education as being more than training in skills, content, and method. Secondly, history of education is a means of inspiring the imaginations of prospective teachers, and of anchoring their pedagogical attitudes in explorations of ethical questions including our broader values as human beings in the world.

Just as teacher candidates must understand that they do not have to conform to contemporary practices, they need not emulate the past. Educational history, at its best, counters backwards-looking attitudes towards pedagogy, and seeks to remove blinders that restrict critical evaluation of the present. History of education in teacher preparation can seek to foster forward-looking, hopeful, and imaginative habits of mind. The following discussion outlines the promise of using historical fiction as one means of supporting these aims while acknowledging the congested and increasingly interdisciplinary character of teacher education curricula. Employing story as an entry point into educational history has the further benefit of relating the discipline to its foundational principles, which are rooted in the evocative retelling and exploration of human experiences in all their triumph, distress, and drama.

What follows are illustrations of fiction used to serve the ends of history, rather than supplanting these. Questions for further study are drawn out, which open opportunities for individual or peer study into a historical question, potentially relating to contemporary life. Literature is one way of exploring the past, and the perspectives or questions raised will need further study in a history of education course. Peter Seixas (2006), in formulating a framework for discussing the teaching and learning of history, outlines six benchmarks: a) exploring primary and secondary sources; b) looking at multiple perspectives; c) considering the moral implications of history; d) establishing historical significance; e) examining the causes and consequences of actions; and f) discussing forces of continuity and change. Far from impinging upon the core questions and methods of historical study, the introduction of historical fiction permits at the very least, within a broader historical study of education, a careful consideration of how stories are told, what sources are used as evidence, how individuals interact with broader forces and institutions, and how educational values are necessarily understood within a particular context.

The examples are drawn largely from voices and contexts that are outside of popular anthologies in an effort to demonstrate how stories from the African continent, from postcolonial contexts, and from hyper-industrialized spaces can offer powerful questions for Canadian teacher candidates to reflect upon in their own places of study and work. The illustrations intend to briefly draw out the potentialities of using stories to introduce historical study, as well as the benefits of exploring narratives that would otherwise be absent. As Kliebard, noted earlier, argued considering the history of education as a humanistic discipline, the sources of our study and the questions that we engage with need not be drawn only from the local and familiar.

Umberto Eco’s final novel, The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana, portrays a protagonist who has a loss of his episodic, or autobiographical, memory (Eco, 2004). His amnesia will not allow him to connect who he is at present to who he has been. The character’s semantic, or public, memory, however, is intact and allows him to recall
cultural artefacts, scholastic facts, and popular stock phrases or categorizations. He remembers when Napoleon died, for example, but has no sense of his own family, job, and personal status. Cultural phenomena, literature, and art are attributed equal authority as primary sources in the protagonist’s active reconstruction of self. The novel offers a parallel to the process of doing history, where what is at stake is not the support of some academic theory, conceptual framework, or publishable study, but the self in time.

In Faculties of Education, where both teacher education and research can be concentrated on the complexities of immediate classroom needs as well as projected ones, the questions that compel Eco’s protagonist into the archives of his attic compel us to turn to the history of education as a resource. Who are we as educators, and what are our influences? What relations bind us to public needs and to the public good? Why are our institutions structured as they are, and to what ends are we working? In other words, who are we, how did we get here, and where are we going?

As the above example illustrates, stories can be pivots for critical thinking about educational contexts and spaces. These can take the form of personal histories and they can evoke reflections of one’s personal, educational experiences, and the sources of background knowledge. In other cases, historical fiction can draw teacher candidates into contexts beyond the bounds of immediate experience and into consideration of past traditions, places, and personalities. As it stands, teacher candidates are being inducted into a state of professional amnesia, wherein the past is lost. If mandatory history of education courses are no longer possible in congested curricula populated by curriculum courses, perhaps an interdisciplinary and critical dialogue emerging from careful reading of historical fiction can introduce questions that must be answered historically.

Literature enables critical interpretation and fosters deep insight of educational contexts and scenarios reaching beyond student teachers’ immediate lived experiences (Sumara, 2002). Considering the relationships and intersections amongst teaching, learning, culture, and language (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000), also requires examination of the normative implications of these intersecting factors for teachers and learners.

While a full exploration of the benefits of literature for critical thinking about education cannot be attempted here, several examples of how fiction relates to educational history and might lead to further historical analysis will be considered below. The texts draw on industrial and post-colonial contexts and are explored as anchors for the introduction of historical, educational themes in context. The dangers of conflating disciplines by conflating the purposes of historical fiction with those of history shall be discussed in the section that follows.

Charles Dickens’ Hard Times is an example of a text from industrial England which teacher candidates can use to examine ways that the ethos of industry in an urban context permeated educational thinking. Across North America, many modern public school systems were established and managed for the efficient functioning of industrialized cities. From Hard Times, the horrific simile of school as factory might prompt educators to reflect upon their own educational experiences with respect to some of the vivid images and phrases found in the novel (Dickens, 2001). In what ways is academic instruction disembodied, cold, and without harmony, and how might it neglect the student’s emotional and cultural frames of reference?

Considering the perspectives of various characters, how might education relate to social norms? In the voice of Mr. Gradgrind, the teacher whose name distils an
educational philosophy, can we think about the school bells beckoning students to line up in neat rows before entering square cells for instruction? What are the core ideas of industrialism, and how do these relate to the standardization of curricula and knowledge production? The themes are familiar to us today – efficiency, accountability, standardization – and the forces of continuity and change evoke past, present, and future in relation to our educational practices within any context?

V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*. The novel describes, in the second chapter, education of young students in post-colonial Trinidad (Naipaul, 1961). The teacher, a representative of the English schooling system of the time, is an oppressive force who hammers mathematical notions into his students’ minds by rote repetition. He holds a rod between his hands and flexes it, a demonstration of colonial and administrative authority. Schooling here is the first line of oppression, where students are compelled each day to learn content decided upon by educationists not concerned with the local needs via means of instruction that are foreign to their culture and context. A further implication to explore that is evident in the classroom scenes Naipaul’s describes surrounds the teaching and learning of the English language in post-colonial contexts. English is both an oppressive and liberating force in postcolonial literature; it represents a language of an external, colonial authority that imposes on the local community a culture from above, but it also empowers and enables the expression of ideas and sentiments.

Bessie Head’s novel *When Rain Clouds Gather* brings Golema Mmidi, a village in Botswana, to the forefront of our consciousness and teaches us how individuals have been able to influence perceptions while emphasizing the importance of building inter-personal connections and a community of understanding (Head, 1969). The villagers are without a formal education and deprived of means for improving their existence, which is for the most part depicted in bleak terms. The elders are scornful of change, and the community’s aims are disparate and uncoordinated. A black male who escapes apartheid in South Africa and a white European agriculturalist challenge authority and motivate economic and educational reform in the community. The subjects of Bessie Head’s novel were drawn from both real and imagined cases of economic and educational reform in rural Africa, and for teacher candidates, the text can lead to exploration and discussion of educational reforms.

The writing prompts the reader to question the status quo, to question the assumptions behind prevailing practices, to reflect on one’s personal beliefs and purposes within a community, and to consider how reforms have and might be implemented in social institutions. At the focal point of these inquiries lies a question at the core of teacher education: Are young teachers to be cogs in an established order, or are they to be reformers of the establishment, informed by the past and with an eye to the future? Are the prevailing pressures on teacher candidates such that they find it necessary to conform to the practices in schools they enter, or should they be prepared to challenge the practices and assumptions of these institutions? The possibilities, successes, failures, and pitfalls of social and educational reforms in our own context and in others should be explored and scrutinized if new teachers are to be seen as potential reformers instead of as fillers for of niches.

Bessie Head’s novel infuses a spirit of optimism in the reader, compelling one to look at the orders and structures within society, to consider their potential, and to wonder: What if? A robust group of progressivists, largely based at Columbia University in the
United States, who included John Dewey, Harold Rugg, George Counts, and William Heard Kilpatrick, thrust these questions to the forefront of the educational enterprise in the first half of the twentieth century. As social reconstructionists, they believed that not only that education could be reformed to promote greater social justice, but that such reforms were vital to the ethos of democracy and the spirit of social cooperation (Kliebard, 2004). Harold Rugg, one of the more prominent social meliorists whose popularity has waned in the historical record, implored educators to cooperate for the betterment of schools and, more broadly, for society: “It is my thesis that this is our moment. That by taking thought now … by focusing our total energies at the fulcrum and lifting together … we can move the social world” (Rugg, 1943, 1). History and the social studies were necessary if schools were to fulfill their full responsibility and potential to social improvement. Rugg fully realized the emotive and focussing potential of literature for expressing questions about the purposes and aims of education:

*Tomorrow is Today*

*There are moments in history when Tomorrow is Today,*  
*When the mammoth glacier of social trend*  
*taking movement down the Valley of History*  
*can be diverted by men*  
*Into pathways towards Tomorrow.*

*There are moments in history when Today is merely*  
*Today ...*  
*inert, unchanging ...*  
*When no mustering of energies*  
*Can prod man out of his inertia.*

*Then comes the moment when Tomorrow is Today,*  
*When the flux is at free flow.*  
*Then Man is Captain of his Soul*  
*And the principle of the effective human act*  
*Works in a world at social crisis.*

*I’ll say it in this way, then –*  
*There is a favored moment ... a place ...*  
*and a mustering of energies*  
*Which, in unison, will produce and effective*  
*human act*  
(Rugg, 1943, xiii).

Harold Rugg was certainly not the only academic and educationist concerned with what is today termed social justice education (Ayers, Hunt, and Quinn, eds., 1998), but his positioning of history as essential to social studies and his concern that educators consider social meliorism as an aim of schooling certainly dovetails with the themes raised in much historical fiction, including Bessie Head’s novel.
Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, another novel with a bold story situated in a post-colonial context, relates stories that teacher candidates can consider to explore issues of equity and race in contemporary as well as historical spaces (Achebe, 1994). In the novel, set in a Nigerian village before independence from colonial authority, a Christian missionary arrives in an African village determined to convert a tribe’s language and culture to his own. The book preserves and validates the local Igbo culture’s tradition of using story telling, fables, and myth as educational media. Achebe describes the community’s involvement in the upbringing of children and subverts the colonialist methods of indoctrinating culture and language. How, ethically and sensitively, can a teacher lead a classroom where many of the students have had a dramatically different cultural upbringing? Is the teacher potentially operating like Achebe’s missionaries, as an authoritative, external, and foreign force requiring submission to norms and standards of practice and thought? Historically and contemporaneously, how have various methods and means of instruction validated or smothered students’ native cultures and beliefs? Achebe’s tragic exploration of cultural difference in Africa during the middle of the twentieth century opens up possibilities for further historical study, as well as critical discussion about race and culture.

The questions raised by this text and the others briefly considered above, are the products of the kinds of analyses we might apply to historical texts presented as stories. The analyses correlate history with the lives of teacher candidates and problems that exist in contemporary classrooms. Further, historical stories should help teacher candidates to develop the interpretive tools that enable them to reflect deeply upon the implications of the setting and situation in which education happens. Dewhurst and Lamb (2005) have argued that confronting teacher candidates with stories and cases drawn from history that run contrary to, or challenge, their own experiences is a powerful teaching tool enabling critical discussion. Ultimately, the study of both history and literary stories is intimately bound to a careful consideration of setting and context (Ellsworth, 2005). In order to examine a contemporary social context of learning and, it is essential that we consider it historically (Chambers, 1999).

**Historical Fiction is not History**

This final section of the essay develops an assertion introduced earlier, namely, that while stories are vital to history and introduce many of the humanistic themes and questions that focus historical study on a particular context, historical fiction should never be conflated with history, proper. There is no doubt that historical narratives have qualities of literature to them. They feature characters, settings and plots. They may employ metaphor. And it is fair to concede that all language is metaphorical and, consequently, slippery, referential, and inexact.

But this is the case with all writing and with all texts. Language might be imprecise, but it is all we have with which to communicate. We do communicate all the time in text and in speech, with varying degrees of clarity. More importantly, we are able to express, despite language’s metaphorical and referential qualities, truth concerning human experience; stories, however, bear no burdens of proof, whereas histories do. Histories can tell a compelling story about human life, but they can be rejected as false unless rigorously “guided by evidence” (Lorenz, 1999, p. 574). Historical explanations
are provisional and hypothetical in the sense that they are always liable to be replaced by better theories or new data. Other historians may examine the same sources and refute an historian’s claims, but they must do so on the basis of the evidence examined. As Bruno-Jofré and Schiralli (2002) argued, historical truth needs to be understood not in terms of absolutes and eternals, but in the provisional, Deweyan sense of warranted assertability (Dewey, 1929).

The truth criterion of history is imposed by “relentless institutional criticism, at least in terms of the verification of facts” (Kellner, 1989, p. 407). The community of historians can reject texts on the grounds that they are not sufficiently accurate, or that they have misrepresented or ignored the source material (Lorenz, 1999). The onus of proof is upon the historian, who must justify arguments and claims via the marshalling evidence. A good story is not tantamount to a good history. Here, the value of establishing and maintaining benchmarks for thinking historically – including exploration of historical significance, primary source evidence, forces of continuity and change, cause and consequence, perspective, and moral matters – is crystallized (Seixas, 2006).

In a related sense, a good theory explicated in a historical frame – postmodern, poststructuralist, postcolonial, or other – that is not rigorously and fastidiously developed via processes such as those outlined by the historical benchmarks above, must also be deemed ahistorical. Any predilection for approaching historical sources with a preconceived theoretical framework runs contrary to the basic tenets of historical analysis wherein the arguments and conclusions must emerge from, and be corroborated by, the sources rather than the alternative. Whereas, for instance, Foucaultian analyses amongst historians began to wane in the 1990s (Jordanova, 2000), they remain in vogue amongst educationists; this is one marker of the divide between history of education and history as a discipline and field of study. The esteem with which history is held in culture and in society is evidenced in the preponderance of literature, publications, debates, films, and television series.

Despite their descriptive powers, many analyses of past contexts that frame the historical sources from particular theoretical models—Foucaultian, postmodern, and sociological frameworks predominate—and use terms couched in the language of those theories, render educational history largely incomprehensible outside of academic circles versed in a particular jargon. Historical study begins with the sources and constructs an argument or case rather than having the case and framework imposed on it by a researcher’s theoretical framework. Further, such historical studies, which are in fact fundamentally ahistorical in their approach to the past, effectively reinforce the marginalization of the discipline by running contrary to the trend towards practicality and applicability. Lastly, as numerous philosophers of history, including Ludmilla Jordanova (2000) have noted, Foucault’s work cannot justly be described as history, just as it is not solely psychology, sociology, literature, or philosophy: “Sometimes he is described as a historian, which is seriously misleading. Foucault did detailed historical research – evident in *I, Pierre Rivière* (1973) – but he usually suppressed much of the historical detail when he published” (79). In conclusion, while literature, as well as much postmodern and poststructuralist research can pose and elucidate questions that concern the past and are of interest to historians, the aims and evaluative criteria of each should not be conflated.
Conclusions and Summary

Educational historians must evaluate anew the roles and purposes of their discipline within the realities of contemporary education Faculties. History is neither content knowledge about the past, nor is it a theoretical model and discourse imposing explanations of the past. Educational history could be useful for considering the present contexts in which we teach and learn; by drawing on historical method and sources, historians of education aim to inspire, to inform, to capture and hold the imagination, and to broaden experience. Drawing on the historical fiction as an anchor for questions, research, and discussion of pedagogical questions is one means of relating history to its roots in story telling about human experiences, triumphs, challenges, and defeats. Stories bridge the past and the present and open up space for the teaching and learning of history to explore past contexts as well as their own, critically and systematically.

This article draws its impetus from concern about marginal status of educational history within teacher education curricula. Whereas it has been argued that the introduction of stories into courses treating historical contexts and ideas can offer teacher educators ways into contexts and questions that might be otherwise foreign or, perchance, ignored, replacing historical analysis with literary analysis would not be an ethically or practically defensible suggestion to historians. We might be well served, to begin with wonder and with awe; we might begin with a story to lay the groundwork for historical studies and questioning. If history is no longer foundational in educational faculties, it might be because stories are not foundational in the study of educational history.

History is a means of exploring our humanity, and educational history involves study of the ways that we learn, school, and indoctrinate. History of education can provoke teacher candidates’ imaginations and critical sensibilities. This is by no means an uncontroversial postulate for historians, but in reflecting from the margins, it appears of grave importance that educational historians rethink the relationship of their discipline and study to contemporary teacher education. History should not be peripheral for teacher candidates; it is an imperative field of study that enables educators to find their place in the sometimes turbulent, sometimes murky current of pedagogical ideas and practices. A forward-looking, hopeful, and robust vision of pedagogy seeking to improve schooling and foster affirmative change in society must work from within a context and consider that setting’s complex historical development and relation to other contexts. Finally, “much of the value of studying the history of education lies not in providing us with answers, but in daring us to challenge the answers and assumptions … bequeathed to us” (Kliebard, March/April 1995, p. 194).
References


