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Anti-progressivism in Education: Past and Present

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Abstract

This essay takes a look at what I call anti-progressivism in education or, more particularly, criticism of progressive education that was so vocal and visceral that it earns a label, at least initially, of anti-progressivism. After a brief introduction discussing the terms in general, I look at three instances of anti-progressivism in the 1950s and 1960s, in works by Arthur Bestor , Jr. published in 1953., and by Richard Hofstadter and James Bryant Conant, both published in 1963. My analysis of each reveals them to be works produced as part of a larger battle over the control of teacher education at American universities. Also, I argue that these works were by authors operating at least somewhat within a progressive tradition, rather than by outsiders to the tradition. The contours of this inter-academic progressive criticism of progressivism are then elaborated on and I close with a look at how this all relates to the contemporary situation in American teacher education.

Keywords: academic disciplines, anti-intellectualism, anti-progressivism, teacher education

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Progressivism and Progressive Education

Progressivism and progressive education are not easy concepts to define or delineate. In fact, the larger progressive reform movement within which progressive education was located, the veritable cataclysm of reform initiatives in late nineteenth and early twentieth century economic, social, and political affairs, is seen by some scholars as so amorphous as to be useless as an explanatory concept, at least in historical scholarship.[1] Yet such a final discard of the concept ignores its utility, in a careful account which is aware of its variety and tendency to contradiction, as an explanation of historical events, as well as its use in analyzing contemporary situations. Progressivism can be subdivided into an organizational change thrust, a search for political empowerment for individuals and groups, an attempt to control and contain economic privilege, and/or a movement to ameliorate the social consequences of industrialization.[2] If one makes the choice to subdivide and categorize, however, one also must come to terms with the tension, if not opposition, between various categorizations. This is a crucial element to help understand the argument made later in this essay.

For an example of tension or contradiction in understanding the concept, if one looks at progressivism in American economic affairs, one is confronted with the continuity and discontinuity between its particulars. The trust busting of Theodore Roosevelt was in reality not an attempt to break up economic trusts but rather a move to regulate them in the national interest. Roosevelt's approach can be compared and contrasted with that of Woodrow Wilson, which was to break up the trusts in favor of more small scale enterprises that would compete with each other and, thereby, curb the exploitation of those huge economic organizations. Similarly in American politics, the approach of broadening the franchise, through movements such as women's suffrage, or the great reform trio of the era, the initiative, referendum, and recall, can be contrasted with administratively oriented movements to combat political corruption, particularly in American cities. This drive sought to establish a more professional and publicly focused administrative apparatus by replacing private services with public utilities, and replacing elected, frequently corrupt, politicians with trained administrators such as city managers and city commissioners.

In education, the variety of plans and policies that came to be called progressive is elegantly described, in all its variety and contradictions, by Lawrence Cremin. In his landmark *The Transformation of the School*, Cremin weaves a progressive educational tapestry that includes developmentally grounded movements to free children from a variety of constraints, organized parents and teachers working together and separately to pursue the welfare of children and teachers, and various administrative reforms, often claiming a scientific rationale, to systematize and thereby improve the operation of increasingly large and complex school systems.[3] The same contradictions that underlay the larger progressive movement can be found in an educational progressivism that tried both to liberate and to contain the child, to use science to indicate what would work and thereby to constrain what was not "scientific," and to improve teaching and teachers through the sometimes contradictory thrusts of occupational organization, objective evaluation, and increased educational credentialism.

Yet, in education, as the debate over what worked most effectively evolved through the middle of the twentieth century, one prototypically progressive line of thought and action

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[1] Peter G. Filene, "An Obituary for the Progressive Movement," *American Quarterly* 22 (Spring, 1970): 20-34.
[2] Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December, 1972): 113-32.
[3] Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1967* (New York: Random House, 1961.

became relatively clear; the movement to diversify the school curriculum to allow it to include non-academic studies and concerns alongside of the basically academic approach to education that had characterized American schools through most of the nineteenth century. More specifics about this educational progressivism will emerge in the following discussion of three of its most vocal critics, Arthur Bestor, Richard Hofstadter, and James Bryant Conant. Before discussing each of these critics individually, it must be said that they are but three of many who decried the developments in American education toward a more non-academic, or extra academic approach. Readers might want to offer their own examples of critics of progressive education, say people like Admiral Hyman Rickover or the noted political conservative and advocate of basic education James D. Koerner.[4] The reasons for my choice of Bestor, Hofstadter, and Conant will become clear in the discussion of each author and his ideas.

Arthur Bestor

Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., was born in Chataqua, New York, in 1909. Bestor was the son of a historian who had taught at the University of Chicago at the same time that John Dewey was a prominent member of the faculty and who would make a name for himself as an adult educator.[5] Bestor was educated at a variety of progressive schools in New York City, most notably spending his high school years at the Lincoln School of Teachers College, Columbia University, which he described "as one of the most progressive schools in the country." Bestor characterized Lincoln as featuring the best of John Dewey's pedagogical methodology in service of a rigorous academic curriculum. He described the faculty at Lincoln as a community of "brilliant" people dedicated to "the teaching of the basic disciplines to the highest perfection possible in the light of modern pedagogy." [6]

The Lincoln School was not the only experience Bestor had in his educational career with esteemed "progressive" educators. In the 1930s, while finishing his doctorate in history at Yale University, Bestor was a member of the faculty at Teachers College, the institution acknowledged as the leading place in which progressive education was developed theoretically and evolved into more practical applications in schools. While Dewey, then on the Columbia University faculty, was influential at Teachers College when Bestor worked there, as were acknowledged progressive educators and Teachers College faculty members such as William Heard Kilpatrick and Harold Rugg, Bestor's closest colleagues at Teachers College included William C. Bagley and Merle Curti. While Bagley was an acknowledged leader of the essentialist movement that was then emerging in American educational circles as critical of some educational progressivism, he did not consider his views to be in opposition to progressive education at its strongest, and as practiced by most of his colleagues.[7] Curti, author of the landmark educational history that was published in the first half of the twentieth century, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (1936), took a position on the evolution of American education that was largely in harmony with the views of John Dewey and the social reform wing of Teachers College in the 1930s, known then as the social reconstructionist educators.[8] Thus, Bestor cannot be said to have been an opponent of progressive education during his time on the Teachers College faculty.

[4] Hyman G. Rickover, *Education and Freedom* (New York: Dutton, 1959) and James D. Koerner, *The Miseducation of American Teachers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963).
[5] Burton Weltman, "Reconsidering Arthur Bestor: A Postmortem for the Cold War in Education," *Eric Document ED 433 276* (1999), United States Department of Education.
[6] Arthur E. Bestor, *The Restoration of Learning* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 140, 141.
[7] J. Wesley Null, *A Disciplined Progressive Educator: The Life and Career of William Chandler Bagley* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).
[8] Merle. Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield Adams, 1935).

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Bestor, in his own mind at least, had an understanding and appreciation of educational progressivism at its best, when its innovations and insights were turned to the task of helping students acquire the academic understandings necessary to success in the developing world of the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. What Bestor could not abide, however, was a near completely child-centered educational progressivism that discarded the academic disciplines in a never- ending search for educational change. Though critics of this type of progressivism were working and writing in the 1930s and 1940s, a development in educational thought and practice of the latter decade galvanized a new round of criticism, scathingly discussed in 1953 in Bestor's signature work, *Educational Wastelands*.[9] That development was the life adjustment movement, led by Charles Prosser an official in the federal bureau of education. Prosser first put his ideas in print in 1939, when he argued that the high school curriculum had to be drastically expanded in order to accommodate the goals and interests of the increasing numbers of new students who were entering.[10] Prosser claimed initially that life adjustment courses and activities were a supplement to the academic curriculum of the high school, a supplement that would serve the over half of the high school enrollment that was not being served by academic courses or vocational courses geared to preparation for the trades. Prosser believed that the over fifty percent of students needed studies that addressed issues of how one was to live, and to prosper, in a modernizing society.

Though Prosser seldom advocated total replacement of academic studies, his reservations toward academic studies increased to the point that he came dangerously close, in the mind of opponents of his approach, to such a policy. His ideas were refined over a decade and published in 1951 in *Life Adjustment for Every Youth*, where he laid out the particulars, and the benefits of his approach to the high school. Through courses devoted to home, family, and society studies, Prosser argued that students would learn real lessons for life, lessons far superior to the abstract and often foreign ideas they encountered in the formal academic curriculum, and the too specific and often menial skills learned in existing vocational education courses.[11] Bestor was appalled by the ideas of Prosser and the steps that had been taken in American public schools and, particularly, in schools of education in American universities that were training teachers for those public schools, to attack the academic curriculum.

In 1953, Bestor lambasted the empty headedness of life adjustment and other anti-academic approaches taken in American public schools, approaches learned in the departments and schools of education which trained their teachers. He found the epitome of what appalled him in progressive education in the words of a junior high school administrator in the state of Illinois who Bestor quoted at length in his book.

> Through the years we've built a sort of halo around reading, writing, and arithmetic. We've said that they were for everybody . . . for rich and poor, brilliant and not so mentally endowed, ones who liked them and those who failed to go for them. Teacher has said that these were some things everyone should "learn." The principal has remarked. "All educated people know how to write, spell, and read. . . ."
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> . . .When we come to the realization that not every child has to read, figure, write and spell . . . that many of them either cannot or will not master these chores. . . , then we shall be on the road to improving the junior high school curriculum.

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[9] Arthur E. Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in our Public Schools* ((Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1953).
[10] Charles A. Prosser, *Secondary Education in Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).
[11] United States Office of Education, *Life Adjustment for Every Youth* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951).

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> . . . If and when we are able to convince a few folks that mastery of reading, writing, and arithmetic is not the one road leading to happy, successful living, the next step is to cut down the amount of time and attention devoted to these areas in general junior high school courses.[12]

Bestor was greatly offended at what he considered the naked anti-academicism of this junior high school principal from Urbana, Illinois. Urbana, one of the two cities in which the University of Illinois operated, was a strategic location for the ideas like those of this junior high school principal that Bestor wanted to publicize and criticize. One reason for choosing an Urbana school administrator was his likely association with the College of Education at the University of Illinois, perhaps the leading target of the analysis in Bestor's volume. In fact, Bestor leveled much of his criticism at Illinois's education faculty, especially but not solely Harold Hand, for his advocacy of life adjustment and other avowedly child or society-centered approaches to education—approaches that disestablished academic studies as the primary purpose of American education. Bestor described the ideas of school administrators like the Urbana principal and professors of education like Hand as the work of "an interlocking directorate" which held increasing sway over American education, kept academics and interested citizens at arm's length from school decisions, and thereby profoundly threatened the intellectual health of the nation. Educationists on university faculties and other progressive educators reacted strongly, harshly, but basically ineffectively to Bestor's charge that they were leading the nation astray.[13] While educational journals were willing to publish critical reviews of Bestor's book, Bestor himself chose to ignore the criticism and to pursue his campaign against educational progressivism largely successfully, in the court of public opinion.

Bestor left Illinois for the University of Washington not too long after publishing his attack on educational progressivism in 1953, and a second attack two years later.[14] The situation in Seattle was not the same as it had been in Illinois, and Bestor went on to develop a specialty in constitutional history that took him away from educational affairs. This did not prevent his works, or his ideas, from maintaining a strong position in the public discourse surrounding American education. That strength was enhanced in 1957, when the Russian launching of its Sputnik satellite shook American politicians and citizens, causing them to eventually blame the schools more than any other agency for what was perceived as the decline of the United States in the midst of its cold war with the Soviet Union. Though the resort to blaming the schools was an overreaction, if not a distortion, of the situation, it served the political purpose of taking attention away from areas of American society such as the economy, the political system, or defense policy, a purpose that surely enhanced the tendency of the nation's political and economic leadership to jump on the anti-progressive education bandwagon.

Richard Hofstadter

The second example of anti-progressivism considered here was published by Richard Hofstadter in 1963, six years after the Sputnik controversy that sparked passage of NDEA, and ten years after Arthur Bestor's *Educational Wastelands*. Criticism of progressive education was a consistent, if not constant, theme in American intellectual life in the decade between Bestor's, and Hofstadter's, volumes, waxing more strongly in some years but never waning significantly. Richard Hofstadter was a Professor of History at Columbia University when he published *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, a book which won a Pulitzer Prize in the non-fiction category.[15] Only one of four substantive sections of Hofstadter's book is

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[12] Quoted in Bestor, *Educational Wastelands*, 299-300.
[13] Weltman, "Reconsidering ArthurBestor."
[14] Bestor, *The Reconstruction of Learning.*
[15] Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963).

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devoted to progressive education, however. The other three consider the realms of religion, politics, and business in America. The theme of each of these sections, and the section on progressive education, is that developments in religion, politics, business, and education provide a wide range of examples of ways in which the excesses of democracy in American history have come to threaten the necessary work of intellectuals in our society.

Hofstadter's account of progressive education argued that it is best seen as a contemporary version of the American commitment to popular education, a movement which he approves in principle. Hofstadter noted, however, that popular education has had severe negative consequences for the life of the mind in the nation. He argued that popular education, which he more often called mass education, was characterized by a stress on quantity over quality and a lack of a commitment to education as an intrinsic good in favor of a commitment to education for its utilitarian values. His discussion of life adjustment education followed for the most part Bestor's critique of a decade earlier. What he added was a contextualization of life adjustment in relation to earlier curricular priorities in the American high school. Germane here is the 1895 Committee of Ten report of the National Education Association which defended, though in an expanded form, the classical curriculum of the nineteenth century high school; and the Cardinal Principles NEA Committee report of 1918, which severely critiqued an academic emphasis in public education and argued in favor of more vocationally relevant and socially ameliorative studies such as citizenship education, leisure pursuits, and home and community concerns.[16] The movement toward utility and away from intellectual priorities intensified greatly in the life adjustment movement of the 1940s and 1950s, which Hofstadter critiqued just as vehemently as had Bestor.

Hofstadter addressed directly, and critically, the legacy of John Dewey and its relationship to the excesses of progressive education. Hofstadter knew that Dewey saw through programs like Life Adjustment education and Hofstadter was too much a knowledgeable historian of ideas to charge Dewey himself with anti-intellectualism. However, he stressed Dewey's relationship to the progressive educational failure to link the liberation of the child which it advocated to any consistent intellectual purpose. While it surely was not Dewey's goal to abandon intellectual purpose, according to Hofstadter, anti-intellectualism was encouraged by educators in thrall to Dewey who intensified his positing of growth as the animator and only end of the educational process and his inability to reign in those who pursued that growth in distinctly and consciously anti-intellectual directions such as the abandonment of the importance of subject matter. While a full account of Hofstadter on Dewey, concentrating on growth as proposed by the master and built on by his disciples, is beyond the scope of this paper, one must acknowledge that Hofstadter was a rather astute analyst of ideas, including those of Dewey, and an even more astute analyst of the deterioration of Dewey's insights in the hands of his disciples. It is also the case, however, that Hofstadter largely ignored Dewey's own critique of progressive education, published in 1938.[17] Finally, I would note that Hofstadter's critique of Dewey and progressive education owed much to scholarly evaluators who operated within the progressive camp, such as Boyd Bode, and Wlliam Bagley, discussed earlier. And, as we all know, including Hofstadter, Dewey himself was increasingly critical of progressive education as it evolved an expansively utilitarian agenda based on the "needs" of the child and, or, society. Yet Hofstadter saw the sins of the disciples as adumbrated in the ideas of the master, a judgment, it should be noted, that he certainly was not alone in making.

The third topic that Hofstadter took as a theme in his discussion was the teacher. In this discussion, Hofstadter stressed how a major consequence of developing a teaching force adequate in number to staff the burgeoning ranks of the public schools was a marked

[16] Edward A. Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School, 1890-1920* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).
[17] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1963 [1938]).

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deterioration in the quality of teacher preparation. He depicted the modern teaching force as a group with little social advantages in its background, enduring low pay which often necessitated a second job for those who were the primary breadwinners in their family, and which had experienced an estrangement from academic subjects and commitments in its preparation for work. In discussing that estrangement from serious academic work in teacher training colleges and departments, Hofstadter wondered: "To what extent able students stayed out of teaching because of its poor rewards and to what extent because of the nonsense that figured so prominently in teacher education. . . ." While he could not isolate cause and effect in discussing teachers, he concluded that it was crystal clear that "teachers did not have enough training in the subjects they intended to teach. . . ."[18]

Hofstadter was a severe critic of teacher training in American colleges and universities, particularly the training of high school teachers. He decried the development of the normal school from a less than college-level institution which trained elementary teachers, concentrating on pedagogical studies and issues, into teachers colleges that trained high school teachers and school administrators, but still concentrated on pedagogy in their studies. The problem, especially in training high school teachers, was the increasing distance between education and subject matter faculties, particularly in institutions like the teachers colleges which had a tradition of "professional" study honed in the elementary school training curriculum. Education faculties, for Hofstadter, had too much autonomy, a situation poignantly illustrated by the quip well known around Columbia University that 120th Street, the street that separated Teachers College from Columbia University, was the widest street in the world. This led to a situation where professional educators "were left to develop their ideas without being subjected to the intellectual discipline that might have come out of a dialogue with university scholars."[19]

There is ample evidence to make the case that in both Bestor and Hofstadter, the denigration of education faculty, and the progressive educational ideas which animated much of their work, was a product of academic snobbery as much as it was the result of rigorous study of the situation. That case is well illustrated in the work of the third critic of progressive education that I will consider in this essay, James Bryant Conant.

James Bryant Conant

Chemistry professor and department head at Harvard, president of that august institution for twenty years, scientist involved with the development of the nuclear bomb in World War II, and diplomat operating in Germany in the post-war years, James Bryant Conant had enjoyed a long and illustrious career when he turned his full attention to the American high school in the late 1950s.[20] Previously, Conant had had some experience in k-12 education as a member of the National Education Association's Educational Policies Commission on five different occasions in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.[21] As part of his consideration of k-12 education that began after his diplomatic career, Conant turned his attention to teacher education with a formal study, the results of which were published in 1963.[22] It is this work that is the primary focus of discussion here.

Early in *The Education of American Teachers*, Conant laid bare the relations between much criticism of teacher education and an arts and sciences orientation, such as that held by Bestor and Hofstadter. Conant remarked:

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[18] Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism*, 318.
[19] Ibid., 338.
[20] James Bryant Conant, *The American High School Today: A First Report to Interested Citizens* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).
[21] Wayne J. Urban, "The Educational Policies Commission: Notes for an Autopsy," *The Sophist's Bane* 3 (Fall, 2005): 15-30.
[22] James Bryant Conant, *The Education of American Teachers* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

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> Early in my career, as a professor of chemistry, I became aware of the hostility of the members of my profession to schools or faculties of education. I shared the views of the majority of my colleagues on the faculty of arts and sciences that there was no excuse for the existence of people who sought to teach others how to teach. I felt confident that I was an excellent teacher and I had developed my skill by my experience, without the benefit of professors of education. I saw no reason why others could not do likewise, including those who graduated from college with honors in chemistry and who wished to teach in high school.[23]

Conant went on to add that he had co-authored a high school chemistry text with his high school chemistry instructor, a further indication of his own educational expertise. He concluded this discussion with the following report: "When any issues involving benefits to the [Harvard] graduate school of education came before the faculty of arts and sciences, I automatically voted with those who looked with contempt on the school of education."[24] Later in the volume, Conant reported that "Many academic professors believe that the courses given by professors of education are worthless, and that the degrees granted students who have devoted much of their time to these courses are of little value."[25] Conant went on to state that his prejudicial view of education faculties was tempered somewhat during his Harvard presidency (1933-1953), when he entered into serious discussions of educational problems and issues with leaders of the Harvard education school, especially Henry Holmes and Francis Spaulding. Elsewhere in his writing, Conant also noted that his suspicions of professional educational study and the professional educators who conducted such studies were tempered further by his terms on the Educational Policies Commission.[26]

In *The Education of American Teachers*, Conant credited education professors with an "emphasis on education for citizenship, on the socially unifying effects of the comprehensive high school, and on the public schools as instruments of democracy, the recognition of individual difference, and the need for including practical courses in high school elective programs . . ." and concluded that these all were characteristics "which I applaud."[27] Note that the particulars that Conant cited here can easily be seen as a summary of much of what had come to be identified as progressive education by the middle of the twentieth century. Thus, it seems fair to say that, for Conant, teacher education, as conducted in most schools, colleges, and departments of education in the twentieth century, conveyed a progressive educational ideology, though one which differed in specifics and in emphases from place to place. Further, Conant had learned some respect for this progressive ideology in his contacts with professors of education, at Harvard and with school administrators in the National Education Association. Yet in spite of this recognition, the balance of Conant's book was devoted to recommending a reduction in courses and experiences in formal educational study for most school teachers, and particularly for high school teachers, in favor of more study in general education courses in the arts and sciences, and in a subject matter major.

Conant did add one relatively new wrinkle in his volume on teacher education, calling for more power for lay school board members in teacher employment and retention and making recommendations about how that power should be wielded. He stated that it should be lay people, school board members, who had the final say in teacher employment and personnel policies. Even so, Conant was not shy in recommending specifically what courses and experiences teachers in training for work in the school should have in terms of

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[23] Ibid., 1.
[24] Ibid., 2.
[25] Ibid., 6.
[26] James Bryant Conant, *My Several Lives: Memoirs of a Social Inventor* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).
[27] Conant, *Education of American Teachers,* 6.

their preparation. Foremost for Conant was subject matter knowledge. He thought that every prospective teacher, including elementary teachers, should have a concentration in an academic subject that is taught in the schools. Next, and almost as important, was practice teaching. He had several recommendations about the practice teaching experience, including the qualifications of the cooperating teacher in the schools and the clinical faculty member from the education department or college who would jointly supervise the practice teacher. Conant's invocation of the words clinical faculty member linked educator preparation with the clinical experiences of medical and other more prestigious professional schools. He also gave his study a scientific cast, including a number of appendixes detailing a variety of characteristics of the teacher education program he was studying.[28]

Yet the scientific aspects of Conant's work seem best evaluated as unconvincing, or perhaps a veneer. No sampling procedure was applied in choosing his institutions, other than their being in the sixteen most populous states, and Conant was happy to simply assume that findings from his sample could be generalized to teacher education institutions as a group. Further, his appendices and a few tables within the text were all descriptive counts of various aspects of teacher education, with no statistical technique or other rigorous analysis added to refine the findings. And at too many strategic points, Conant would resort to conclusions blatantly impressionistic in nature. For example, in discussing student comments on teacher education, he remarked that "I could not ignore their [students'] repeated comments that most of the educational offerings were 'Mickey Mouse' courses."[29] In a chapter discussing the nuts and bolts of teacher preparation programs, he opined that there was no close correlation between intellectual ability and teacher excellence, and added the following: "I still maintain that *we should endeavor to recruit our teachers from the upper third of the graduating high school class on a national basis.* Why? Because the courses in the academic subjects that I believe important as part of a general education must not be pitched at too low a level or too slow a pace."[30] Conant's easy resort here to his personal beliefs as a basis for policy recommendations occurred elsewhere in his account of teacher education and offers some reason to question the acuity of his analysis and recommendations.

Conant's emphasis on education of the gifted students in high school echoed a major concern of both Bestor and Hofstadter, though Conant was especially interested in giftedness in mathematics and the sciences, while the other two saw giftedness in areas such as their own study of history and other humanities and the social sciences, as well as in the sciences. Yet none of the three offered any evidence to support their common sense conclusion that separate educational experiences for gifted students were superior in their accomplishments to existing arrangements where the gifted took courses along side of their less academically gifted or talented fellow students. And the frequency of Conant relying on his beliefs and opinions, as well as the opinions of students, citizens, or academic professors about formal education courses and experiences, leads me at least to question the grounds undergirding his convictions and the warrant he had for making his numerous recommendations about teacher education. Having said this, however, I want to indicate in the conclusion to this essay that I am not in complete disagreement with the opinions of Bestor, Hofstadter, and Conant about the weaknesses of teacher education and the relation of those weaknesses to progressive educational ideology.

Conclusion

Before considering my own views of the critics, I want to make the point first that Bestor, Hofstadter, and Conant all had reason to see themselves as part of the progressivism that they were critiquing. Though none of the three addressed this issue directly, Bestor's own

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 12.
[30] Ibid., 81.

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educational background and his work at Teachers College in the 1930s, Hofstadter's interactions with Lawrence Cremin and other members of the Teachers College faculty and his publications about the accomplishments of progressive reformers and progressive academics,[31] and Conant's association with mainly progressive, professional educators on the Educational Policies Commission and interactions with his own Harvard education faculty all point to their nuanced understanding of the larger phenomenon of progressivism. This, however, stands in marked contradiction to their rather un-nuanced criticism of teacher education professors and courses. Bestor and Hofstadter were writing critiques, near polemics, and did not necessarily see themselves as bound by the scholarly demands of balance and fairness that characterized most of their other scholarship. Conant did not see himself as a partisan or polemical critic, instead taking the stance of friendly critic of teacher educators as well as friend, and milder critic, of arts and sciences faculty such as Bestor and Hofstadter. Yet Conant's reliance on beliefs and opinions, his own as well as those of students and other academics, belies the objectivity and scientific mantle he tried to adopt in his analysis. What this all means is that a good part of the criticism leveled against education faculty, and the progressive educational ideology that they professed, even though it came from three people not opposed to progressivism in principle, was in large part a reflection of a long-standing academic bias against educational studies and professors of education.

Having offered this brief criticism of the critics of progressive teacher education, let me close with a more lengthy assessment of the strength of their position, an assessment like that of Bestor, Hofstadter, and Conant, based on my own experience and little more. Over my four decades on education faculties, beginning in 1968, I have found that much of what I have seen would support the criticisms made by our three authors. The decline of academic standards in many education courses, the embrace of things like Power Point and other easy technological advances to the point that they are used ritually without any real serious effect, and the often intellectually questionable positions taken by students, and more troublingly by faculty colleagues are things I would point to as fodder for the anti-education critics.

I can't really say that I have ever considered Colleges of Education, at least the ones I've worked in, to be fundamentally intellectual places. I'm not sure that they should be but I am confident that they should be more intellectual than they are. I don't want to discount the notion of academic snobbery in characterizing education faculties as anti-intellectual, but I also want to suggest that the situation is one in which more than academic snobbery is operating.

One place to look for evidence about colleges of education is in the dissertations their doctoral students have produced. I won't cite titles here, but I would like to say that I've been on more than a few in my career that came close to being a joke. And I've seen plenty of others that appear, by title, to be an academic joke. I'll let readers provide their own examples. The area of curriculum and instruction is particularly susceptible to questionable dissertations, but I would not exempt the foundations area, or any other sub-specialty in education from critical scrutiny.

More important than dissertation titles is a turn which has been taken in the foundations of education, history, philosophy, and sociology of education, in the last few decades that I think can be seen as progressive in one sense and anti-intellectual in another. That trend is toward interdisciplinarity in the foundations, although one can argue that foundations of education was begun as an interdisciplinary field, and I have defended that development early in my career.[32] Interdisciplinary, however, is not the same thing as anti-

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[31] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age or Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955) and Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1968).
[32] Wayne J. Urban, "Social Foundations and the Disciplines," *Teachers College Record* 71 (December, 1969).

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disciplinary or adisciplinary, two characteristics of too much of the writing in foundations fields today.

More specifically, the field of foundations has evolved over the years away from faculties with disciplinary specializations in history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology of education and towards training in fields such as curriculum theory, cultural studies, diversity studies, multicultural studies, etc., etc., etc. If there is any common intellectual grounding to these fields, and I'm not sure that there is, it would be critical theory, as developed originally in the Frankfort School in the 1930s and brought to the United States in that decade as a result of the Nazi ethnic cleansing of Germany.[33] Critical theory, as practiced by Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and others, was a formidable intellectual field. Critical educational studies as practiced in the twenty-first century, is to me considerably less intellectually formidable. I would think that it should be closely allied to philosophy of education and less closely but still allied to history of education. And much critical work in educational studies takes place in philosophy of education journals. But it has simply replaced philosophy of education too often, rather than enriched it.

I realize that my own views are no more rigorous or evidentiary-based than those of Bestor, Hofstadter, or Conant. However, they are offered from a perspective of rather intimate involvement with the many unreconstructed progressive educators working in colleges of education. The main tenet, or perhaps the main result, of the work of such educators is the debasement of academic study, or at least the relegation of such study to a place in importance beneath the concerns of timeliness and relevance. One does not have to invoke dubious concerns such as international economic competition to worry about the academic state of American schools. Much good work still goes on in those schools[34] and a good bit of it is in the school subjects that are also academic disciplines in colleges and universities. Yet the tendency away from academic disciplinary concerns is now taking place even within the disciplines themselves, through academic ideologies such as post-modernism. If teachers, and the trainers of teachers, abandon academic work completely, something that I do not think has yet happened, it does not bode well for the future of our society. Asking education faculties to embrace a commitment to academic rigor in their work does not seem to be too much to ask. It seems to me that refusing to embrace such a commitment does not bode well for the future of education faculties.

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[33] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston, Little Brown, 1973).
[34] David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myth, Fraud, and Attack on America's Public Schools* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1995).