
What This Course is for: Contemplating Goodlad's Legacy to Reclaim Teaching

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Abstract: A teacher educator describes the process of developing a new partnership with and for her students in a local preschool classroom. At the same time, she is reclaiming her heart and soul as a teacher guided by John Goodlad's legacy and his postulates for the education of future teachers.

KEYWORDS: teacher education, preschool, partnership, co-creation

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants

The question, “What are schools for?” stopped me in my tracks. Goodlad stood on a stage, not even a full hour after members of the National Governors’ Association (Goodlad, 2006) had explained to conference attendees the need for common standards between states. More than ten years later, I accepted an appointment at a regional university teaching preservice teachers and began working to answer the same question in concert with my undergraduate students. What follows in this article is a reflection on how that particular question, “what are schools for?” has captured the education imagination of this teacher. I reflect on how this question has re-invigorated my commitment to the profession and to helping preservice teachers examine their own questions. In particular, I share how one course that I taught in Spring 2019 pursued this question in beginning a relationship with a local school teacher.

In the thirteen years between Goodlad’s speech and my current appointment, Common Core State Standards became a reality. So did Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Both my children were born. Mandates in several states officially tied student data to their classroom teacher in teacher evaluation. Nationally board-certified teachers admitted they exchanged lessons requiring deep thinking for test preparation worksheets six weeks before the testing window opened in May. We replaced paper worksheets and texts with electronic ones and expected different results. A colleague tallied the hours required for the new high school tests in our state and found that in order to assess the students according to requirements, some schools would have to begin in February due to technology access. My future college students experienced the implementation of wide-spread high-stakes testing first hand, beginning from kindergarten. Regulations and requirements from the statehouse came faster than guidance from the department of education.

I cried.

I left K-12.

But I did not go too far. My teacher soul sought refuge studying for my PhD and working in higher education. As a graduate student, I finally had what I craved working with K-12 schools: time. Time to think. Time to critically examine ideas—of others and my own. Time to read the scholarship piling up on the end table in the living room. Time to consider what education really could be.

The very first chapter of the book, *Those Who Can, Teach* (Ryan, Cooper, & Bolick, 2016) used in one of the first classes students take in our undergraduate teacher education program asks preservice teachers to answer the question, “What are schools for?”

But there is a step we need to take first. Before we even open the book to examine the question, we must ask ourselves on the first day of the class, “What is this course for?” This leads to a discussion of what we should learn, starting with the course outcomes established by School of Education, and then including what we are hoping to understand. We don’t stop there. We investigate how we want to learn and how we want to share our understandings. We also look to the future: why is this important for me and my future students? Why should the discoveries and determinations that we make together matter more than me in this moment? On this first (and

second) day of class, I give them the luxury of time. The time to consider what school should be for.

The students in my class typically go from the surprise and discomfort of not having a completed syllabus and the shyness of not knowing one another and not having lecture notes to hide behind—to being open to learning with and from each other. Gently, we are immersed in work that is the spirit of Postulate 7 “acquiring the literacy and critical thinking abilities” necessary to teach and to learn. We begin to value our time and space, and this allows for us to be open to other opportunities and hands-on experiences in a “nurturing pedagogy” (Goodlad, 1993).

Each semester is different, and this past spring we had an opportunity to work with a preschool teacher, Ms. Doe, for a rural district in our education partnership. Many rural teachers have multiple responsibilities, and she is no different. The preschool teacher is also the Title I coordinator of her school and approached our department in Fall 2018. She had family engagement events every quarter and was investigating her options for support in facilitating the events. We helped in predictable ways: provided a student and faculty member the day of her event and purchased some supplies. Both she and I (the faculty member) wanted to consider the possibilities for the Spring 2019 semester. What would happen if this event would be embedded into a course? Especially a course with students who might not yet have decided to major in education. Especially a course where the outcomes may be set, but our path to the learning goals is wide-open and always up for discussion. I presented the opportunity on the first day of the course and explained I did not want it to be optional if we included the work on the syllabus. If the students did not want to work with a preschool (a possibility that I had to face might be highly probable due to the fact half of the class have not picked education as a major and those that have are interested in upper elementary) we would honor that, and I would help the school and teacher in a different way. The students were interested.

They met with Ms. Doe the second week of class. She answered their varied questions on Title I in depth (from the perspective of a practitioner mired in the federal demands and yet striving to support her students), shared the plans for the first family engagement event, and was comfortable with the class designing activities for another event later in the semester. More than just my anecdotes, or the course text's summaries of these ideas, they would now have a field experience to inform their knowledge-making (Postulate 15; Goodlad, 1994).

By taking part in this experience, the students may discover they dislike family engagement events. Some students on the fence about whether teaching is for them may find they are not as interested as they first thought. My school partner and I may find that this course does not quite fit with the needs of the school, or that the benefit of collaborating does not lighten the load or enrich the experience enough to continue.

As we make these decisions, whether and how to work together, and find our stumbling blocks and points of conflict (Postulate 16; Goodlad, 1994), we also balance the theoretical with the practical, allowing theory to inform practice to inform theory. We are taking back both the word and the work of praxis, and putting it squarely where it belongs: with teachers engaged in the important labor of “discovering knowledge and its teaching” (Postulate 8; Goodlad, 1994).

The course in Spring 2019 honored the space and place of the teacher we worked with and the students who took on the work. Semester to semester, the only guarantee is that we will work together to determine the answer to the question “What is this course for?” and to inquire, explore, and reflect on the question being open to making discoveries different from the course goals. I take solace in believing, as Goodlad did, that the answers may vary based on the community and the experiences of the people; I often remind myself that knowing one definitive answer of what schools are for (or even what this course is for) is not possible. But it is not dangerous to not know, or come to determinations together. The real danger is in forgetting to ask the questions. Because then I might forget that the technical aspects of creating partnerships and teaching students is not all there is to being educated or educating. Educative aims that allow for ambiguity—that utilize the postulates as a map and not a checklist—ultimately prepare ourselves, our partners, and our future teachers to meet the needs of their students, their communities, and develop their own understandings of schooling.

In that space, where we work together, we will establish (or reclaim) our teaching souls. Together, we will be able to make sense of what schools are for.

Postulates Referenced

- *Postulate 7*
Programs for the education of educators, whether elementary or secondary, must carry the responsibility to ensure that all candidates progressing through them possess or acquire the literacy and critical-thinking abilities associated with the concept of an educated person.
- *Postulate 8*
Programs for the education of educators must provide extensive opportunities for future teachers to move beyond being students of organized knowledge to become teachers who inquire into both knowledge and its teaching.
- *Postulate 15*
Programs for the education of educators must assure for each candidate the availability of a wide array of laboratory settings for simulation, observation, hands-on experiences, and exemplary schools for internships and residencies; they must admit no more students to their programs than can be assured these quality experiences.
- *Postulate 16*
Programs for the education of educators must engage future teachers in the problems and dilemmas arising out of the inevitable conflicts and incongruities between what is perceived to work in practice and the research and theory supporting other options.

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Sarra Grubb is an Assistant Professor at Indiana University, Kokomo. She rediscovered teaching as soul work at a rural work college in the hills of eastern Kentucky, where she became dedicated to collaborating and co-creating curriculum with preservice teachers as they develop their teacher hearts.