

Comments on Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, and Garabedian

Existing Practice Is Not the Template

by Rodney Evans

In the April 2006 issue of *Educational Researcher*, Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, and Garabedian offered their response to the recent outpouring of criticism calling for reform of doctoral education degrees in the United States. The centerpiece of their proposal was the development of a new practitioner-oriented doctoral degree to replace the Ed.D. This article critiques the conceptual validity of the proposal—especially the idea that existing practice can be the driving force for the proposed curriculum reforms. The author argues for a fuller and more complex form of practice as *praxis*, in contrast with Shulman et al.'s implied preference for concrete existing practice—what might be called the *actuality* of practice—as the template for future practice.

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It is difficult to argue against the “wisdom of practice” approach set forth by Lee S. Shulman, Chris M. Golde, Andrea Conklin Bueschel, and Kristen J. Garabedian, of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in their recent efforts to reclaim education doctorates from their alleged state of disrepair (“Reclaiming Education’s Doctorates: A Critique and a Proposal,” *Educational Researcher*, April 2006). With the phrase *wisdom of practice*, the authors wish to designate a process whereby the real-world practices of “exemplary” education practitioners are identified and codified into a set of performance standards or behavioral indicators, which the authors believe reflect superior real-world performance in a variety of practitioner domains. These standards or behavioral indicators are intended as baseline data from which a series of performance assessments would be developed. The authors hope that the use of these assessments in lieu of the traditional doctoral dissertation will exert a powerful influence on the selection of curricular content for doctoral programs in U.S. colleges and universities, in the expectation that this will lead to changed (i.e., reformed) practice. Although the authors provide a fuller and more detailed rationale for their proposal in the cited article, this is the essence of the program offered by the Carnegie Foundation.

As a phrase, *wisdom of practice* has a nice ring and a certain commonsense appeal that makes the concept and the programmatic

practices that flow from it seem sensible and unassailable. It is not difficult to see how such a proposal will appeal to college deans and others anxious to be seen doing something about the current state of doctoral degree programs in education, more especially as the proposal dovetails nicely with other recent efforts at curriculum reform that emphasize the “assessment piece” as the driving force of curricular change—the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the U.S. Department of Education report *A Test of Leadership* (2006), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development’s “High School Reform Proposal” (2007), and other policy statements and working papers of state and federal accrediting bodies. Still, it is an open question whether externally derived, a priori assessments, established in advance of the development of a curriculum, merit their pivotal role in the curriculum development process; however, this is not the only question I want to address.

Although Shulman et al. find some bright spots in their study—university degree programs here and there that meet the Carnegie test of excellence—the outlook for many, perhaps most, programs seems bleak. In this regard, the Carnegie report echoes the “findings” of several other recent studies (Brown, 1990; Golde & Walker, 2006; Levine, 2005) that have reached similar conclusions. Still, the question of whether the problems surrounding education’s doctorates are as chronic or as crippling as the Carnegie Report suggests remains more of a hypothesis than an established finding. I would venture that although some university programs offer their doctoral students little more than advanced vocational training, others offer unparalleled opportunities for students to reflect thoughtfully on their practice and to deepen their understanding of a broad range of pedagogic phenomena. At their best, such programs are transformative and potentially life-changing experiences. However, the Carnegie report goes considerably further than most reports in making a number of highly specific programmatic recommendations for the reform of education’s two main doctoral degrees, the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. In this respect, the report deserves to be read carefully but also skeptically—skeptically because, to say the least, it is written from within a political climate of intense accountability for an exceedingly narrow range of educational outcomes. Private foundations such as the Carnegie Foundation are not exempt from the political climate and may, at times, be in the vanguard of the accountability movement. And although there are problems of a logistical and organizational nature, as a spate of reports and study groups have recently attested, there are even more profound problems having to do with the fundamental

purpose and intentions of education's doctoral degrees. My concern is that what offers itself as the "presenting problem" is frequently a mask for more deep-seated and concealed problems.

My response to the Carnegie proposal involves three main points. I argue that (a) the Carnegie solution rests on an unacceptably narrow conception of educational practice; (b) it offers an impoverished view of the nature and scope of doctoral education; and (c) it continues to build on a questionable understanding of the nature of the problem that it sets out to solve, namely, the nature of the *kind* or *type* of knowledge that can inform educational practice. To justify these assertions requires a probing of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the report as a necessary first step in promoting more counteractive dialogue.¹ To this end, a series of unresolved issues in the theory and practice of education need to be addressed, beginning with the authors' embrace of what they refer to as the "wisdom of practice" approach.

Few would doubt the centrality of practice and its pivotal position in education and the various subgenres, including—perhaps especially—my own subspecialty of educational leadership. Indeed, so popular and so frequent are the attempts to emphasize the practice or applied dimensions of the profession that important epistemological issues go unnoticed in some degree programs. But the category of practice (practical action) is associated with a long and complex philosophical tradition, dating back at least to Aristotle, that is much broader than the reform proposal's concept of practice. Shulman et al. define wisdom of practice as "[what] the most able exemplars of accomplished practice . . . do, and do well" (p. 29). According to this line of logic, the problem boils down to finding the best of the best—"[what] the most able exemplars of accomplished practice . . . do"—mapping their practices, and developing a set of assessments and related standards drawn from those exemplary practices. The successful completion of this process, it is assumed, would be our best indicator of superior real-world performance.

The conceptual linchpin of the entire reform proposal thus rests on the ability to identify outstanding practitioners—in the broad area of education, one assumes—although the title of the proposed degree, professional practice doctorate, does not make this abundantly clear. But the question of who qualifies as best of the best is specious and in many ways unanswerable: Best at what? Best for whom? Best under what set of circumstances? And so on. The notion of *best* presumes a hierarchy of agreed-upon talents and abilities and the ability to measure same, which despite the confidence exuded in the article by Shulman et al., does not exist. Not only that, but the use of such assessments for curriculum-building purposes almost certainly would institutionalize an approach to doctoral education that runs counter to the development of a certain critical mindedness and the capacity for independent thinking that might justify the seeking—and offering—of doctoral education in the first place. By using the template not so much of practice as of *existing* practice, the proposal also seems likely to entrench the values of efficiency and predictability over values of a more critical-interpretive nature. If we ask whether it is possible, as Shulman et al. appear to believe, "to imagine a . . . process whereby a highly public, well-justified, rigorous set of assessments for the highest levels of professional practice might also stimulate the development of new P.P.D. programs" (p. 29), the answer must be "No." Despite the authors' seeming certainty regarding

exemplary practice, what constitutes "the highest levels of professional practice" can be determined only through a close, interpretive, and contextually based analysis of the mundane events of practical pedagogical life. But even here, no final and definitive answer is possible. Moreover, any assessments of what counts as the highest levels of professional practice will, like many state and interstate licensure requirements, be couched in terms far too abstract and general to be useful for instructional purposes.

But if the practical requirements of the proposal are difficult to operationalize, so too are the key conceptual assumptions on which the proposal is based. Practice—as the complement and fulfillment of *theoria*—is a richer and fuller concept than can be represented by its *doing*, that is, by being equated with what even the most capable practitioners *do*. This would be to make the mistake of equating practice with its performativity rather than its *praxis*—where by *praxis* I am alluding to the Freireian notion of praxis as action-full-of-thought and thought-full-of-action (Freire, 1994), in order to separate it from the more mechanistic and usual sense of simply knowing *how* and *when* to apply theory to the concrete situations of practice.² Once the limitations of performativity in education become clear, then a way opens up for us to recognize the important affective or valuational or praxiological dimensions of practice, dimensions without which practice becomes a more or less pro forma event in which success is defined in terms of accomplishing conventionally defined goals and societally determined objectives.

In contrast, it is important to note that Shulman et al. define educational practice in exclusively performative terms—they are concerned only with the doing of practice. They explain the key feature of their approach this way: "This 'wisdom of practice' strategy begins with studying and thinking about the most able exemplars of accomplished practice that can be identified. We can then ask what they *do*, and *do* [italics added] well" (p. 29). Quite apart from the previously mentioned difficulties involved in identifying "the most able exemplars" is the question of whether there is or could be any such thing with an agreed-upon definition of exemplary practice that is stable over time and place. Moreover, if the measure of practice rests in its performativity—practice defined purely in terms of what its practitioners *do*—then we might ask what it is that these able exemplars are actually exemplifying beyond their own (or someone's) inevitably circumscribed notions of leadership or teaching practice, for example.

So it is first necessary to establish that the template cannot be *existing* practice, as Shulman et al. seem to think. Concrete existing practice, what I will call the *actuality* of practice, cannot be the template because of its radically incomplete nature. And this would be the case no matter how able the exemplars or how conscientiously they are selected. Practice or, better, praxis—that is, practice intertwined with *theoria*—*always* overflows the confines of the actual. Thus to speak of practice in its praxiological sense is to have in mind at least a glimmering awareness of the fullness and plenitude of practice that always exceeds its actuality. But this is obviously not the sense in which the authors use the term in their reform proposal. When they refer to practice they are referring to concrete, existing practice, and therein lies the problem. We cannot improve educational practice—make it fuller, more thoughtful, more reflective, more obedient to the type of practice it is and should be—by basing it on the kind of naked empiricism that uses existing practice, however "able," as the template.

Much could be written on this issue, but clearly more dialogue is needed before we rush to realign education doctorates along questionable theoretical lines. In the first place, the allure of using spurious assessments based on existing practice to drive the curriculum-building process needs to be put on hold, if not jettisoned outright. Second, the curriculum-building process needs to be left where it is right now—in the hands of capable and knowledgeable scholar-educators who understand that the practitioner world, whatever type of world we imagine it to be, requires more than an intermingling of empirically based research with current practice—what Shulman et al. (p. 30) refer to as “cross-over” experiences—if educational practice is to approximate what it can and needs to become. Third, and most important, we need to ponder the long-term consequences of the separation of the research world from the so-called practitioner world, a separation that is so much a part of the Carnegie proposal. Establishing separate degree tracks based on this distinction would affirm the belief in an intrinsic separability of research from practice, that is, the fundamental distinction that Shulman et al. make between the world of the education researcher and the world of the education practitioner.

It seems important to point out that although the practitioner world is not precisely identical to the scholarly world, neither are the two entirely different or dichotomous (Boody, 1990). Each requires and makes the other possible. Rather than posit the existence of two different classes of activities as the authors do—namely, a research-scholarly class and an implementation-practitioner class—we would do better to think in terms of a unitary scholar-educator class or set of activities to which people make differential contributions according to time, talents, interests, and abilities. Positing the existence of a scholar’s degree (Ph.D.) that is separate and distinct from a practitioner’s degree (either an Ed.D. or the proposed new P.P.D.) institutionalizes a philosophical and practical separation that contributes to a flawed conception of both. Beyond a preoccupation with the occupational dimensions of the role (which would almost certainly become the focus of a professional practice doctorate), practice needs a heightened sense of the possible if it is to surmount the present and enlarge its sphere of pedagogical possibility.

The trouble with the Carnegie proposal is that in the name of practical and/or political expediency, it equates the fullness, inexhaustibility, and plenitude of practice in its full praxiological sense with existing practice. It is important to distinguish a degree program that treats education as just one more object or topic in general from a degree program that *is* educational from the outset, which seeks, in other words, to deepen the pedagogical outlook of the educators themselves. The latter will be a degree program that interrogates, inquires into, and if necessary engages in explicit criticism of existing practice, rather than one that uses existing practice, however able, as a template for more practice.

A further problem with equating practice with what practitioners do is that such a definition cannot account for—or make available to prospective educators an understanding of—what the practice is *for*, other than in the most naive and conventional of senses. This type of understanding is hardly sufficient. The lack of a philosophically grounded understanding of what a given practice is for, of what makes the practice the particular kind of practice that it is, of what makes it humanly necessary (and not just socially desirable), practice cannot be read off from the

actuality of the practice—from the *practice* of the practice. One cannot work backward from an examination of the actuality of the practices—however diligently pursued—to an understanding of the deep purposes and intentions *behind* the practice. It bears repeating that definitions of educational practice that are performance based, that begin and end with an exclusive concern for performativity—operationally defined as what every teacher, principal, counselor, special educator, and so on, should know and be able to do—neglect two additional dimensions of educational practice, namely, the necessary and the possible.³ Moreover, performance-based accounts of teaching, counseling, administering, and the like neglect the *experiential modality* within which the doing is experienced by the recipients of the practice. Beyond what practitioners should cognitively know and be able to do, competent educational practice requires a philosophically grounded sense of what the practice *is*. It is important to see this not just as a missing dimension of the Carnegie proposal but as something that undermines the conceptual validity of the P.P.D. proposal taken as a whole.

In the absence of a philosophically grounded understanding of what makes an educational practice humanly necessary and essential, Shulman et al.’s assertion that the education Ph.D. should be a research degree reserved for those who plan to pursue research careers seems misplaced. Indeed, this assertion should be seen as at odds with the motivation that many people might have for embarking on a doctor of philosophy in education degree in the first place. In my own case, for example, the motivation for pursuing a Ph.D. in education had little to do with becoming a researcher in any specialized sense of the term and everything to do with becoming a scholar-educator in the full practical and philosophical sense of the term. Once we recall the full scope of our work as educators and make the conscious choice to keep our sights fixed on the development of programs designed to broaden and deepen students’ *educational* sensibilities, the need for dichotomization into different degree tracks fades. It need hardly be said that developing students’ educational sensibilities is by no means the same as developing their research capacity. Worth considering is the possibility that we have too much research and too little thinking in education—a possibility that the Carnegie proposal does little to correct.

The important point to be made here is that the doctor of *philosophy* in education degree is not primarily about learning research skills; rather, as the degree title suggests, it is about caring and thinking deeply and passionately—and I would add, thoughtfully, carefully, critically, and creatively—about the phenomenon of education. Only the phenomenon of education understood as an autonomous human science (Bollnow, 1987) is wide enough, broad enough, and deep enough to merit sustained attention and prolonged study (I am not using *study* in this context as synonymous with *research*). The end point is to know more about education and its place in human life and not simply about research. In a well-planned and thoughtfully constructed doctor of philosophy in education degree, much more is at stake than equipping students with the so-called research tools they are expected to use and are told they will require. The critical point is that the world of professional practice can also benefit from exposure to an advanced degree program that emphasizes the *study* of education as a broad and rich field of human endeavor. It is not axiomatic

that separate degrees are required, one for future scholars of education and one for future school superintendents, principals, and other practitioners. There is a very real sense in which practice needs scholarship, not merely in terms of cross-over experiences but in a fully intertwined, interconnected, reciprocal relation. The intrinsicity and indivisibility of this relation is not well recognized in the Carnegie reform proposal and, in fact, is implicitly denied. In opting for two quite separate classes of activities—scholarly activities on the one hand and practitioner implementation activities on the other—the strongest relation between them that Shulman et al. can envisage is a production-consumption relation. As an instance of how and why practitioners in a professional practice doctorate need to engage in scholarship, the authors cite the need to learn to read and respond critically to research reports—a thoroughly consumerist and technicist activity. Contrary to the view contained in the Carnegie proposal, I argue that the best practitioners lean in a scholarly direction—they possess the scholarly attributes of intellectual curiosity, critical mindedness, and a desire to know and understand the innate intricacies of their practice beyond the familiar commonplaces. They do more than consume the fruits of the latest education research. They are scholar-educators more so than they are professional practitioners. And from the scholarly perspective, it is obvious that educational scholarship requires practice as the inexhaustible experiential matrix out of which it formulates its varied pronouncements, research based or otherwise. The relationship between scholars and practitioners is dialectical from the ground up and inescapably so.⁴

With this in mind, what is the contribution that scholar-educators can make to contemporary praxis beyond engaging in research in the style recommended by Shulman et al., that is, engaging in the discovery and transmittal of scientifically based “new” knowledge? What other possibilities for action exist, and where might the value-added contribution of scholar-educators lie?

First, the aim of a praxis-based doctoral program would be not to make education practitioners any more effective or efficient in any type of instrumental sense so much as to produce in them a type of practical resourcefulness and thoughtful sensitivity to the concrete situations of practice that would enable them to act self-confidently and with genuine insight. Underlying such an approach to doctoral education would be the realization that the kind of instrumentalist program recommended by Shulman et al. can produce only a *technically* equipped practitioner—someone who knows the rules and when and where and how to apply them. Such a practitioner is skilled primarily in the tasks associated with application. Thus the strongest idealization that Shulman et al. seem to envision for professional practice is that of professional practice as a *techne* and the professional practitioner as a technician.

In contrast to this instrumental-pragmatist doctoral program, a praxis-based program would engage practitioners in the formation of a different kind of practitioner consciousness. Rather than treating education practitioners as engaged in rule-bound or rule-governed practices, a praxis-based program would encourage scholar-educators to develop into self-reflective, intentional actors capable of reflecting not only on means but also on situationally conditioned pedagogic ends. Or better, their situationally conditioned reflection on ends would be ipso facto a reflection on means. Thus a praxis-based program would be less

enamored of turning practitioners into consumers of the latest research-based findings and more focused on cultivating educators’ critical and interpretive capacities—enabling them to make practical, pedagogic *judgments* of an embedded and localized nature. Such a capacity for judgment contrasts with the technically prepared, theory-equipped practitioner who has been “rigorously” trained to reproduce a quantifiable theory or formula in response to the varied contingencies of practical pedagogical life. In short, scholar-educators would bring to praxis a critical and interpretive intelligence that would move educational practice closer to becoming a true profession.

But the mode of self-reflection presupposed by a praxis-based program has little to do with any kind of psychologistic or inward-looking form of self-reflection that seeks to render the “self” transparent to itself. Following the seminal work of Blum and McHugh (1984), the kind of self-reflectiveness I have in mind is more radical—it is the production of the *self-reflective consciousness* that has no choice but to experience the disorientation and dislocation that follow in the wake of the modern urge to conceptualize, to form things into *concepts* of things. The self-reflective consciousness to which I allude recognizes our ingrained tendency to deal in idealizations and sees how such idealizing dresses everything real in a “garb of ideas” (Husserl, as cited in Blum & McHugh, 1984, p. 14).

Thus an important task for praxis-oriented scholars consists in laying bare the disorienting effects of an idealizing and conceptualizing worldview that turns the *things* of the world into concepts and deals with them at the level of concepts. A rethinking of the many scientifically derived concepts of practice is urgently needed—but now from the standpoint of the real ground (i.e., the experienced and experience-able ground) on which we actually stand as teachers and learners. One obvious example would be the recently constructed notion of *best practice*, which as a *concept* stands at the end of a long chain of other scientifically derived concepts. This concept should be seen as what it is, namely, a mental construct lacking a foundation in the real ground of experience. And although it is clear that certain practices are to be preferred over others in certain situations, under certain conditions, and for certain purposes—none of which can be specified in advance—there are no universally verified or verifiable “best practices” that could or should govern the practical actions of teachers (or others) in the particular and always unique circumstances in which they find themselves. It is precisely this kind of demystification of what are increasingly oppressive instructional practices—often mandated for teachers—that distinguishes the work of praxis-based scholar-educators from those lacking the critical-interpretive mindset.

Today, notions of best practice—along with other conceptually based practices such as the use of externally derived performance standards and the move to rationalize curriculum content and teaching decisions by appeals to test data—have become pillars of received wisdom, whose net effect is to cut teachers off from their more deeply held knowledge and convictions regarding the value, worth, and purpose of their work as teachers. In each of these conceptually based practices, the praxis is to demystify abstract conceptualizations with what we *feelingly know* is pedagogically required, based on the living ground of felt experience (Gendlin, 1997). And in the case of increasingly dogmatic

claims regarding the role of “data” in the teaching/learning process, the praxis would be to rethink the practice of reducing all important curriculum practices to data in an attempt to relocate all significant curriculum decisions away from the personal and intuitive knowledge of the teacher and toward a “firm” foundation of measurable, quantifiable data. In short, the aim of a program of praxis would be the production of the *self-reflective* practitioner in the Husserlian sense of Blum and McHugh (1984) rather than the production of a *reflective* practitioner in the sense of the late Donald Schön (1983).

A critical consequence of contemporary efforts to rationalize the educational process has been the undermining of knowledge forms and their related practices that do not accord with the scientific foundations on which “reliable” knowledge is assumed to be predicated. This situation has been exacerbated, especially in the United States, by the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation and the move to so-called evidence-based research in the pedagogical sciences. It would be too long a detour to enumerate even a short list of instances where pedagogical knowledge of value to educators has received short shrift at the hands of an “empirical science” of education, but it is undeniable that the loss of such knowledge forms and their omission from many, perhaps most, doctoral curricula is a serious matter with practical and political consequences. One could point to the work of representatives of the *geisteswissenschaften* or human-science tradition, or the pedagogically oriented work of scholars in the tradition of European existential phenomenology, as a case in point.

In short, scholar-educators contribute to praxis by restoring a lost balance to educational theorizing and to praxis by engaging in practices that seek to complicate the simplifications of a seductive technological rationality (Aoki, 2005) that inheres in contemporary policy—especially in the United States but increasingly elsewhere. In regard to the contemporary realities of life in schools, praxis-oriented scholar-educators add value and perform a service by seeing students as more than data and by questioning and, where necessary, opposing policy-driven mandates that enforce data-driven decision making as a limiting and dehumanizing practice. Scholar-educators contribute by seeing the growth and development of children as more complex and fragile than can be represented by test scores and one-dimensional achievement data and by seeing how the reductive policies of best practice make teachers’ access to their most important sources of creativity and insight more difficult. Scholar-educators contribute to praxis by seeing how the language of *accomplishment* may be more appropriate than the language of *achievement* and by seeing how the language of *effectiveness* denies the essential normativity that is required to make this particular place a good place for the students and teachers who work there. In short, it is the capacity to see through the increasing technicism of current pedagogical ideology and to act to demystify much of what currently passes as progressive (i.e., technical) thinking in the fields of policy and practice that constitutes the value-added work of the scholar-educator.

From a scholarly point of view, the realization of a praxis-based educational practice would require the enlargement of the research canvas and a broadening of the intellectual framework within which research has been confined in recent years—especially in the United States in the wake of No Child Left

Behind. It bears repeating that a praxis-based pedagogical program would resist the simplifications that are the inevitable accompaniment of a research program based on narrow, monologic principles (Sidorkin, 1999). Such a program would not make any of the subspecialties of education easier—indeed it would add a layer of complexity to the already difficult work of teachers and others—but it would be a good complexity in the sense that it would return to the work of educators something of the “original difficulty” (Caputo, 1987) that cannot be researched away in the name of “best practice,” for example. It is this original difficulty that makes teaching, administering, counseling, and so forth, deeply worthwhile and satisfying and inspires the best efforts of those who, hearing the challenge, are called to respond. In this sense, research must remain a resource on which teachers can call rather than a straitjacket in which they are confined.

For practice to become praxis, individual practitioners at the level of the local school site must have the pedagogical competence and freedom to decide, through a close and careful reading of the contingencies of each practical situation, where the appropriate course of action lies. In short, it is one’s reading of the situation in all its uniqueness and contingency that should guide and moderate one’s practical acting—rather than subsuming the situation under the auspices of a general rule.

Much of the argument contained in the Carnegie proposal for a research Ph.D. separate from a professional practice degree is based on a comparison with the medical model and with the approach taken in the medical field in regard to the training and preparation of practicing medical doctors. As Shulman et al. correctly point out, in medicine a research/theory arm supplies the practice arm with the basic and applied knowledge for practitioner implementation. Although their argument is pitched at the level of the epistemological structure of practice (they do not claim, of course, that the actual practices of medicine are the same as or similar to the actual practices of teaching), questions remain: How well does the epistemology undergirding medical preparation transfer to a practice of a very different kind? Does the analogy hold, as the Carnegie proposal assumes?

To believe that the analogy holds, one must first be convinced that sufficient overlap exists between the two practices—in other words, that sufficient comparability exists between the kinds of services rendered, between the many purposes and problems with which they deal, and between the various methods or modes by which each practice “delivers” its distinct service. One also needs to be convinced that the practical, “in action” nature of the two practices is such that the same or similar theory-to-practice linkages apply—in other words, that similar epistemological structures exist. And especially important, one needs to be convinced that the object or objects that constitute the raw material to be worked on possess the same ontological status—a status that enables the otherwise very different practices to be bracketed together for illustrative or explanatory purposes. Does the required overlap exist? Can the analogy hold?

The place to begin is with the nature of the practices themselves, including the basic purposes and general intentions of the practices. Right away, we notice an important difference. First, making all due allowance for the rising importance of preventive medicine, the vast bulk of medical practice is broadly concerned with alleviating illness and disease and thus by definition is primarily a problem-solving

practice that *begins* with a deficit condition that it seeks to overcome or to rectify. Education is differently situated. As a practice it has more diffuse ends, having to do with fostering awareness, stimulating formal and informal learning, providing for the socialization and enculturation of the young, sponsoring the growth of human potential in a broad encompassing sense, and so on. And yet, despite the many challenges inherent in teaching, educators are not in a deficit-reduction business. Children and youth are not problems to be solved, any more than they are ailments to be cured, which is not to say that along the way there are no issues to be addressed or problems to be overcome. But it is to say that, taken in its entirety, the basic structure of the practice is not one of moving from an undesirable or less desirable state of affairs to a more desirable one.

For the practice analogy to hold, one would also need to be convinced that the nature of educational practices (particularly teaching practices) were such that the deliberative rationality presupposed in Shulman et al.'s epistemology could in fact be practiced, that is, used in practice. This would require more than a simple ideological assertion of the relevance of the medical model for education; it would require an examination of the structure of educational practice at the level of actual practice—in other words, a phenomenologically based explication of the structure of the educational lifeworld—as the only viable alternative to the imposition of ideologically or theoretically based models. If it could be shown that something belonging to an educational practice made it resistant or even immune to theory-based (research-based) principles, then one would have further grounds to resist the medical analogy and by extension the theory-practice dichotomy explicitly promoted by Shulman and the Carnegie Foundation researchers.

With this in mind, the most painstaking and detailed contemporary account of the phenomenological structure of the educational lifeworld is provided by the Canadian curriculum theorist Max van Manen in a series of books and articles produced over the last several decades. Drawing on a tradition of European existentialism, and especially the work of Dutch and German phenomenologists, van Manen shows how the active moments of pedagogical practices are not susceptible to the deliberative rationality presupposed by traditional epistemology, that is, by familiar theory-practice scholarship. He provocatively shows how the on-the-spot, moment-by-moment, improvisational nature of classroom practices makes difficult, if not impossible, the implementation of the rationalized accounts of teaching found in the Carnegie proposal and elsewhere. And in a counterproposal to the well-known concept of reflective practice popularized by Donald Schön (1983), van Manen (1995) raises a provocative question. He asks, “How reflective is the *active* moment [of teaching]?” Or more pointedly, “How reflective can it be?” (p. 35). Such questions are immediately recognizable by anyone with firsthand classroom teaching experience as real, not simply rhetorical, questions, which rise up from the soil of experience and point the way to their own answer. If van Manen's account of the live, improvisational character of teaching is correct, and if his claim that the “knowing” needed for teaching is more of an embodied, felt, tacit knowing, then the highly rationalized research-into-practice duality of the medical model will not hold for education and we will have to look elsewhere for the knowledge and insight needed to inform practice. In an interesting counterproposal, van Manen cites the work of Wittgenstein, Molander, Heidegger, Beekman,

and Sockett to show how the know-how contained in the active moments of pedagogical praxis relies more on propositionless “body knowledge” than on a fully articulated and articulable propositional “body of knowledge.”

Finally, it is far from certain that educational practices stand to benefit from theoretical models based on cause-effect principles, as Shulman and his coauthors appear to believe. It is not just a matter of having better trained researchers doing more rigorous research, as several contributors to *Educational Researcher* have recently argued (Levin, 2006; Raudenbush, 2005). Rather, it is the much more fundamental issue of the autonomy of the human subject in its socio-moral aspect that makes the imputation of causality difficult if not impossible to sustain. This is one reason why all the talk of “interventions,” “diagnoses,” “treatments,” and so forth, which is so much a part of the medical program and to which many educators have now become inured, nevertheless strikes a note so foreign to the ear of the experienced educator. (Perhaps Shulman et al.'s parenthetical comment about educators' “not trusting” education research is more ironic than it was intended to be [p. 27].) Could this lack of trust have a firmer foundation than Shulman and his Carnegie colleagues are willing to recognize? It is interesting to me that Sockett drew attention to the limitations of the language in Shulman's discourse of reform some 20 years ago (Sockett, 1987), limitations that quasi-medical talk and advocacy of the medical model do little to redeem. The insurmountable problem with the medical model and the entire research-into-practice cosmology on which it is based is that it does not honor the structure of educational practice as it is revealed phenomenologically, that is, as it is lived. One would have to conclude that the importation of an alien theoretical cosmology is unlikely to advance our understanding of education practices and may even retard or distort such understanding.

It seems to me that many of the shortcomings we see in education today are the result of seeing educational practice from too narrow a view, emphasizing its occupational dimensions to the virtual exclusion of its philosophical and pedagogical dimensions. My concern here is that, if education's doctoral programs come to be defined as little more than the research and training grounds for current policies and practices rather than as sites for research of a different kind—research that takes seriously the scholarly examination and critical interrogation of modern research-based practices and their related epistemologies—then the last, best hope for a future of more authentic praxis will be lost. There is reason to hope that the educational community may have arrived at a healthy skepticism toward “programmatic” reforms—reforms for which the initiating problem has already been “identified” and for which the underlying theoretical conception and proposed response have already been “determined.” Only intense face-to-face dialogue about the ends of doctoral education and not just the means, dialogue that seeks to locate a common *telos*, is likely to produce the needed changes. And although such dialogue needs to occur at many organizational levels, it is of paramount importance that it occur at the local level, at the site of individual doctoral degree-granting programs.

At a time of intense accountability for an increasingly narrow range of educational outcomes, there is a strong likelihood that all forms of educational practice will come to be seen as highly specialized and intensely pragmatic activities. For some, of course,

it has been ever thus. For others, this view is a new and unprecedented development. It is ironic that in seeking the “wisdom of practice,” the Carnegie authors recommend an approach that makes the acquisition of real wisdom a more remote possibility.

NOTES

¹In a recent article, Robert Bullough (2006) offers a lucid and compelling argument for restoring a lost dialogue with the humanities as a way of overcoming the constricted purposes of many doctoral programs, purposes that have been fostered, in part, by federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind.

²For an informative discussion of the distinction between practice and praxis, see Wenglinsky (2004).

³In *Basic Concepts*, the European existentialist Martin Heidegger (1993) discussed the three related modalities of being. In addition to the most present and most insistent modality—that of the “actual”—there are what Heidegger calls the “wealth of the possible” (p. 22) and the “stringency of the necessary” (p. 22). He writes,

Thus beings do not exhaust themselves in the actual. . . . Henceforth, if we earnestly think beings *as a whole*, if we think their being completely, then the actuality of the actual is contained in being, but also the possibility of the possible and the necessity of the necessary. (p. 22)

The full text of Heidegger’s statement on this issue follows. In attending to only one modality of the being of educational practice—that of the actual—the Carnegie proposal effectively denies the relevance and indeed the necessity of the other two modalities.

To what “is” belongs not only the currently actual. . . . To what “is” belongs also the possible, which we expect, hope for, and fear, which we only anticipate, before which we recoil and yet do not let go. To be sure, the possible is the not yet actual, but this not-actual is nevertheless no mere nullity. The possible also “is,” its being simply has another character than the actual. Different yet again from what happens to be actual and the possible is the necessary. Thus beings do not exhaust themselves in the actual. To beings belong the wealth of the possible and the stringency of the necessary. *The realm of beings is not identical to the domain of the actual.* (italics added; pp. 21–22)

⁴In a short but insightful paper presented at the 1990 annual meeting of the Far West Philosophy of Education Society, Robert Boody addressed the possibilities not so much of solving as of dissolving the theory-practice split in education. Drawing on the phenomenological-hermeneutic philosophy of European existentialists Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Boody commented as follows:

From the hermeneutic point of view, theory and practice are not fundamentally different—they are both types of human activity and knowing—and practice does not depend on an undergirding of theory and laws. In fact we might say that the hermeneutic view of knowledge turns the theory-practice distinction of today almost on its head. The paradigm for knowledge shifts from theory (scientific laws) to practice (acting correctly in a concrete situation). This is not to put teachers on top of a knowledge hierarchy, instead of researchers, because everyone is involved in a kind of practice, whether university researcher, teacher, or student. (p. 11)

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