

March 15, 2006
EdLab Seminar



**Event Synthesis:
Arthur Levine on the Future of Ed Schools**

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OVERVIEW

According to TC President, Arthur Levine, the current problems facing U.S. education have their roots in a history that is deeply flawed. The key to understanding and improving education for 22nd century society involves an investigation of how we have failed and how past failures have created systems that prevent success. With this knowledge, we can begin to conceptualize education and education schools in a revolutionary way.

At this week's EdLab Seminar, Levine coined the history of education as a history of "retreat from practice." From normal schools of the 19th century to today's graduate schools of education, research and training in education have been haphazard and irrelevant. Emphases have been placed on creating and deconstructing theory, rather than on investigating and improving practice.

Contemporary society positions education schools at a crossroads: we can overhaul our systems and vision, or we can bow out. A grim message, to be sure, but there is a silver lining. Education schools are not *quite* obsolete; if we accept the challenge to innovate and recreate, we can secure an influential and crucial role in the continued development of society and the global world.

OUTLINE

The following outline presents a survey of the key topics President Levine covered during his visit.

Today Education Schools have a bad reputation. Why?

1. *Theory versus practice*—Education schools are increasingly retreating from practice, focusing more on the theoretical aspects of education as opposed to teacher training.
2. *Research in education schools*—Compared to other fields, education is not producing enough top-notch research. Education researchers need to investigate more potent and applied research questions.
3. *Research outcomes*—Education researchers spend too much time criticizing schools as opposed to helping schools solve problems.
4. *Who comes to education schools*—Education schools are filled with bright people. But, school administrators around the country are beginning to realize that education schools are a cash cow, which means some schools are lowering entrance standards and watering down their courses.
5. *Research on education schools*—There is very little research on education schools. For example, how effective are the teachers they produce? What accreditation programs produce the strongest pedagogues? The rest of the world interprets this lack of information as a negative finding. Levine points out, "Our critics don't know us, and they're ideologically driven."

The future of education schools is tough to predict.

1. *The competition*—An increasing number of alternative certification programs are entering the education marketplace. Programs like Teach for America, New York City Teaching Fellows and other district-driven training programs are offering inexpensive and even paid alternatives to the traditional education school route, particularly in urban and rural areas. Traditional education schools primarily train teachers for suburban communities. Whether these trends continue is up for debate and rests largely upon the decisions of administrators and educators in the graduate-school setting.
2. *A philosophical issue*—Should teachers be trained in an apprenticeship setting/on the job (ex: Teach for America) or should they be trained in professional lab settings and then released into the classroom (i.e. traditional university education schools)? Is it best to gain pedagogy skills and an understanding of child development on the job or before the job begins?

How can education schools protect their share of the education marketplace?

1. *Prove they're better*—Education schools have a lot to offer (subject training, pedagogy training, development/psychology training, policy training, etc). They just have to prove that they are better than the competition at producing professionals ready to handle the complex issues and challenges of the education sector as a whole.
2. *Focus on practice*—Education schools should concentrate more energy on strong teacher-training programs, particularly baccalaureate programs.
3. *Applied quantitative research*— Although qualitative research is useful, the field is in desperate need of more robust quantitative studies that confront real problems facing schools (including graduate schools of education) today.
4. *Professionalism*—Education schools produce professions. Therefore, they need to start viewing themselves and adopting some of the organizational practices of other professional schools, such as business and law schools.

DISCUSSION

EdLab members raised a number of questions during President Levine's visit. Presented here are a few of the questions and a summary of President Levine's responses.

1. *If education schools didn't exist...*—What would happen if education schools disappeared tomorrow?
 - Arts and Sciences departments might take over in terms of research and the training of teachers. Also, more alternative teaching certification programs (like Teach for America) would be started. Principal training would likely move to schools of management.

2. *The future of education schools*—Should we develop new education training and research institutions or reform old ones better suited to the needs of the education sector today?
 - Levine wants to see new competition and new ideas when it comes to graduate schools of education. It is hard to change the habits and practices of old institutions.
3. *Borrowing from business*—Would education schools benefit from using the case-study method of learning that is popular in business schools throughout the country? Should Teachers College market education case studies to education schools around the country?
 - Case studies are a very useful way to get students to think about real problems in the education world. Levine used the case study method for a number of the education courses he taught at Harvard. If TC were to produce case studies for education schools at large, the cases would have to be marketed very carefully. Harvard's education school tried to this a while back and the cases were not lucrative at all.
4. *Lab schools*—Should education schools create lab schools? (For example: public or chartered elementary schools run by faculty and graduate students)
 - Lab schools should exist only under the circumstance that they are being used to educate teachers and inform research.
5. *Next Steps*—What are your recommendations for the next TC president?
 - TC is poised for a take-off. The next president needs to do the biggest capital campaign raising project in the school's history. It will be important that the president also think about the type of students TC wishes to attract—domestic versus international applicants, part-time versus full-time. Finally, the president needs to focus on issue of educational equity.

For more information regarding Levine's research on schools of education, please visit *The Education Schools Project*: www.edschools.org/index.htm.