FROM STUD FARM TO CAMPUS —
The institutionalization of educational sciences
at the Open University *

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Open University

This case study is in five sections. The first briefly discusses why educational studies was established at the Open University. The second section is concerned with the choice of which educational sciences to include in the Faculty. It includes some consideration of the state of educational sciences in Britain at the time. The third section considers the impact of one OU educational science course on colleges of education.

The Introduction of Educational Studies

The original plan for the Open University envisaged four “lines of study” which corresponded roughly with the faculties of the established universities — mathematics, science, social science and arts (Planning Committee Report, Jan. 1969). There was no place for educational studies. How then did they come to be included?

The only comment in the report relevant to educational studies was that “One vital and pressing need is for degree courses for practising and certificated teachers” (Planning Committee Report, para 6.4). This was an outcome of discussions originating in a sub-committee chaired by Dr. E. BRIAULT. BRIAULT was the Chief Officer for the Inner London Education Authority, an authority which then suffered from a chronic shortage of teachers. His original paper argued that “top priority should be given to initial teacher training courses leading to qualified teacher status” with collaborative arrangements with colleges of education for teaching practice (SC4M, 9.1.68; MC4/3, 13.2.68).

* I am indebted to a number of people in the Faculty for the time they gave to discussions about the early days, to P. THORNTON-PETT the Student Archives Officer and to R. COWEN for comments on an early draft. The interpretation of the data area are, however, mine.
Subsequent consultations with interested parties shifted the emphasis from initial training to courses enabling qualified teachers to convert their certificates into degrees — a need which Briault had noted in his paper. Two arguments appear to have been persuasive. Both were advanced by the Head of the Teacher Training Branch of the Department of Education and Science — although he made the point that he was providing a personal rather than an official contribution. One argument was that an OU involvement in initial teacher training would have required a change in the Training of Teachers Regulations. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, it was argued that the "teacher education world" had already been offended by what they regarded as unreasonable excursions into their field, notably the introduction of the B.Ed degree validated by the CNAA and by the establishment of Teacher Training Centres in Further Education Institutes. Other groups with whom discussions were held confirmed these points.

In contrast the provision of education courses enabling qualified teachers to convert certificates to degrees would encounter no statutory, operational or political difficulties. It was estimated that some 260,000 teachers who were of certificated status could be interested in such courses. At the time other universities were reluctant to accept a teacher's certificate awarded by another university as a suitable qualification for entry to their own conversion courses. Hence, unless a certificated teacher lived near the university which had awarded their teaching certificate they could not take a B.Ed course. The OU provided a national solution to this problem.

The Planning Committee’s own solution was to accept, in principle, that such courses should be established as soon as was practicable but, as we saw, made no commitment to a separate faculty or "line of study" for educational sciences. The Committee was dissolved in July, 1969. Later that year we find the first public mention of educational studies as a faculty in the draft 1971 Prospectus: "It has now been decided to separate mathematics from technology, and to add a sixth 'line' or faculty namely educational studies’ (Prospectus, 1971). The Vice Chancellor was clearly a central figure in all policy decisions at this time but a split of policy of this magnitude would have needed the approval of the University Council.

What also appears to have been accepted is that educational studies should be the only one of the six faculties which should not have a foundation course, nor has it ever been permitted to develop one. The origins of this policy appear to be in the argument advanced in the Students and Curriculum Working Group that it would be unwise to establish the precedent of a foundation course in education because of its applied or professional focus. If other courses with a professional focus were introduced they too would have a claim to offer a foundation course.

What remained unclear was which educational sciences would be included in the new faculty.
Which Educational Sciences

The first Director of Studies in the faculty had previously been a lecturer in Adult Education in the Extra-Mural Department at Nottingham University. He had no strong allegiance to a particular educational science and his personal preferences and previous experience were for topic-centred inter-disciplinary courses which explicitly addressed the perceived needs of practising teachers.

The need for legitimation of the new faculty, however, led in a different direction to a curricula which offered the “pure” educational sciences. Advice from Deans and Professors of Education in other Faculties and Schools of Education was to “get the basic discipline leadership right”. This advice drew on an established epistemological tradition that disciplines have their own internal logic and integrity and differ from other knowledge forms in the type of questions asked and judgements made. In addition within the OU other faculties were being developed with a structure based on conventional disciplines of knowledge.

The compelling logic was thus for a faculty organization based on disciplines. The secondary question was which ones? At first only two were anticipated and there were two outstanding candidates.

Psychology of Education

Psychology of Education was undoubtedly the strongest candidate. It had been institutionalized in British universities in the form of Chairs since the 1920s. For example, C. BURT was appointed to the Chair of Educational Psychology in the University of London, Institute of Education in 1926, and a number of additional Chairs were established in the 1930s (TIBBLE, 1966). Developments in training colleges paralleled university developments. In 1969 40% of the time spent on education in the colleges was taken up with educational psychology (Teaching Educational Psychology in Training Colleges, 1962). When teacher education was re-organized in the colleges in the 1960s first by lengthening the course to three years in 1962 and then in 1965, following the recommendations of the Robbins committee, to four years leading to a B.Ed for selected students, no subject had a stronger claim to be established as an educational science in its own right and none had a greater corps of competent staff.

Its academic and professional identity was confirmed in other ways too: In its research presence and influence on educational policy (See for example the Hadow Report, 1931 and Spens Report, 1938) and in the production of a professional journal: The British Journal of Educational Psychology, established in 1931.
By 1970 it would have been difficult to imagine an Education Faculty without a Chair in which the main academic concern was the Psychology of Education (although it is probable that the Chairholder would be formally appointed as a Professor of Education).

Sociology of Education

For several reasons the development of sociology of education in the training of teachers is particularly interesting. Until 1961 only the London School of Economics had an established Chair in Sociology. Four years later there were 29. In 1967 the ULIE founded the first Chair in the Sociology of Education, BERNSTEIN was appointed. Similar developments took place in the colleges. In 1960 only six teachers' colleges ran main (i.e. academic) courses in sociology; by 1966 it was twenty-eight and two years later it was forty-six (REID, 1978).

It was a dramatic transformation. In the early 1960s a small group of young sociologists interested in education but doubtful whether they would ever be able to further their careers in such an institutionally restricted field used to meet regularly. The group seems to have had both academic and therapeutic functions. The group included B. TAYLOR (now Director of ULIE), M. CRAFT (now Professor of Education at Nottingham University), M. SHIPMAN (now Professor of Education at Warwick University), P. MUSGRAVE (now Professor of Education at Melbourne University) and several other sociologists who are now Professors of Education.

Sociology then "took off" in the 1960s, becoming established in universities and colleges as a major discipline or science and as an educational science. In both instances its surge owed much to an increased interest in understanding the processes of social change, social structure and institutional behaviour.

Within education in the late '50s and early '60s a number of studies offered structural explanations of educational problems and shifted the level of analysis from the individual to social groups. Much of the work was informed by the structural-functional perspective, powerfully influenced by the LSE. Research was publicly funded and a number of government reports drew heavily on a sociological perspective and research findings. SRETZER (1980) argues that "for practical purposes — if implicitly — the official recognition of the sociological standpoint may be dated from the Early Leaving Report in 1954". It is much in evidence in the Crowther, Newsom, Robbins, Plowden and Educational Priority Reports. And, of course, the social-psychological and structural-functional perspectives were powerful influences in the precedent establishing and norm-setting desegregation judgements and other decisions made within the emerging ideology of equal educational opportu-
nity in the United States. This too had an influence in Britain affecting policy and research.

Additional disciplines

The arguments for Psychology of Education and Sociology of Education as the basic sciences in the Faculty were compelling and two Professors were appointed. They began work on the Stud Farm located a short distance from the main campus and later moved to two houses in a nearby village — the sociologists to The Mount and the psychologists to the Rectory. Their physical location, the lack of points of contact with other senior university staff (for example on university committees) and the demands of course planning, appointing staff and course production seriously limited the opportunities for participation in the development of university policy.

When a third and fourth Chair became available in the Faculty the tensions between disciplines and a topic centred or integrated approach were again evident. The Professors favoured the development of additional sciences with philosophy, a “basic or foundation disciplin” as “preferable to history”. The Dean/Director of Studies on the other hand favoured the development of curriculum studies as an academic area of interest or field of study which had direct relevance to teachers. Neither philosophy nor history had strong claims on this criterion.

Curriculum Studies had emerged as an important area of study in the 1960s though it made few claims to be a primary discipline. Conceptualizations of the area commonly assumed interdisciplinarity or integrated studies. For example, TABA (1962) argued for a theory of curriculum development which involved cultural analysis, knowledge of the learning process and an understanding of the nature of knowledge. The skills required were those of sociologists, political scientists, psychologists and philosophers and suggested a team.

By 1970 Curriculum Studies had become nationally and institutionally significant in Britain. The Schools Council had been created in 1964 and many curriculum reform projects were under way. The first Chair had been established in Leicester University, in 1966, and others followed. Teacher colleges had set up units for curriculum studies (or professional studies). In 1968 the Journal of Curriculum Studies was founded.

In the Faculty the established professors were uneasy about the “uncertain definition of the curriculum field”. In short it was not a discipline. Furthermore it represented a change in the structural rationale of the Faculty. It was easy to visualize different course levels in a discipline but less so in an integrated study area. Nonetheless following consultations between the Dean and the Vice-Chancellor it was agreed that the third area be Curriculum Studies.
It is of some interest to note that the new professor was a psychologist who wished to apply that basic discipline to curriculum studies. There seems to have been a more or less explicit criterion that the applicability of curriculum studies rather than the development of curriculum studies into a discipline was a factor in the appointments process. Concerns for relevance to teaching were more important than scientific purity. The interdisciplinary, or integrated code, assumptions in the area were acknowledged by subsequent appointments: a sociologist, a philosopher and a historian cum comparative educationist.

The debate over a fourth science followed a rather similar pattern with the final decision in favour of Administration and Management, an applied science and again one which fitted the integrated or interdisciplinary course model.

The faculty is thus formally organized into four sciences. Two are disciplines; the other two being areas of academic interest — though formally each is referred to as a discipline. These areas are Psychology of Education, Sociology of Education, Curriculum Studies and Administration and Management. Each has an established Chair, has responsibilities for research and the acceptance and supervision of postgraduate students — all matters formally for discipline groups.

Concretely the tensions were displayed in the first three courses produced in 1972, one year later than the foundation courses produced by other faculties. Each was a half-credit multi-media course which required some 160 hours of student work. Notice how the course titles changed during the production period: Educational as Social Relationships became School and Society; Education as Learning and Development became Personality, Growth and Learning; and Environment and Learning became Curriculum: Context and Design.

The changes of title are indicative of how the academic implementers shifted course content from the Dean’s original conception of topic-centred courses which were informed by a particular intellectual perspective, in which the applied component would be prominent, to a more purposeful initiation into an educational science which derived from the intellectual allegiance of course teams to their discipline. This shift was most clearly evident in Sociology. School and Society was in effect An Introduction to the Sociology of Education.

A further interesting point about this course was the deliberate intention to present a range of theoretical positions to the student. Specifically it was intended to offer a symbolic interactionist perspective within the course because of its apparent relevance in the analysis of classrooms and teacher behaviour. A later decision brought this perspective to the front end of the course. Although there were considerable intellectual tensions within the
team the decision seems to have been clearly pedagogical. The team was naturally conscious that almost all the students would be experienced teachers and were under some pressure to demonstrate the applicability of sociology to the needs of teachers in the classroom.

The Effect of School and Society

The broader implications of this decisions were important in two ways. First by giving considerable prominence to the interpretive school of sociology it contributed powerfully to the redefinition of the field. Secondly it had a particularly strong influence on college courses in sociology of education.

It is worth looking at the second point in some detail. The penetration of the School and Society courses into the colleges was the result of two factors. The first is the effective process of dissemination of OU materials. The correspondence texts and Readers for courses are readily available in bookstores throughout the country; they are attractively presented; and the Reader often provide a range of literature not easily accessible elsewhere. One should also note that each course has an external assessor, normally a prominent academic in the relevant discipline, which acts as some guarantee of its academic quality. A further feature of the dissemination process is the practice of appointing lecturers in colleges and universities to work part-time for the OU providing a course specific tutoring service. OU course content quickly finds a place in the courses they teach in their own institutions.

The second factor was a matter of timing. The School and Society course was produced at a time when many of the courses of education were developing new structures and new courses. Many were deserting their local universities in favour of CNAA as a validating body. This necessitated new and specific course proposals. Each course was under some pressure to prove that it made a useful contribution to the professional development of teachers in initial training. The pressure was particularly strong in sociology, still a relatively new science of education and constrained in a structural-functional paradigm which contributed rather little to understanding teacher behaviour in classroom. To lecturers putting a CNAA proposal together the content of School and Society with its early emphasis on the school and classroom and use of the interpretive paradigm, its effect of “putting man back into sociology” (REID, 1978), was highly attractive and components of School and Society found a place in many course proposals from colleges. There was nothing reprehensible in this. The teaching materials were good, readily available, attractively presented and fairly cheap. While they tend to underplay societal factors and in some cases overlooked the influence of structural feature on transactions within schools and classrooms other established texts could fill the gap.
Those staff in colleges who were interested in the symbolic interactionist perspective and were working on courses conceived within that perspective before the *School and Society* course was published were helped in two ways: the course provided a rich source of high quality materials, and its provided a legitimation of their work.

*School and Society* may be the most exciting course yet produced in the faculty and perhaps in the university. Its influence has ranged far beyond the 10,600 students who studied it in its four year life, affecting the development of the science and its institutionalization in colleges and universities throughout the country.

**Curriculum Studies and Comparative Education**

In 1973 the faculty approved courses in Comparative Education and Philosophy of Education. Production was scheduled to start in 1976. Both were initiated in Curriculum Studies and are a further indication of the disparate theoretical interests of the group. Within a few months the situation changed. Expansion was halted. The university plan for 111+ full credit course equivalents was cut to 87. The faculty FCEs were reduced from 16+ to 10+.

In the new context all courses were reappraised. Within Curriculum Studies there was considerable discomfort. Should the group stand by past commitments? How could the group choose between comparative education and philosophy? More widely should the group continue its practice of allowing its members to develop their own disciplines area within Curriculum Studies or should it seek to develop a single discipline approach? Should it seek to establish Curriculum Studies as a science in its own right?

A further complication surrounded Urban Education. With a four year life a remake would need to start in 1976 but if comparative education started in 1975 as agreed before the cuts the Curriculum Studies group would not have the manpower to produce Urban Education.

Within the group no agreement was possible, there were too many conflicting intellectual interests. Elsewhere in the faculty, in discipline groups, decisions were easier. The sociology group for example made a policy decision to oppose comparative education on the grounds that it was not sufficiently distinctive as a discipline — new disciplines always seem to be the most active guardians of disciplinary purity. When the decision came to faculty board comparative education was rejected by a coalition of interests including those persuaded by the discipline argument and others concerned about manpower.

There is still no comparative education though faculty courses do make extensive use of examples of educational processes in other countries. Written units, television and radio have all been used in this way. The purpose has
been to illustrate or to challenge assumptions not to provide a basis for comparative analysis. The exception is the recent sociology course, School, State and Society, which attempts a sustained comparative analysis. It has the weaknesses you would expect in a purely sociological perspective but is indicative of an increased interest in comparative study.

Two recent initiatives should be noted, however. The first is a proposal to mount a course on Education in Europe. As proposed it would be organized in free standing units each analysing a particular aspect or problem in educational systems or educational institutions in Europe. The production team would be drawn from a number of countries. The materials would be translated into other European languages. We have just completed a study for the Commission of the European Communities on the potential use of this course in institutions involved in initial and in service teacher education in member nations of the EEC. If the whole project is funded it would be a major step in the development of comparative education.

The other initiative is at the level of taught higher degrees, where comparative education has been accepted as one of seven options in a research methods course. It is an important initiative in two respects. First it is a public statement that comparative education is regarded as a distinctive and suitable area of study at the OU. Secondly it provides easily accessible materials which can be adapted by colleagues elsewhere.

The future looks more hopeful than at any time since 1973.

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