

## Chapter 27

# Teachers, Teaching, Teacher Educators, Teaching Education: A Case for Class-Based and Classroom-Based Transitions

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### **ABSTRACT**

*As a full professor of education—a teacher of teachers serving primarily in a university-based teacher educator capacity—the author has long been aware of the tenuous nature of our standing in the academy. He recalls learning from his first doctoral advisor of the conversion of “normal schools” to colleges of education. And of the case that had to be made that the field of teacher education was on par with all others in terms of intellectual rigor and impactful scholarship. We were not just teachers teaching teachers. This historical phenomenon was just one of the realities that has contributed to what he long ago recognized would be a career-long case of his own “Imposter Syndrome.” But it’s also the structural reason that, even after more than two decades of what anyone scanning his vita would characterize as a very successful academic career, his transition from K-12 to higher education is still a work in progress, one that he wrestles with daily, and one that he proposes might be made complete for his and all of his teacher educator and teacher colleagues with a reframing of our shared profession.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a full professor of education—a teacher of teachers serving primarily in a university-based teacher educator capacity—I have long been aware of the tenuous nature of my standing in the academy. I recall learning from my first doctoral advisor—one of the most preeminent curriculum theorists in that field’s history, at what historically has been and still endures as one of the leading graduate schools of education in the United States (the University of Wisconsin-Madison)—of the conversion of “normal schools” (teacher education colleges) to colleges of education (Harper, 1970; Katz, 2008). He spoke of this shift in

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a righteous manner, certain that our predecessors had earned the privilege to stand on the same stage as scholars in all other fields (Ogren, 2021). At the time I was proud both to know that these forebears had fought for this equal standing and that I would soon be among the activist academics who would carry the torch forward. I have forged my career conscious of the case that had been made by my antecedents that the field of teacher education—which is perhaps the only truly reflexive in all of higher education, as we *study* and *teach* about *studying education* and *teaching*—was on par with all others in terms of intellectual rigor and impactful scholarship. Despite well-established senses of academic inferiority, we were *not*, after all, *just* teachers teaching teachers (Labaree, 2004).

This historical phenomenon of the status of the teacher education field was just one of the realities that has contributed what I long ago recognized would be a career-long case of my own “Imposter Syndrome.” But it’s also the structural reason that, even after more than two decades of what anyone scanning my vita would characterize as a very successful academic journey, my transition from K-12 to higher education is still a work in progress. It’s a shift that I wrestle with daily, that is rooted in a working-class identity that I once believed I’d escaped by becoming a fully-licensed and employed public school teacher, and one that I propose might finally culminate for me and all of my teacher educator and teacher colleagues in a reframing of our shared profession. In this chapter I tell the story of my still-ongoing odyssey into higher education in four short chapters, concluding with the evolution of normal schools and a proposal for a reconfiguration of university-based teacher educators’ and classroom teachers’ roles, a restructuring of colleges of teacher education, and a recognition that teaching—the art and science of pedagogy—may be at the heart of that passage.

## MY DAD AND SCHOOL

My father, who passed in 2018, was the most sincerely curious individual I’ve ever known. Curious in the sense that he was unique and quirky and playful, and curious from the perspective that he wanted to learn about everyone and everything. He was a talented artist, and a gifted writer, and he was intrigued by every idea and individual. He was a student of the world, though he’d been removed from his own high school at 17 for disciplinary reasons. He dabbled in college multiple times, typically in abbreviated flares, including one final cycle supported by me and my siblings for art school in his 60s, but he never made it past earning a handful of credits. The financial needs of his family always won over his full time and attention, when he was a son and was called upon to assist his financially distressed clan with the small family grocery store, and later when he was a husband and father to me and my four siblings and the primary breadwinner for our fringe-poverty household.

He was also the most natural teacher: he was just *that* engaging and intelligent and a passionate listener. While he never served in a professional educator role, he would have been an extraordinary pedagogue in a classroom context. It’s because of him, and the student and teacher he *could* have been, that I have spent my own life teaching. First to high school “dropouts” and “pushouts” in my early 20s as an undergraduate at an elite private university (the University of Notre Dame), later as a backdoor-licensed teacher to adolescents living in inner city Chicago public housing and then at a public alternative school outside Seattle, and for more than two decades as an assistant, associate, and full professor of education to future high school and middle school teachers in Cleveland, Ohio and northern Virginia.

I was aware of my father’s immense and almost entirely unfulfilled potential from the time I was in early elementary school. Conscious of his intellect and his ingenuity and the gap between his promise

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