Brameld, Reconstructionism, and the American Education Fellowship Policy Statement of 1948

By Shinichi Kai

From 1940 on, Theodore Brameld (1940) used the term "reconstructionism" to express his educational viewpoint.[1] Though in 1940 he did not deny that progressive educators had "already rendered, and [would] continue to render, great services in behalf of democratic reform," he criticized them for encouraging "activity-for-activity's sake without either asking or answering definitely, 'what for,'" and he urged them to recognize "the necessity of basic criteria through which to direct and evaluate educational practice" (p. 878).

On the other hand, Brameld contributed to the development of the Progressive Education Association (PEA) and the American Education Fellowship (AEF) as a vice presidential representative of the North Central Region, writing the draft for the AEF policy statement of 1948. His draft, which was later modified by the AEF Policy Commission, was presented to the 1947 national conference held in Chicago.

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Adverse criticisms leveled against the proposed AEF policy were the following, as reported by Archibald W. Anderson (1948):

l. The first criticism was that it represented an

abandonment of the traditional concern of the AEF which was to make the schools more democratic and to develop the individual adequately.

2. The second criticism was that it intended to commit the AEF to "an advocacy of a socialistic economy" (p.9).
3. The third criticism was that it attempted to commit "the AEF to a program of indoctrination for a specific type of economy" (p.9).
4. The fourth criticism was that "it did not specifically or adequately commit the organization to a support of democracy" (p.9).

After the document setting forth the AEF policy had been modified in order to allay the above fears, and some additional changes had been made, the proposed policy was approved unanimously by the national conference. The following year it was approved as a formal policy statement by a mail ballot. Nevertheless, the adoption of it brought out more discussion about the policy statement. According to Anderson (1953), this "discussion continued unabated and, perhaps, was actually intensified by the formal adoption of the Statement" (p. 57).

The purpose of this article is to compare Brameld's draft with the actual policy statement and to consider the role which the policy statement played in the AEF and its implications for teacher education.

Brameld's Draft and the AEF Policy Statement of 1948

The nub of Brameld's (1947) draft is in the following which I quote:

> The two great constructive purposes which should now govern the American Education Fellowship follow directly from this brief analysis. They are:
>
> I. To channel the energies of education toward the reconstruction of the economic system—a system which should be geared with the increasing socializations and public controls now developing in England, Sweden, New Zealand, and other countries; a system in which national and international planning of production and distribution replaces the chaotic planlessness of traditional "free enterprise;"...
>
> II. To channel the energies of education toward the establishment of genuine international authority in all crucial issues affecting peace and security;...
>
> In "taking sides" against an unworkable economic system and unworkable nationalism, and with a workable system and workable internationalism, there is need to develop consciousness of a distinction between the convictions already held by those who take such sides and those who do not yet do so. This [is] necessary in order thereby to permit development of new educational techniques which avoid mere indoctrination of these convictions. The task is to experiment with techniques of learning through social agreement, not by superimposing prejudgments. Only thus can majority rule eventually become rule by an informed majority who understand what they want and how [,] democratically, to get what they want. The school should become a center of experimentation in attaining communities of uncoerced persuasion. (pp.260-261)

A revised version of these paragraphs in the policy statement follows:

> Inasmuch as the forces that shape society are those that determine education as well, educators should understand what is taking place in the community, and should take stands as adult citizens on controversial issues of the day. It is their right and duty to participate actively in political and economic life.
>
> As a result of the analysis made in I and II above, two great constructive purposes have first claim for active support:
>
> 1. The reconstruction of the economic system in the direction of far greater justice and stability; ...a system in which the will of the majority with due regard for the interests of all the people is the sovereign determinant of every basic economic policy.
>
> 2. The establishment of a genuine world order, an order in which national sovereignty is subordinate to world authority in all crucial interests affecting peace and security;...an order geared with the increasing socializations and public controls now developing in England, Sweden, New Zealand, and certain other countries;...an order in which "world citizenship" thus assumes at least equal status with national citizenship...
>
> In implementing the above outlook through educational practice, there should be no attempt to indoctrinate for any political party or for any given economic system. It is vital to maintain democratic, intelligent discussion and decision but also to make sure that the process will lead to conclusions. This can only be done by informed teachers who have convictions of their own—convictions which they do not foist upon students but which at appropriate age levels they share with students. The task is to experiment with techniques of learning which look toward intelligent social consensus, not to superimpose prejudgments or dogmatic doctrines. Only thus can majority rule eventually become rule by an informed majority who understand what they want and how, democratically, to get what they want. The school should become a center of experimentation in attaining communities of uncoerced persuasion. (pp.41,46)

There seems to be little reason to deny that the policy statement largely represents Brameld's points of view. Some representative AEF members admitted the reconstructionist points of view reflected in the policy statement. Isaac B. Berkson(1953), for instance, commented that the policy statement was "leading to a new synthesis in which the invaluable contribution of earlier progressivism, embodied in the central concept of education as growth, would be united with the 'positive social goals' emphasis of the emerging 'reconstructionist' position" (p.63). Ephraim V. Sayers (1953) pointed out that there were two strains of emphasis in social reconstruction. One of these regarded changes in social patterns as goals to be realized and the other of these "focus[ed] upon the development of democratic method in the making of social changes" (p.64). In the 1947 national convention, according to Sayers, the former "was almost, if not quite, dominant in the rewriting

of the policy of the Fellowship. This particular strain of emphasis has been called 'Reconstructionism.' This strain got itself almost exactly written into the statement of policy adopted at that time" (p.64). Anderson (January 1953) said that the policy statement had since been criticized on every one of the charges leveled against the proposed policy.

Brameld's (1953) own comment was that "I [found] it difficult as one AEF member to discover cogent reasons for rejecting these economic goals any more in 1953 than in 1947" (p.69).

In one sense, the policy statement could be regarded as the reconstructionist challenge to progressivism, and vice versa, as many AEF members reacted to this statement drafted by a reconstructionist.

Reactions to the Policy Statement

A. Comments by Ball and Shane

Lester B. Ball and Harold G. Shane (1948), who were members of the Board of Directors of the AEF, criticized the policy statement soon after its adoption. Their criticisms were as follows:

l. The policy statement is not "free from bias and economic dogmatism." It does not make a scholarly effort to evaluate the strengths of the present American economic organization, but emphasizes "the strengths of a more socialized economy" (p.llO).
2. The policy statement represents opinions of "authoritarian liberals" who are "in the far left" and are not "the real liberal[s]" (pp.110-111).
3. The policy statement should explicitly oppose Russian totalitarianism that does not accept the ideals for which many liberal educators stand.

I do not regard the policy statement as that of a far leftist or as an authoritarian point of view. This is because the policy statement insisted that "there should be no attempt to indoctrinate for any political party or any given economic system," and emphasized "democratic, intelligent discussion and decision."

In 1949, William H. Fisher (1949), who reviewed the article by Ball and Shane, responded thus:

l. The "pragmatists or 'instrumentalists' have, within recent years, concentrated more and more on societal forces which affect education. This, of course, doesn't mean that they have lost sight of the importance of a kind of 'methodology' consistent with pro-democratic social and economic goals" (p.149).
2. Ball and Shane's opinion as to Russian totalitarianism leads to three alternatives. The first alternative "must be found in the unrealistic wish that the Stalinist regime in Russia will, in the foreseeable future, be replaced with a regime holding ideals 'supported' by the western democracies" (p.150). The second alternative is to support every anti-Communist crusade financially. This

approach is not consistent with progressive theory that means and ends must be consistent. The final alternative is war itself. The policy statement seems to reject acquiescing to any of the three alternatives above depicted "at the risk of being called 'red'" (p.150). It seems to be sure that Russia and the United States can co-exist beyond the difference of regime, while itdoes not by any means condone "every act of the government of Soviet Russia" (p.150).

3.Ball and Shane were perhaps afraid that the policy statement might lead to a split within liberal AEF members. Counter to this, it is difficult to find any reason why a society-centered policy would lead to the disintegration of the AEF. This is because the educational frontier today, Fisher continued, lies in the realm of social, political, and economic conflict rather than in the methodological realm.

In short, Fisher concluded that Ball and Shane "read much more of a leftist nature into it than [was] actually there" (p.151). I agree with Fisher's points of view.

B. Comments by Gans

In 1952, Roma Gans (1952) criticized the policy statement on the following points:

1. It took notice of increasing socialization and public control in England, Sweden, New Zealand, and certain other countries, but it did not make a statement about "Russia's disregard of civil liberties" (p.125).
2. It did not attempt to understand "the development of constructive personalities" (p.125).
3. It required children and youth to become involved with ideas which might be denied by their parents and controversial issues which might cause threats to and resistance in some persons.
4. When the AEF had definite answers about controversial issues, it would be impossible for the AEF to work with other educational groups.

I think that Gans disregarded the proposal in the policy statement (1948) that the AEF "will continue to emphasize 'learning by doing,' 'community schools,' 'the integrating curriculum,' 'teacher-pupil planning,' 'child development,' and other objectives of 'progressive education' as these now become more widely accepted. These types of experimentation should emphasize the social-emotional development of children and adolescents, and parent education" (p.58). She also ignored the difference between the teacher who had his or her own definite point of view but did not foist it upon students, and the teacher who indoctrinated a point of view. Gans should have admitted the difference between these two and recognized that people and groups supporting different positions are capable of cooperating in a democratic society.

C. Comments by Washburne

Carleton W. Washburne (1952, 1953) criticized the policy statement in the

early 1950s. He recognized it as "a genuine challenge to an education which fail[ed] to come adequately to grips with the most crucial problems of today" (1952, p.126), but he also found the following deficiencies in the policy statement:

1. The policy statement intended to give the answers to the issues it raised and did not recognize other crucial issues and other promising answers. For example, it advocated a doctrine on national and international order.
2. The policy statement was "an attempt to make the Fellowship an organ of social action toward a particular kind of national and world society " (1952, p. 127). It should not be disregarded that "the AEF is an **educational** organization, dedicated to helping people think things out for themselves" (1952, p.127).
3. The sentence that the "school should become a center of experimentation in attaining communities of uncoerced persuasion" led to advocacy of indoctrination in spite of the disclaimer in the policy statement. "The job of education is to release the potentialities for growth and thought, not merely to instruct" (1953, p.71). Indoctrination or mere instruction does not warrant that students will rise higher than their teachers and does not produce progress which "socially, depends on the new generation being wiser than the old" (1953, p. 71).

I do not believe that the AEF policy statement supported indoctrination for teachers' favorite thought, nor that it regarded education as mere instruction. The proposal that it is important to "maintain democratic, intelligent discussion and decision" in educational practice supports release of students' potentialities for growth and thought. Washburne's comments can be regarded as a typical opinion of progressive educators who have a methodological or child-centered orientation.

D. Comments by Berkson

I.B. Berkson (1953) recognized that the policy statement which emphasized decisions, conclusions, and convictions stood in contradiction to the traditional emphasis on methodology in the classroom, but he did not consider that it accepted indoctrination. He insisted on the difference between the "positive teaching" (p.63) of social goals which the policy statement advocated and indoctrination which progressive educators rejected. The positive teaching which intended to be not neutral but objective as far as possible was "at all times concerned with transmitting ideas and conclusions which [were] warrantable as well as with developing good attitudes and methods of attack on problems" (p.62). In other words, it meant that "generally agreed upon assumptions, goals, and proposals must be presented positively along with analysis of the evidence for the conclusions" (p.63). Therefore, he did not find any advocacy of indoctrination in it.

The following statement by Brameld (1953) reflected a similar interpretation to Berkson's:

> What the AEF policy assumes here, in short, is that teachers and citizens who care to do so are privileged to express their convictions together; but that other teachers

> and citizens, as well as students, may or may not come to share similar convictions. Whether they do or not, after free and open discussion, is a matter for them to decide, not for the AEF. (p.68)

Harold 0. Rugg (1953) had a similar point of view to Berkson in terms of the difference between neutrality and objectivity. Rugg wrote:

> No teacher worthy of his hire can be neutral on any issue on which there are documented data from tested experience, but every teacher is obligated to school himself to achieve as much objectivity as possible. **Teachers must not be propagandists**; **they must not indoctrinate for any special cult or concept**. The need is for teachers of competence who know the culture and who, in teaching, succeed in appraising it objectively—that is, not on the basis of sectional, class, or partisan interest, but from the viewpoint of the nation as a whole and in the light of a consensus on fundamental principles. Such competence cannot be acquired except through thorough and never-ending study of society and culture with the aid of the new university disciplines. (p.38)

But one difference was that Brameld preferred not to use the word "objectivity," but rather to use the phrase "defensible partiality." This is because he thought that it was impossible for any conclusion or proposition to be arrived at through "genuine" objectivity or impartiality. Brameld (1950) argued:

> What we learn is defensible simply insofar as the ends we support and the means we utilize are able to stand up against exposure to open, unrestricted criticism and comparison. What we learn is partial insofar as these ends and means still remain definite and positive to their majority advocates after the defense occurs. (pp.92-93)

However, Berkson (1953) criticized the notion that the "will of the majority [was] the sovereign determinant of every basic economic policy" and emphasized that "the popular views need[ed]" to be supported, or moderated, and, in some cases, vetoed, by the critical views of expert opinion" (p.61). He also rejected the "Utopian outlook" (p.61) in the policy statement.

A careful examination of Berkson's criticisms reveals that his first criticism is not adequate. He should not have ignored the following sentences in the policy statement (1948) which reflected respect for scientific or expert opinions: "It is vital to maintain democratic, **intelligent** discussion and decision but also to make sure that the process will lead to conclusions," "...to experiment with techniques of learning which look toward **intelligent** social consensus," and "Only thus can majority rule eventually become rule by an **informed** majority understand what they want and how, democratically, to get what they want" (p.46). (Emphasis added).

How about the second criticism by Berkson (1953)? For example, he regarded "the reconstruction of the economic system" as reflecting a "Utopian, salvationist spirit" (p.61). He found the following reasons:

1. "That laissez-faire in economics is no longer an adequate principle may be taken for granted" (p.61) in the policy statement.
2. That "the technological complexity of production and distribution requires a far larger degree of coordination, planning, and government control than necessary heretofore, may be reasonably affirmed" (p.61).
3. That "the greater degree of government intervention in economic affairs ought to lead also to greater equalization of income and a better distribution of wealth may be defended as being in harmony with the American traditional belief in equality of opportunity and in the desirability of a general equality of condition among the commonality" (p.61).

Berkson was not sure that these thoughts would necessarily lead to a reconstruction of the American economic system. He seemed to believe that "in the democratic countries the development [was] toward a mixed economy in which the element of free enterprise [would] be preserved and correlated with various forms of public, state-influenced, and state-controlled economic forms" (p.61).

But the policy statement noticed the socialization and public control in England, Sweden, and New Zealand where capitalist enterprise was still dominant. So we find that the policy statement did not deny a mixed economy. Berkson's point of view does not differ from that in the policy statement. However, he was opposed to "an order in which national sovereignty [was] subordinate to world authority in all crucial interests affecting peace and security" since he regarded the statement about a world order as "a particular instance of the messianic character of the Statement" (p.61). As to the issue of a world order, Berkson was more interested in interdependence of national sovereignty with the United Nations rather than with superiority of the world authority over national sovereignty.

Conclusion

The AEF members' comments on the policy statement may be considered a progressivist critique of reconstructionism because many members, according to Brameld (l953), found some objectionable features in it, such as the following:

1. The policy statement is concerned primarily with dogmatic goals, not with methodology.
2. The policy statement attempts to make an educational organization a militant medium focused upon social change.
3. Advocacy of social, economic, and political goals in the policy statement leads to advocacy of indoctrination.

Brameld (1953) defended the policy statement by countering the above criticisms. He made the following points, in particular:

1. Democratic education is committed to some definite goals which are neither absolute, dogmatic, nor fixed. Definite goals which the policy statement asks us to admit are compatible with democratic values: "In John Dewey's sense,

moreover, these goals may be regarded as suggestions or hypotheses for the solution of such economic problems...They offer simply a minimum of direction by which it is hoped the problems may be cooperatively solved" (p.68).

2. Progressive educators should not accept "the traditional dualism of school and community, of learning and doing, of thought and action....Properly understood, the good democratic school is an action group, just as the good democratic organization is profoundly a school" (p.68). The policy statement which reflects critical views on the traditional dualism ought to be supported.
3. Careful reading of the policy statement would reveal an opposition to indoctrination like the one raised by critics of the policy statement. The proposal that informed teachers with their own convictions do not foist their views upon students but rather share them with students at appropriate age levels is never compatible with indoctrination and points to "new frontiers in teaching" (p.68), characterized by the following:

    1. "[P]anels of teachers of various outlook work in teams" (p.68).
    2. It is not the teacher-centered teaching, but the learning group-centered teaching.
    3. Students learn to disagree freely and honestly from one another and from their teachers.
    4. Teachers attempt to express their own convictions in order that students can learn to criticize them as well as learn from them.
    5. It pays much attention to conclusions and concomitant actions as well as methodology. In short, this teaching admits that teachers are privileged to express their own convictions, but it does not require other teachers and students to share similar convictions; it respects students' free and subjective judgments and decision.

However, the 1951 AEF national meeting in Philadelphia adopted the following resolution quoted by Kenneth D. Benne (1951):

> It is the sense of this meeting that the challenge to education presented by the current situation at this Mid-Century is such as to necessitate a re-examination of the purposes to which the American Education Fellowship is committed. We recommend to the Board that suitable steps be taken to involve, through democratic procedure, the membership in a clarification of our purposes and a fuller commitment thereto.

In accordance with this resolution, the Board of Directors of the AEF appointed a committee on revisions. In 1953, the Board of Directors, by a vote of 14 to 1, rescinded the 1948 policy statement.

The policy statement reflected not only Brameld's personal opinion, but opinions published in issues of *Progressive Education*. For example, such topics as intercultural education, prejudice, world government, atomic energy, the consumer co-operative movement, the United Nations, and the inadequacy of competitive individualism to which the policy statement referred had already been discussed in several issues of *Progressive Education*.

Then why was the statement criticized and rescinded not long after it was adopted? Many members, including Brameld, according to Anderson (January 1953), seem to have thought that "it was an inevitable manifestation of those anxieties of our time which justify calling it...an 'era of suspicion'" (p.92). But Brameld did not regard it as "a historical document, dated with the characteristics of a year that cannot be recaptured" as Anderson did (p.92). Brameld (1953) was still convinced that the policy statement was defensible in 1953, commenting: "The economic problems of this decade, in short, remain urgent and dangerous problems. Responsible educators can no more ignore them today than they could yesterday. **The worst failure of which our profession could be guilty is to fall victim to the easy complacency that so quickly becomes habitual in a time like this**" (p.67). (Emphasis added). From that point on, Brameld continued to develop his philosophy of education based upon ideas and issues revealed in the policy statement. He never believed that the policy statement was only temporarily relevant to American education.

In the final analysis, what implications does the above discussion about the AEF policy statement have for teacher education? The incident explored in this article seems to suggest that the teacher should avoid indoctrination, but he or she should not remain neutral on controversial issues. That is to say, teachers should not avoid responsibility for and loyalty to goals which are compatible with democratic values and democratic education. Moreover, I think that the experience helped Brameld (1957, 1965) further develop his own theoretical framework for teacher education. According to him, bitter conflicts existed between spokespeople for the liberal arts and educationists in teacher education. The former insisted on providing the prospective teacher with solid knowledge of the academic subjects in which he or she specialized because the skills which teachers needed were easily acquired by one or two methods courses in teacher education. The latter supported programs of training that focused upon the importance of techniques at the expense of scholarship.

Brameld attempted to develop a framework for teacher education that avoided the limitations and biases of the two camps. It included four essential parts, which were: general education, specialized knowledge, practice, and a unifying theory. General education, Brameld (1957) asserted, might enable the prospective teacher to "understand, harmonize with, and contribute to the wider culture of which he [or she] was an important and respected member" (p.258). Specialized knowledge consisted of behavioral sciences and a particular field of knowledge. The former embraced at least psychology, anthropology, political science, economics, and sociology. The latter included professional knowledge in which he or she majored. Practice, Brameld (1965) maintained, involved not only classroom experience but also "frequent contacts with a wide range of institutions, organizations and activities that [had] direct or indirect bearings upon formal education" (p.201). He believed (1957) that a unifying theory could help the prospective teacher begin his

or her professional career with the rudiments of clear commitment "to a meaningful conception of personal and cultural freedom" (pp .271-272). By a unifying theory, Brameld meant the history and philosophy of education. His framework for teacher education demanded that the prospective teacher study cultural issues which included political, economic, and social problems—both descriptively and prescriptively—as well as master knowledge of the subject which he or she would teach and know-ledge about the teaching profession. He stated that the teacher was "the chief deputy of cultural transmission, continuity, and innovation" (p, 264), rather than a mere instructor of subject matter.

Brameld's opinion of teacher education reflected what he suggested in the discussion of the AEF policy statement. In the mid 1970s, he published *The Teacher as World Citizen* (1974). In this small volume, he argued that the prospective teacher should be required to "receive a minimum of six years of professional preparation after high school graduation: two years in a program of general education that examines and appraises our age of revolutionary change; then four years of fundamental knowledge of the sciences and arts as these bear directly upon problems of world order" (p.60). Moreover, Brameld demanded that the "sixth year offers a tough internship in which every one must prove to himself, to his peers, and to his mentors that he not only deserves assignment as teacher-citizen of the world, but has attained professional qualifications at least equal in thoroughness and competence to those of any doctor of medicine" (p.60). Brameld urged the prospective teacher not only to acquire professional knowledge, but also to take responsibility for becoming a world citizen. He consistently insisted that teacher education should take account of approaching cultural issues and of exploring descriptive and normative cultural values.

In conclusion, a careful examination of the discussion inspired by the 1948 AEF policy statement originally drafted by Brameld provides the prospective teacher with insights into the historical scope and method of teacher training, especially as he or she soon joins the world community as an effective teacher and citizen.

Note

1. Brameld's (1940) explanation of "reconstructionism" is as follows: "Of the three main anti-progressive positions, 'authoritarianism' has been comparatively quiet in the literary field since Robert M. Hutchins let go with both barrels about three years ago...The 'essentialists,' a second main group, offer much the same criticism of the progressive school;...Although not yet clearly defined as a movement, the third dissenting trend in education may well be called 'reconstructionism'...reconstructionism insists that education must on the one hand be guided, not by a sterile and specious rationalism, but by clear democratic-collectivistic goals, and on the other hand be implemented by potent social and political strategies" (pp. 877-78).

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