A LIFE IN EDUCATION
HISTOIRE DE VIE SCOLAIRE

Neville Scarfe and Teacher Education

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When in 1956 Neville Scarfe became dean of education at the University of British Columbia, he brought with him arresting capabilities. As a child he had attended Chelmsford Grammar School, founded – as he rarely neglected to mention – by Edward VI in 1551. Thus grounded in the strenuous traditions of such institutions, in 1925 he went on to the University of London, where in 1927 he achieved a first-class honours B.A. in geography, at age 19 heading the honours list. The following year he acquired a teaching diploma, which from 1928 to 1931 he put to good use as senior geography master at Bemrose Grammar School, Derby. Thence he transferred to the University of Nottingham, where for four years he lectured in geography and earned a master's degree as well. From 1935 to 1951 he worked as senior lecturer and head of geography at the University of London Institute of Education. From this last position he took leave of absence on war work (1939-1945), serving as director of press censorship, Ministry of Information, London. After the war a visiting professorship (1948-1949) at Syracuse University, New York State, and the task of co-ordinating the UNESCO International Seminar at McGill University preluded his five years (1951-1956) as Dean of Education at the University of Manitoba. From the latter position he submitted his application for the corresponding deanship at UBC.

As of his arrival at Point Grey in 1956, Dean Scarfe listed among his attainments some thirty-seven articles on topics as wide-ranging as teaching geography, the purpose of education, teacher education and the role of the university, visual aids, motivation, curriculum, learning, student attitudes, research, industrial education, matter and method in education, personal philosophy, and leadership. In this connection, he consistently acknowledged that major sources of his inspiration were outstanding educators on either side of the Atlantic. In Britain these included Sir Percy Nunn, a prominent exponent of individualism in human affairs; Sir Cyril Burt, who stressed scientific experimentation

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in psychology; Sir Fred Clarke, who related education to social change and conceptualized culture as "the medium in which individual development takes place"; James Fairgrieve – a down-to-earth geographer bent on assisting students to imagine world characteristics accurately, the better "to consider social and political problems"; and Thomas Henry Huxley, who throughout his life pressed for the inclusion of science in the school curriculum.

In the United States, too, Neville Scarfe discovered stimulating educational propositions that helped mould his beliefs concerning teacher preparation. There, William James had paved the way for what John Dewey termed his "idea of an objective psychological theory firmly rooted in evolutionary biology." Dewey himself promulgated the notion that the school is essentially a social institution intended to nourish aesthetic, moral, and intellectual development, and is therefore crucial to general social reform. Edward Lee Thorndike declared that education has to do with changes in human beings; that a change is the difference between two conditions; that each condition manifests certain products; hence it behooves us to measure these products "with some precision." Frances Keppel argued for an educational revolution based on a combination of research and creativity illuminated by philosophy and sociology. And Gordon Allport proposed that, biological survival aside, human behaviour is mostly motivated by self-expression – that is, being who we are.

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Over seventeen subsequent years Dean Scarfe drew on some of these assumptions according to his feel for the educational requirements of post-war children and the societies they inhabited. Spontaneity marked his frequent exchanges with students or colleagues. Social gatherings displayed his quick mind and sharp wit. Memoranda reflected his terse style and singleness of purpose. Faculty meetings verified his robust facility for moving things along. He was a close reader of commissioned reports on education and an uninhibited rebutter. On contentious educational issues he habitually badgered the press – especially the *Ubyssey*, which in the early years of his tenure upon occasion printed letters and articles antithetical to his own views on educating prospective teachers. On the basis of these peregrinations he also developed in the journals more systematic articulation of his philosophy concerning how best to qualify teachers for their immediate responsibilities and ultimate professional growth.

For a start, Dean Scarfe contended with Pestalozzian fervour that education is a biological process whereby children's minds "grow like other organisms." It follows that to some degree "teaching is a profession akin to that of a gardener." Lecture and textbook teaching is therefore futile. Rather, childhood intellect deserves "a good balanced diet of properly selected and ordered facts and experiences, an efficient thinking process, and opportunities for creative and artistic expression." The purpose is twofold: to inculcate "a receptive frame of mind," and in the long run to generate critically thoughtful citizens "with minds of their own." In the case of geography for instance, the study of place conditions in a given location helps reveal "the association between the cultural and environmental element in any area." Doing so enables students "to think sensibly about political and social problems in the world around" and even nurtures benevolence.

Of course, such high-minded purposes call for teachers of exceptional talent. Contrary to folk wisdom, though, UBC's first dean of education asserted that teachers are made, not born. Moreover, their preparation must be "rigorous and long," and can best take place "in the environment that a great university with all its facilities provides." In such a setting, fledgling teachers merit tuition at the hands of professors who themselves excelled as school teachers and who also understand the characteristics "of adult education, adult psychology, and the problems of young people." In addition, since learning occurs as the result of "research, enquiry, and experiment undertaken with deliberate effort," a university-based teacher education program must resonate according to research findings.

Similarly crucial, in Neville Scarfe's opinion, was maintaining an enthusiastic tone within UBC's new Faculty of Education. Insofar as student unity and morale were concerned, Dean Scarfe saw little virtue in "muddling together elementary and secondary student teachers in the same classes." Instead he insisted that the key to cohesive student interaction is extracurricular assemblage in the cafeteria, library, common room, or gymnasium; on the stage or sports field; or wherever music, debating, dancing, musical events, club activities, or simple conviviality might take place. The reason for such a prescription is that in its own right, the student community constitutes "a very educative society." Thus, to become better persons, teacher trainees "should spend at least a few years on a university campus engaging in all aspects of university life."

As for staff coalescence, Professor Scarfe invoked the analogy of the "closely-knit family." Despite their pedagogical specializations,

members were to avoid "isolation within narrow disciplinary boundaries." They would mix informally with their counterparts in other faculties and where compatible exchange teaching duties. In addition each of them assumed the role of "expert counselor" in the "practical craft of the teacher." Each was to act as "coordinator of the total training program for a small group"; organizer of related seminars; and discussion leader on "common teaching problems." And each extended his or her curricular reach as far as administrative feasibility allowed. Overall the objective was to involve one and all with elementary and secondary teacher certification; with beginners and graduates; with practical supervision and theoretical edification; and with counselling and research.

In the light of these assumptions about teacher candidates and those who seek to widen their horizons, the Dean of Education elaborated further on the nature of education classes. In his judgment these are "not particularly well adapted to the lecture-instruction or course-unit system of the Arts Faculty." Indeed, even large groups should never be submitted to "dull, dreary, formal lectures attended by note-taking listeners." Rather, they must be "enlivened by stimulating demonstrations and... discussion." For the purpose of teacher education is not "acquiring facts or knowledge" but "the practice of skills." Nor are students of course mere recipients of knowledge. They are participants in it. In fact, education denotes a process, not a product. And this process must be "dynamic, experimental," ever changing.

Since, however, diverse lecture-room theories impose extensive investments of participants' time, study, and appraisal, all concerned seek curricular "unification about some point." To Neville Scarfe that point was "practice teaching, the most important item of the year's work." But here a caveat. In the face of appeals from trainees, school boards, and teachers for extended periods of practical experience in the schools, the dean cautioned that "the translation of theory to practice is very difficult" and that whatever its duration, unenlightened practice teaching "is of very little use."

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The moment Dean Scarfe's philosophical tenets intersected with changing circumstances surrounding B.C. teacher certification, though, they drew fire from numerous sources. Disenchanted with the claims of western educational progressivism as well as stunned by the

prowess of Soviet space technology, certain professors in other faculties lamented the encroachment on campus of what they considered soft pedagogy and the erosion of academic rigour. Echoing these sentiments, within four years the Chant Report of the Royal Commission on Education promoted the intellectual development of the pupils as the primary aim of provincial education. In this context, too, the contention that education professors should themselves have excelled as school teachers likewise ran contrary to general implementation. In theory at least, such a requirement would have hindered staff recruitment of youthful academics unschooled in methodology, innocent in the ways of schoolchildren, yet whose scholarship might well enhance the faculty's academic profile.

Although not necessarily targeted by cross-campus gainsayers, Neville Scarfe's thoughts on achieving an enthusiastic tone throughout his tenure proved equally problematic. In the case of trainees, the principal challenge was co-ordinating a wide variety of programs in order to rectify an acute provincial teacher shortage on the one hand while leaving the door open for degree and graduate studies on the other. Accordingly, candidates' entrance qualifications ranged from Grade XII to a recognized university degree. As well, the length of courses leading to teacher certification could differ as widely as one to five years. Reflecting nearly a half-century later on the level of student morale under these conditions, a sample of retired teachers proved far from unanimous. A substantial number recalled getting to know one another by way of class attendance, campus organizations, serendipitous encounters, and such other factors as supportive faculty, prior high school friendships, and university athletics. Conversely, several retirees remembered that heavy workloads and limited contacts with other education students in preponderantly academic phases of their degree years impeded free-time mingling. For some candidates, long-range commuting, the vagaries of timetabling, domestic obligations, and other conflicting distractions at times rendered it unmanageable to widen acquaintanceships or boost morale to any significant degree. For others, socializing varied according to priorities. To illustrate, certain respondents intimated that the purpose of education at UBC was not to socialize. It was to earn a teaching certificate and make a living.

Nor was coalescence among staff members accomplished overnight. Education professors approached their teaching duties from differing points of view. Some had served previously with UBC's School of Education – a relatively small unit offering a one-year

program for prospective high school teachers with university degrees already in hand. Others came on strength from the now-defunct Vancouver Provincial Normal School that had prepared elementary school teachers since 1901. Several ex-school inspectors joined the new faculty. From the schools themselves, specialists in teaching fine, domestic, recreational, and industrial arts or academic subjects assumed various responsibilities. And a coterie of teacher educators from the University of Manitoba followed their dean out to Point Grey. Moreover, as Professor Scarfe wound up his administrative obligations in Winnipeg, he was compelled to deal simultaneously with pressing decisions concerning staff recruitment in Vancouver. These he was obliged to handle as best he could by mail, telephone, or telegraph together with the occasional flying visit to UBC.

To complicate matters further, as of January 1956 various vested interests expressed their hopes, expectations, understandings, and assumed prerogatives concerning faculty recruitment. By dint of its funding of public education and issuance of the licence to teach, the provincial Department of Education kept a close eye on developments. It did so, too, in that, traditionally, normal school personnel had been civil servants whose appointment, salary schedule, and duties were authorized by government legislation. Conversely, though UBC staff appointments in education involved deliberations within a widely representative Joint Board of Teacher Education that considered advice from education ministers and their deputies, in the final analysis staff selection rested squarely upon UBC Board of Governors' ratification of presidential recommendations.

Elaborating on this difference of approach to building strong normal school as opposed to university teaching cadres, professional organizations such as the British Columbia Teachers Federation and the Provincial Normal Schools Faculty Association also offered suggestions, curricular materials, and teaching services for faculty consideration. But in the event, transfer of elementary teacher preparation from the provincial normal schools to UBC and Victoria College proved a more delicate gambit than initially contemplated. Fearing for their future security, normal school personnel turned for support to their principals and association colleagues. They likewise addressed their concerns to the Ministry of Education and UBC administration including the president himself. But during the ensuing crisscross of communication, participants found it hard to keep track of who had promised what to whom by way of rank, salary, tenure, and duties. During this eleventh-hour scramble, normal school

candidates receiving firm offers of employment at the new Faculty of Education argued vigorously for salary schedules commensurate with their expectations had the normal schools continued in operation. In reply, UBC's president reiterated the point that professorships were granted at the pleasure of the Board of Governors and that salary schedules as such did not exist within the university community.

Several normal school emeriti recalled similarly divisive issues that forestalled the faculty-as-family image Dean Scarfe so passionately espoused. As one respondent put it, Vancouver Normal School had once been a unified facility where "the staff worked as one" on a common curriculum without jealousies over differences in rank. Now its members were faced with directors they barely knew; ways of doing things that appeared to be "a complete reversal of the normal school system"; and a group of four appointees from Manitoba that some felt "wielded...more influence" than its size warranted. Others emphasized the difficulties they encountered in reconciling divisional and departmental organization with their dean's injunction to reject disciplinary isolation. Elementary, secondary, and graduate divisions as well as numerous subject-oriented departments met separately to conduct business, develop curricula, and monitor relevant policy. To these administrative units faculty were assigned on appointment. And though staff room interaction, periodic social events, and personal friendships to some degree softened hard divisional boundaries, in the main these organizational entities kept their distance one from another. Only the dean's full faculty meetings brought the entire professoriate together to consider faculty-wide agendas. But in early days those most likely to express themselves at such gatherings were senior in administrative or academic status. As for faculty deployment, no individual could hope to cover as many bases as the dean had thought proper. A case in point was supervision of practice teaching. Though a pivotal component of faculty assignments, it would prove of little interest to campus-wide promotions committees. For this and other reasons, staff members on occasion stopped short of volunteering for the task. Others were never asked to take part.

Among essential requirements of what Dean Scarfe considered superior teacher education, however, none elicited such close scrutiny as the essential nature of lectures and the unifying potential of practice teaching. On the one hand, to describe their learning experiences in lecture rooms, charter trainees with uninspiring recollections of 1956 beginnings employed adjectives such as lightweight, disjointed, over-

theoretical, dull, boring, large, overwhelming, and impersonal – scarcely what their dean had hoped for. But on the other hand, similar numbers proved more positive. A dozen offered such qualifiers as acceptable, good, interesting, worthwhile, useful, thought-provoking, welcoming, enjoyable, and helpful. Even more approving of their preparation, other respondents escalated such judgment from the level of fine, motivational, wonderful, and strongly influential to that of dynamic, fascinating, inspiring, and exceptional – the very qualities Professor Scarfe held dear. As for practice teaching, many concurred with the dean that it staged the crucial scene in the year's drama. But few envisaged it as a unifying element for everything else. In fact, some spoke about the distinct realms of the schools and the university. Others thought about the practicum in Darwinian terms as an exercise in survival. Yet others described the undertaking as surreal, fearful, and lacking integration with course work. And one in particular deplored the artificiality of the enterprise. Although they did not perceive the practicum as *the* coalescing factor within the teacher education program, however, many retired teachers spoke with gratitude of certain insights it bestowed. Several wrote about the fun of being with young people, overcoming self-doubts, and at long last actually teaching. And as one confessed, she "finally understood fractions and learned how great seven-year olds are and how real their world is."

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Given the creation and early work of the Joint Board of Teacher Education, sundry compromises between Neville Scarfe's and others' views on teacher preparation were perhaps not unique. Arriving at them, however, induced the growing pains of a bold plan executed by then in only two other Canadian provinces (Alberta and Newfoundland.) From 1956 onward, these twinges would recur whenever the dean tested his pedagogical ideologies against alternative perceptions. Even so, by the time of his arrival in the old army huts, many particulars had already been accounted for. Some of these had followed 18 months or more of prior deliberation among diverse interests in aid of what Dr. F. Henry Johnson termed "a rather carefully balanced structure achieved with a great deal of patience and much give-and-take on all sides." In the years to come, however, differing opinions were to arise in the form of colleagues' concerns over faculty structure and governance, teacher education and graduate

programs, as well as internal and external faculty relations. Certain aspects of curricular reform eventually ensued. But on Neville Scarfe's watch, other sources of faculty discomposure defied amelioration.

Nevertheless, his intermittent accommodation of others' proposals for change at no point signified abdication on the dean's part. From the word go he himself delivered riveting lectures and demonstrations. He personified initiative and enthusiasm. He never lost faith in quality training, the driving force of practice teaching, or the primacy of student needs. Nor did he ever abandon his determination to cut through as much resistance to his vision of teacher education as he dared, negotiating the rest with singular directness, insight, and verve. Upon decanal retirement in 1973, his bequest would be a vital university faculty over four times its initial size, complex in its divisional and departmental structure, sweeping in its array of specialization, distinguished by virtue of its staff and students, recognized abroad for its professional accomplishments and community service, and no stranger to conflict and compromise in the conduct of its daily rounds and contemplation of its future prospects.