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Editors: John M. Novak & Kenneth A. McClelland
Associate Editors: Rahul Kumar & Dirk Windhorst
Publishing Coordinator: Robert C. Morris
Web Publishers: Rahul Kumar & Herman Yu
Webmaster of the Society of Professing Education:
Jan Armstrong

Contact

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Editorial: Professorial Paths to Freedom, Recalcitrance, and Beyond

John Novak

Being a professor of education has its ups and downs as we make the rounds from the academy to the school to the surrounding community to professional journals to global issues and back. Done well, we experience an aesthetic sense of unity and completion. We have brought many worlds together and enjoy the postmodern rush of limited but creative harmony. Done poorly, we commiserate about the formalism of the academy, the high stakes testing in the schools, the lack of community in the community, the hoop-jumping experienced in following editorial comments, and the disruption of hope in an ever more complex world. We feel alone, and worse, we feel surrounded by others like ourselves. Misery may love miserable company, but too much of anything, especially a bad thing, is too much. It is hoped that there are more 'done wells' than 'done poorlyies' and we savour the former and learn from the latter. A community of colleagues supports us during our low moments and prods us during our self-content perches. The four parts of this issue of *Professing Education* look at professing well and present some practical suggestions, conceptual distinctions, probing questions, and re-examination of core words that keep us going. Each of the four articles offers support and prodding to move us beyond our present contents and discontents.

In the first article, "On the Path to Professing," Jill M. Gladwell from Buffalo State College, cogently describes how she prepared herself for the teaching, research, and service needed to profess well. Regarding teaching, she followed the advice of her academic advisor and took courses from excellent teachers. These are people who modeled not only a sound understanding of what they were teaching but also a contagious spirit about why their subject mattered to them and should matter to thoughtful people. Her research efforts were encouraged, sustained, and extended by a dissertation support group that continues even after she obtained her doctorate. In her role as president of the department graduate student association she gathered invaluable experience research symposia and conferences. Preparation for teaching, research, and

service does not merely happen. It develops from encouragement, collaboration, and professional networking.

The direction for professing can go in very different ways. In his article, "Education Left and Right," Ken McClelland uses a key distinction from the late Richard Rorty's "Education Without Dogmas" to look at the different political sensibilities evoked in choosing to educate for freedom or truth. It is Rorty's contention that primary and secondary education are controlled by the conservative emphasis on socialization while higher education is led by the left's commitment to social criticism. Using Dewey's concept of a moderate progressive, McClelland shows how Rorty can be enlisted to aid and abet thoughtful reformist impulses. Professors of education who question both the recalcitrant left and the right will appreciate this insightful essay.

Recalcitrant is not a term that is often associated with John Dewey, and Rebecca Glass, from the University of Hawaii-Manoa, explores why this might be so. In her review of Naoka Saito's book, *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson*, Glass points out Dewey's difficulty in dealing with the recalcitrant child. Although he can speak *about* the recalcitrant child, it is not in his heart to really speak *for* the recalcitrant child. As a social philosopher through and through Dewey needs Emersonian nudgings to help learn the value of the *nonconformist* within society. Professors of education influenced by Dewey's *Democracy and Education* and *Experience and Education* might wish to rethink some basic social assumptions after reading this article.

After reading these three essays, some imaginative practical, conceptual, and professional possibilities could help remake the rounds of our work as professors of education. Read on.

On the Path to Professing

Jill M. Gradwell
Buffalo State College

In an earlier article in this journal, Alan Jones (2005) articulates the nature of professing in the field of education:

Let's grant that professing is traditionally something done by those who hold teaching positions, or professorships, at institutions of postsecondary education—at colleges and universities, where instruction is offered to undergraduate and graduate students. Professing in this setting, in addition to teaching, involves research, writing, and a variety of public service. (p. 9)

As I ponder the nature of professing, I reflect on the path that has brought me to this place. Why and how did I become a member of the professoriate? What in my doctoral preparation prepared me for the trinity of the academy: teaching, research, and service? Although my family, immediate and extended, played a significant role in supporting my efforts to complete my doctorate and find employment in the academy, it is my formal doctoral education that I focus on here. In retrospect, from my position as an assistant professor of social studies education, I now have a stronger sense of that path. In this paper, I describe my experiences of becoming a professor and find that it is the journey more than the destination that matters most.

Acknowledgements: The author thanks Paul G. Theobald and Gary Marotta for their close reading and helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

First, I recognize that my circumstances allowed me an advantage over others starting their doctoral programs. I was the recipient of a four-year Presidential Fellowship at my university, important not only for the economic benefits it provided, but the expectations that came along with being a fellow. As a Presidential Fellow I was expected to teach at the college level, engage in collaborative research with faculty, and participate in special seminars. Additionally, I was extremely fortunate to have an advisor who epitomizes what it truly means to be a mentor and continues to be one today.

Some assume that because you are a teacher educator, you must be able to teach and teach well. I have learned, however, that teaching is a craft that must be carefully honed through years of practice and reflection. Although I taught secondary social studies for seven years in public schools, there was much to learn about teaching adults, and specifically teachers. One exceptional piece of advice my advisor gave me when I asked what courses to take in my program, was to learn about the various professors and take courses from those identified as being excellent teachers; the content of the course was secondary. I found this suggestion to be wise for I learned more than content. I observed the teaching of ambitious educators whom today I try to emulate in my own practice.

Another useful suggestion was to take courses outside of my department that both appealed to me and complemented my program. I learned how professors from different fields approach their subject. This has truly helped me in my current situation as I teach in an interdisciplinary department of historians, social scientists, museum specialists, and social studies educators.

As I was making my way through my program, I also took every opportunity to teach at the college level, first with my advisor and later independently. I not only taught at the university in which I was enrolled, but also as an adjunct at a nearby college. Co-teaching allowed me to collaborate and learn about the development of college courses. Working as an adjunct helped to familiarize myself with how other institutions work,

those that are teaching colleges, and how those differences mattered with respect to the environment I wanted to work in later.

Another area of professing relates to scholarly research. I learned to never pass up a research opportunity regardless of how overloaded I felt. It was during these joint research ventures that I gained practical experience doing original research, writing papers, and subsequently publishing the findings. I struggled, especially near the end of my program, with the question of whether to devote all my energy to writing the dissertation or to continue submitting paper proposals for annual meetings, presenting papers for conferences, and finalizing articles for publication. I opted to take a longer time in completing my program to pursue these research opportunities. I think in the end it was a smart choice because it helped me to build a strong work ethic. Also, I had a significant number of national presentations and some publications on my curriculum vitae when I went on the job market. Additionally, it opened networking opportunities for me, because at the annual conferences I established ties to other like-minded researchers, and I have been approached to collaborate on common projects. Finally, because of the numerous research projects I collaborated with my advisor on, we continue to work together now as peers. This research relationship has helped me seamlessly move from student to professor.

Another significant factor in helping me down this path to professing was co-founding a dissertation support group. Again, listening to the wise advice of my advisor, I found others in my program to rely on to read and respond to my work. My advisor was helpful for the subject-specific nature of my research, but my peer support group could read my work from an outsider's perspective. Since the completion of our program, our group has now evolved into an educational research group that meets monthly to

discuss relevant issues related to beginning professors of education. The bonds formed early on in the program laid the trusting relationship that continues today.

One other aspect of professing is to provide service to the profession, college, and local community. Often, service activities can consume even the most organized person. My service experiences as the president of the department graduate student association and officer in the student special interest group of my professional organization prepared me for the numerous demands professors balance. I helped to organize research symposia, brown bag lunch series, interdepartment-alumni conferences, and national student group meetings. I recommend becoming involved in campus and professional life in some way during your doctoral studies. I found it helped me to connect to the campus and my profession, especially when I was engaged in the dissertation phase of my program. It also helped me to form ties with other students in the department, which eventually led to

four of the current members of the educational research group mentioned earlier. As a professor, the experiences I had as a student have enabled me today to lead committees, hold and organize meetings, and form networks across departments and campuses.

Although I still feel I am very much “on the path” to professing rather than at the final destination of the professoriate, I sense I am inching closer. Not long ago, a student and a new assistant professor invited me to be their mentor. This announcement left me feeling uneasy and unsure about my place in the professorship. Had I really arrived? In a conversation with my former advisor, I shared my insecurities. Surprisingly, he shared his own uncertainties. I was amazed, given that he is an accomplished, award winning scholar and teacher, and a full professor! Like Grant’s (2005) description of a high school history teacher’s route to ambitious teaching as being “more journey than end,” I find myself feeling much the same way.

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Education Left and Right: Another look at Richard Rorty's "Education as Socialization and as Individualization"

Ken McClelland
Brock University

Richard Rorty's essay, written in 1989 under the title "Education without Dogmas" was republished in his *Philosophy and Social Hope* (1999) under the new title "Education as Socialization and as Individualization." Rorty wrote quite little explicitly dealing with education. In this provocative essay, he opens with the familiar distinction between left and right politics and the way this distinction manifests itself in the educational sphere. Put simply, the right thinks of education in terms of *truth* while the left thinks of education in terms of *freedom*. From the right, if you take care of truth, freedom will take care of itself. From the left, if you take care of freedom, truth will take care of itself. Where the right tends to appreciate the Platonic asceticism associated with truth conservation, the left tends to invert Plato in order to exalt Socratic social criticism.

While Rorty (1999) aligns his own affiliations with the progressive side more than the conservative side, he says that both the right and the left are beating around the same philosophical bush:

On both the original, rightist and the inverted, leftist account of the matter, there is a natural connection between truth and freedom. Both argue for this connection on the basis of distinctions between nature and convention and between what is essentially human and what is inhuman. Both accept the identification of truth and freedom with the essentially human. The difference between them is simply over the question: Is the present socioeconomic set-up in accordance, more or less, with nature? Is it, on the whole, a realization of human potentialities, or rather a way of frustrating those potentialities? Will acculturation to the norms

of our society produce freedom or alienation? (p. 115)

These philosophical variations end up manifesting themselves most interestingly in education in concrete political ways. The right thinks that much of the conventional educational wisdom is a product of reason's trajectory and that the left has turned against important fundamental truths. The left thinks that the society in which we live is, in the main, unreasonable. As Rorty says, "[the left] regard the conservative's 'fundamental truths' as what Foucault calls 'the discourse of power'" (p. 116). And so the left thinks that an important part of the job of education is the promotion in the young of those strong critical dispositions that can get them into a position as quickly as possible to question, if not buck, the status quo.

Now clearly Rorty considers himself to be on the progressive side of the divide, but he is also eminently practical. Our acculturation is that matrix out of which the very idea of progressivism is possible. Socialization is a necessity of living in a culture, and therefore in liberal democracies a compromise has been struck between the two sides: The right has kept control of primary and secondary education, and the left has gradually taken control of higher nonvocational education. This general common sense is reinforced by the fact that school boards regulate public school teachers such that they can never stray too far from local consensus (though there is some obvious flexibility that mitigates against totalitarianism), whereas at the University level, academic freedom, established as the *sine qua non* of the professoriate, allows professors to set their own agendas. Truth,

taking the form of the moral and political common sense of the society, becomes the mainstay of education up to 18 or 19 years of age, while freedom, taking the form of the moral and political ability to question established conventions, becomes the mainstay of higher education.

For Rorty (1999), where most of the skirmishes occur with regards to education is at the borders between secondary and higher education:

Even ardent radicals, for all their talk of ‘education for freedom’, secretly hope that the elementary schools will teach the kids to wait their turn in line, not to shoot up in the johns, to obey the cop on the corner, and to spell, punctuate, multiply and divide. They do not really want the high schools to produce, every year, a graduating class of amateur Zarathustras. Conversely, only the most resentful and blinkered conservatives want to ensure that colleges hire only teachers who will endorse the status quo. Things are difficult when one tries to figure out where socialization should stop and criticism start. (p. 117)

When Rorty claims that the conservatives are wrong “in thinking that we have either a truth-tracking faculty called ‘reason’ or a true self that education brings to consciousness,” he assumes the radicals to be right “in saying that if you take care of political, economic, cultural and academic freedom, then truth will take care of itself” (p. 117). But, Rorty goes on to say, “the radicals are wrong in believing that there is a true self that will emerge once the repressive influence of society is removed” (p. 117). Rorty’s whole philosophical point, made consistently throughout all of his work, is that there is no human nature in the deep Platonic sense, nor is there alienation from such a human nature via societal repression in the deep Rousseauian or Marxist sense. Rorty plants himself, like Dewey, firmly as a moderate progressive, philosophically

speaking. Indeed, all of this Rorty tells us is in keeping with Dewey’s own educational views.

Rorty (1999) says that, “Dewey showed us how to drop the notion of ‘the true self’ and how to drop the distinction between nature and convention” (p. 119). Indeed, some distinctions, if they are based on already unproductive dualisms, are not worth making. Dewey taught us that the only important freedom was the sociopolitical freedom found in bourgeois democratic societies and that this freedom must always be the starting point for any free inquiry. Freedom itself is a quality that is felt, and felt most strongly when it is absent. It was not a matter, for Dewey, of tracing such freedom back to some account of human nature or the nature of reason. Looking forward, as such, means that the only criterion of truth is that which results from such free encounters. Instead of criteria, Rorty tells us:

Deweyans offer inspiring narratives and fuzzy utopias. Dewey had stories to tell about our progress from Plato to Bacon to Mills, from religion to rationalism to experimentalism, from tyranny to feudalism to democracy. In their later stages, his stories merged with Emerson’s and Whitman’s descriptions of the democratic vistas – with their vision of America as the place where human beings will become unimaginably wonderful, different and free. . . . Dewey’s point was that Emerson [and Whitman] did not offer truth, but simply hope. Hope – the ability to believe that the future will be unspecifiably different from, and unspecifiably freer than, the past – is the condition of growth. That sort of hope was all that Dewey himself offered us, and by offering it he became our century’s Philosopher of Democracy. (p. 120)

In spite of this inspiring narrative, Rorty thinks that education, generally speaking, is still in trouble. There have occurred certain educational

travesties since the time Dewey wrote his inspiring narratives that he could not have foreseen. Rorty tells us that Dewey did not foresee that his country would decide to pay its teachers one fifth of what it pays its doctors. Nor did Dewey foresee that a greedy and heartless middle class “would let the quality of education a child receives become proportional to the assessed value of the parents’ real estate” (Rorty, 1999, p. 121). Finally, Dewey did not foresee that “most children would spend 30 hours a week watching televised fantasies, nor that the cynicism of those who produce these fantasies would carry over into our children’s vocabularies of moral deliberation” (p. 121). I think Rorty’s comments here while accurate to what has transpired since Dewey wrote, are still slightly overblown when it comes to Dewey’s own foresight. While Dewey no doubt would have been terribly disappointed and depressed with the state of things, it would not have come to him as a palpable shock. He spent much time and energy exploring the very sorts of underlying conditions, what we might in this case call the conditions of detachment, that lead to such educative failures, that such news would only be a rather dreary confirmation for him that certain insidious conditions had won out (see, for example, *The Public and Its Problems*, 1927/1991). At any rate, none of this counts against Dewey’s philosophical renderings of truth and freedom, but clearly Rorty is right; the young have been losing contact with the vital narratives that otherwise saturate their time and place and therefore are having a harder and harder time managing, quite literally, their time.

The conservative agenda, then, in its most powerful educational manifestation is not merely about the transfer of sterile information. It should be about enlivening the young to the inspirational fabric of their rich, joyous, barbaric plural heritage. The young need to see, says Rorty (1999), that they are heirs to “a country that slowly and painfully, threw off a foreign yoke, freed its slaves, enfranchised its women, restrained its robber barons and licensed its trade unions, liberalized its religious practices,

broadened its religious and moral tolerance, and built colleges in which 50 per cent of its population could enroll” (p. 121). If this fails to happen, then what is to stop a return to old forms of prejudicial barbarism (do we not see it happening even now)? As it is now, not enough money or inspiration is infusing the elementary and high school levels. Nonvocational higher education is being asked to take up increasing amounts of remedial work that should be the mainstay of the high school level. There should be no need for Great Books courses or general education courses – at least no *remedial* need – at the higher educational level.

If society at all valued the narratives of its own past trajectory, it would be inculcating the inspirational force of such narratives in its (at least) high school students. Rorty takes to task both the radical left and the fundamentalist right for such neglect – the neglect of a rigorous conservatism that harbors its own reformist impulse. It is the most rigorous form of democratic patriotism endorsed by both Dewey and Rorty. There need be no need for the convulsions of revolution in an inspired democratic culture. When the culture’s leftist revolutionaries begin to sound popular to larger and larger numbers of the citizenry, then the vitality of an inspired democracy is drying up. When the fundamentalist right begins to sound popular to larger and larger numbers of the citizenry, then the vitality of inspired democracy also is drying up. The latter wants a return to a simpler more comfortable (absolutist) past, while the former wants the past erased and for poetic revolution to occur on a massive social scale. Rorty, ever the staunch defender of revolutionary poetic creation in the private sphere, I think sensibly recognizes what it can lead to on a broad social scale. History has shown that bad things often happen when the private fantasies of some few become the socio-political movements of the many (an obvious example being Hitler’s Germany). Neither option is a good one for a pragmatic democratic society. But nor is apathy and sitting back watching (or just

plain ignoring) individuals slipping away into oblivion. It is an educational problem and one that will not be solved overnight. Large social reforms take time, but the reformist impulse is nonetheless the more expedient in the public/political sphere than is the revolutionary impulse. Such reformist impulses need not be antithetical to revolutionary impulses. In the end perhaps a reformist pragmatic and democratic impulse is just less impulsive – it is revolution taking its time and being careful not to give away too much.

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Book Review

Full Title: *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson*

Author: Naoko Saito

Forward by: Stanley Cavell

Publisher: Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press

Paperback 200 pages

Rebecca Glass

University of Hawaii-Manoa

Essentially, this book answers the various critics of John Dewey's educational philosophy by putting Dewey in critical but fruitful dialogue with transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. "Inevitably, Deweyan growth reconstructed in the light of Emersonian Moral Perfectionism will turn our eyes into philosophy as education" (p. 11), writes Naoko Saito in her recently released book, *The Gleam of Light; Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson*. In constructing a hopeful answer to many of today's educational problems, including the isolation and disenchantment of students and teachers, Saito creatively goes beyond both Dewey and Emerson in a way compatible with both of their philosophies of educational growth.

Neither Dewey nor Emerson separate the formal project of education from living everyday life educationally. Open-ended, continually transforming growth is central to a flourishing human experience. They also think that this growth takes place both in private and while we are engaged in society. Dewey's description of the private sphere is similar to Emerson's characterization of each person as an individual "gleam of light" (p. 4), while Dewey's public sphere is similar to Emerson's ideas about friendship. The dialectic of these two equally important spheres of individual and community is iterated both in the classroom and in the extension of education to life outside the classroom.

However, Saito finds significant disparities in how Dewey and Emerson manage the intersec-

tion of individual and community in education. She explains that although Dewey frequently expresses concern for the “tragedy of the lost individual” (p.1) in modern society, this individual is sometimes parenthesized when Dewey introduces “social reconstruction of criteria” (p.81) to determine the end for continual growth. Saito details several examples of what she believes is Dewey’s “avoidance of extreme deviance” to the point where his “attitude towards the ‘exceptional’ individual seems to become less tolerant, or even inflexible” (p.88). The most notable of these examples, and for Saito the greatest challenge to Dewey’s philosophy of education, is the way that Dewey views the “recalcitrant” child in his chapter on “Social Control” from *Experience and Education* (p.88). Although he does advise teachers to be patient and consider “the causes for the recalcitrant attitudes,” Dewey still views such attitudes as “unruly” and contrary to the “normal, proper conditions of control” (pp. 88-89). Because “exceptions rarely prove a rule or give a clue to what the rule should be,” the “personal will” of the student is secondary to the “moving spirit of the whole group” (pp. 88-89). Saito feels that the way that, with this language, “Dewey speaks *about* – and does not speak *for* – the recalcitrant child suggests his tendency to muffle the voice of a single child in the confidence of an adult” and to “endorse a prevailing conformity” (p.89).

Fortunately, explains Saito, this shortcoming in Dewey’s philosophy of education can be corrected through Dewey’s essentially dialogic attitude. Although Dewey struggles with one part of his educational dialogue – the dialogue with the recalcitrant child – this cannot be final in light of his commitment to mutually engaging educational dialogue. Dewey’s commitment to socially revised criteria is a fundamental insight that provides resources for revising his own account of how such revision occurs. Saito shows that in Emerson, we find a dialogic other who influenced Dewey significantly, and through whom Deweyan educational philoso-

phy can be now read, both as reinterpretation and as reconstruction. Emerson’s individualistic gleam of light, his fondness for “whim” (p.103), and his favourable description of the aimless and taunting “nonchalant boy” (p.89), all provide a firmer grounding for considering how the deviant could contribute to the socially revised criteria. When Dewey gains Emerson’s ideas of friendship and respect for the individual’s light, and Emerson gains Dewey’s commitment to a social sphere of learning, both Dewey and Emerson can be more useful to educators. Explains Saito, when we read Dewey through Emerson, we learn to value “the nonconformist *within* society” (p.88) who has discovered that “the gleam of light requires the encounter with the other” (p.159).

Saito also addresses two other concerns that educators frequently have with Dewey’s philosophy. First, critics of Dewey’s idea of education as progressive growth frequently ask “growth towards what” (p.6)? When readers of Dewey try to answer this question, they usually answer in one of two ways: either Dewey is a complete relativist, who sees no good and bad in growth as long as there is change, or Dewey is a dogmatic realist who equates the scientific method with intelligence. Educators reject absolute relativism because they are concerned with the real possibility of failure – but they also reject dogmatic realism because it does not leave enough room for creativity or individual values.

Saito argues that Dewey is neither a relativist nor a dogmatic realist. Saito explains that with his ideal of *pluralism*, Dewey is exploring “a third realm of human experience that lies beyond the either-or choice of metaphysical realism or relativism.” This pluralism meshes well with Emerson’s moral perfectionism, which sees the ideal self as always both attained and unattainable; the goal is neither relative nor absolute. Temporal experience is the key to resolving the dilemma. The goal of education is neither (statically) relative nor (stati-

cally) absolute, but, in Emerson's phrase, "a flying perfect" (p.78). This asymptotic idea of perfection "around which the hands of man can never meet" (p.78), calls our current lives into question with a goal, but also develops as we develop, leading us onward with an ever better goal. As Saito explains, "perfection is perfecting" (p.78) within the interplay of radical individual and friendly community, nourishing the participatory nonconformist.

Finally, Saito also addresses the final criticism that both Dewey and Emerson are naïvely optimistic about the ability of human will. Saito disagrees with the claim that as nineteenth-century humanists neither Dewey nor Emerson understand or address the real tragedy possible in this world. She shows that in Dewey's "tragedy of the lost individual" and Emerson's "decent, indolent, complaisant" (p.131) scholar, there is a double sense of the tragic: not only have we lost the gleam of light, but we have forgotten that it existed and therefore have lost the sense of loss. Saito connects this dilemma with contemporary educational reforms that ignore whatever cannot be measured. To see education as growth means that one must see this double sense of the tragic – but at the same time go beyond awareness of real tragedy to creating the ground for real hope. Searching for the flying perfect is part of humanity's best chance at developing a kind of education that truly enables the creative dialogic flourishing of individual and society.

Fittingly, however, Saito's most powerful answer to recent criticisms of Dewey lie in the motion and product of her writing. She has written a work of educational philosophy that dialogically engages the ideas of Dewey and Emerson to go beyond both Dewey and Emerson in the kind of progressive educational growth that Dewey advocated. If the critical reductions were true – if Dewey advocated either individualism or socialization, or either relativism or dogmatism – then Saito's creative, passionate, and beneficial work would not have been possible.

Call for Articles

Professing Education continues to provide a space and opportunity for professors of education to contribute their thoughts on and about their own professional activities and scholarship as pertains to education generally. We also would like to provide this space as an opportunity for graduate students to submit their work. Contributions could include brief synopses of completed dissertation work, advice to fellow graduate students about getting to successful completion, scholarly reports from professional conferences, as well as any other resources that have proven beneficial along the way. In this way, Professing Education hopes to be a vehicle for both the present and future professoriate.

Please submit articles using either the website **<http://profed.brocku.ca>** or by sending a word document to **profed@brocku.ca**

*The Society of Professors of Education
c/o Dr. Robert C. Morris
Department of Educational Leadership & Professional Studies
State University of West Georgia
1600 Maple Street
Carrollton, GA 30118*

