Theorizing the Politics of Educational Reform: The Case of New Jersey’s Alternate Route to Teacher Certification

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Employing Bourdieu’s notion of social field, this research conceptualizes New Jersey’s alternate route to teacher certification as a contested arena, in which the interests, ideologies, and visions of different stakeholders regarding the character of public education have collided. Findings for this study are primarily based on data from the New Jersey State Archives and on other open public documents. I conclude that during the 1980s New Jersey became one of the leading states in developing educational policies that excluded teacher unions and teacher educators from the positions of power they formerly held in the field of educational policy, gradually subordinating them to the power of the state.

Introduction

Americans have always been engaged in attempts to reform public education (Ravitch 2000). In the most recent round of discussions, teacher quality has been a central theme, and it has been nominated as the single most important factor in narrowing the student achievement gap (Darling-Hammond 2000). This increased sensitivity to teacher quality today echoes very similar debates that emerged in the 1980s, compounded with—what was then new—the demand for greater accountability in public education.

One important response to these concerns, which has gradually become more popular among federal and state actors, was the introduction of market-based educational policies. An example of this response (which will be the topic of this article) can be found in teacher preparation and certification programs that were controlled for years by colleges and schools of education but since the 1980s were heavily challenged by dissatisfied public committees...
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and state officials who proposed policies such as “alternate routes” to fix the system’s flaws. Since their inception in the early 1980s, alternate route programs and policies, which vary considerably in aim, form, content, and thus in quality (Floden and Stoddart 1995), have been gradually adopted in most states. According to the latest data, 48 out of 51 states (including the District of Columbia) operate at least one type of alternate route program (Feistritzer 2006).

This study focuses on the first “successful” and high-profile attempt to propose an alternate route on a large scale, which took place in New Jersey. The alternate route story in New Jersey is full of hurdles and struggles. The analysis that follows shows how elected state officials and senior appointed bureaucrats were promoting and pushing for full and quick implementation of the policy, while groups within the educational establishment, such as teacher unions and teacher educators, were arguing for a more cautious approach, one that might be interpreted as an argument for minor changes. However, instead of describing the struggle over the policy as others have already done (Carlson 1990; Carlson and Silverman 1985; Klagholz 2000) or evaluating the policy outcomes of it (e.g., Klagholz 2000; Natriello and Zumwalt 1993), I analyze the struggle by applying Bourdieu’s (1984, 1985, 1993) theory of fields. By using this theory I hope to redefine the assumptions on which this political struggle has been understood before, provide the historical background needed to contextualize this struggle, and, finally, carefully position the participants—Bourdieu would call them the “social agents”—and reflect on their aspirations and motivations to transform or preserve the structure of power in the field of educational policy.

While this conceptual framework has rarely been used to inform debates concerning educational policy making in the United States, Bernstein (1986, 1996) used a very similar approach to study struggles over what he called “pedagogic discourse” in Britain. In contrast, for years the discourse about educational policy in the United States has been dominated by pluralist-driven approaches. Generally speaking, the pluralist outlook understands policy making as a democratic process in which everybody takes part in the game by organizing as an interest group seeking to capture a slice of the public resources and by establishing ad hoc alignments with other interest groups to form winning coalitions. This approach, however, tends to disregard endemic patterns of social and institutional inequality that inhibit many groups and individuals from having fair and equal access to the so-called democratic sphere. As a result, what appears to be democratic on the surface is oftentimes a game characterized by unfair competition over power and resources, which favors

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those who are well connected and resourceful and further impoverishes those who had very little to begin with.

This applies to the field of educational policy as well. In the case of the New Jersey alternate route program, we have those agents who were able to sustain significant control over the positions of power in the field of teacher preparation and certification (teacher educators and teacher unions) versus the new rising power of elected politicians who sought to reallocate the sources of power and control in the field. Past research clearly shows that a pluralist analysis of similar cases yielded a well-articulated account of the politics surrounding the educational policy in question. All the while, such an analysis tended to uncritically adopt the pluralist assumptions, resulting in presenting a somewhat inaccurate picture of the political process. In this article, I aim toward a Bourdieuan perspective, one that conceptualizes the political process in a different way, hence bringing to the fore alternative explanations.

I begin by describing New Jersey’s initial proposal for an alternate route into teaching. Then I discuss the data and methods of this study and introduce Bourdieu’s (1984, 1985, 1993) theory of fields. I conclude with a discussion that considers the relevance and applicability of Bourdieu’s approach to the New Jersey case. I am convinced that bringing Bourdieu’s theory into the field of educational policy provides an alternative explanation that challenges the mainstream pluralist model. In doing so, the discussion shifts from a pluralist focus that is mainly based on rational choice assumptions of interest groups who interact in a presumably democratic sphere to an approach that analyzes social players based on their positions in the field and the hierarchical distribution of resources that is an inseparable part of that jockeying for position. Thus, the application of Bourdieu’s theory to the case of New Jersey offers a new interpretation and explanation of a key struggle over educational policy, one that in many ways reshaped the way elected officials think and act in the field of education.

The Initial Proposal for an Alternate Route

In September 1983, New Jersey’s commissioner of education, Saul Cooperman, and his colleagues laid out a detailed proposal for the construction of an alternate route to teacher certification, titled *An Alternative Route to Teacher Selection and Professional Quality Assurance: An Analysis of Initial Certification* (Cooperman et al. 1983a). The proposal provided a detailed background of what was described as the largely deficient body of students who were enrolling in teacher preparation programs. The proposal went on to describe the lack of consensus among teacher preparation programs regarding the professional knowledge required for new teachers, as well as the minimal standards that
students of teaching had to acquire during their preparation. In the absence of consensus, every program developed its own standards. The proposal argued that the same inconsistency occurred among teacher educators and other professors regarding the theoretical roots of teaching. Thus, Cooperman and his colleagues contended, “For certification purposes, there is little basis for requiring specific theoretical courses. To do so would be merely to set up an artificial hurdle to professional access at a time when we can ill afford to turn away talented individuals” (Cooperman et al. 1983a, 20).

Instead, the authors suggested that teachers should be taught practical knowledge, preferably on the job, and assessed individually. The certification standards in the initial proposal suggested that teaching candidates should: (1) possess a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university; (2) demonstrate that they know the subject matter that they will teach; (3) demonstrate teaching ability by completing a full-time internship under the supervision of a qualified expert and in accord with established assessment criteria (8–11).

These requirements were intended to set comprehensive and more “rigorous” standards for entry into teaching, both for students in teacher preparation programs and for those majoring in any noneducation field of study. Thus, for instance, the first requirement was designed to cease the practice of granting emergency certificates to individuals who failed to possess a college degree. The second requirement was intended to enhance the quality of teaching, based on the “logically defensible” assumption that teachers who know their subject matter will be more effective. It was also a direct criticism of teacher education programs that allowed their graduates to dabble in subject matter but never to engage in sustained, discipline-based study. The third requirement praised the practice of internship as one that “provide[s] the appropriate vehicle for transmitting the applied knowledge and techniques which are related to effective teaching and which undergird the profession” (Cooperman et al. 1983a, 10). Here the writers did not forget to add that internships should be experienced during college, if one enrolls in a teaching preparation program, or “after graduation by a local district” (10), if one is pursuing a degree in a noneducation field. Cooperman and his colleagues further clarified their intentions for the internship: “There is a need to provide an alternate route to certification for those who possess a degree but who have not completed an internship, and thereby open the doors of the teaching profession to talented persons from all collegiate fields of study. . . . It is recommended that school districts be permitted to hire anyone who holds the bachelor’s degree and who has appropriate state subject matter test. . . . Upon employment, the individual will be issued a one-year provisional certificate and will be placed in a district operated on-the-job internship” (Cooperman et al. 1983a, 13).

While clearly pointing toward a new direction for teacher preparation and
certification, the initial proposal intentionally left the most contentious issue—
what the internship’s “practical” knowledge would entail—for future delib-
erations of “a panel of nationally recognized experts and members of the
profession . . . appointed to define the criteria for developing and judging
teaching ability, as well as the practical knowledge about teaching which fosters
that ability” (Cooperman et al. 1983b, 3). Once appointed, this panel of
experts—which became to be known as the Boyer Report—issued a report that
was aligned with the ideas expressed by Cooperman and his colleagues in this
initial proposal, specifically, the emphasis on practical knowledge of classroom
management backed by strong subject matter knowledge.

By 1985, after three years of debate, the state was able to establish the
alternate route to teaching program. In doing so, the program planners sought
to circumvent and break the long-standing monopoly of the “failing teacher
preparation programs” (Cooperman and Klagholz 1985) and, instead, recruit
teacher candidates with strong subject matter knowledge that would be pro-
vided a 200-hour program that covered the core issues of teaching (e.g., class
management and student learning) during the first year of teaching. While
the planners were confident that this policy would enhance the level of teacher
quality, teacher educators and unions were less optimistic and viewed the
policy as a direct challenge to their professional authority.

Method

The purpose of this analysis is to describe, conceptualize, and explain the
battle over the alternate route program. Thus, I chose to collect data that
illuminated the positions that were held by the different players and the strat-
egies they used to capture the positions of power in New Jersey’s social field
of educational policy.

Data Collection

This research is primarily based on data that were collected from New Jersey
State Archives. In addition, I conducted several semistructured interviews with
key participants in the field of educational policy and read research documents
published by teacher educators of New Jersey.

In the archival search, I reviewed approximately 75,000 pages of files con-
cerning education from the governor’s office, the special assistant of education,
the policy director, and the governor’s chief of staff; the files concerning the
alternate route to teacher certification and the undergraduate teacher edu-
cation reform were of particular interest to me. The documents in the archive
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included policy proposals, meeting memos, and internal correspondence, and they documented the policy-making process from its inception (as a one-sentence note from the chief of staff to the governor), going through the first drafts of the alternate route policy, the committee’s work and recommendations, meetings and correspondence regarding the struggle, numerous announcements to the media, and—finally—the policy as it was approved by the state board of education.

The interviews were supplemental to the archival investigation and helped me clarify details and issues concerning the perspectives that different groups have advocated during the struggle. Among those I interviewed were the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) president, Edith Fulton; a professor at Rutgers University, Kenneth Carlson (who was a leading figure among the teacher educators of New Jersey); and Governor Kean’s education speechwriter, Chris Reimann. Finally, I reviewed research that was written about the creation of the program, as well as several manuscripts and documents that were written by teacher educators and reflected their perspectives on the policies and unfolding events.

Data Analysis

I began by immersing myself in the data, familiarizing myself with what was there. In the back of my mind, I intended to focus the analysis on the notion of social field, which Bourdieu (1985) elaborated in his seminal work *The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups*. Then I added the notions of habitus and capital, which are central to Bourdieu’s work. After I had a clear picture of the content of my data, and the way it was described by others (e.g., Carlson 1990; Cooperman and Klagholz 1985), as well as the way others have theorized similar cases of educational policies (e.g., McDermott 2005), I went back to the data and tried to sort it conceptually in terms of Bourdieu’s theory. I used the various sources of data to clarify answers to the questions: Who were the main players involved in the policy-making process? Who among them used to control the field? How did teacher certification policies evolve over time? How could the notions of social field and habitus clarify the nature of struggle over educational policy?

The results of the analysis do not take the form of a traditional empirical analysis in social science but are much more like a historical analysis in which I use evidence that I found in the archives, the interviews that I conducted, and other scholarship on education politics, politics in New Jersey, and teacher education in order to flesh out an argument about the nature of the struggle and the strategies used by the various agents to capture the positions of power in the field.

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This work seeks to illuminate questions of power, authority, and ideology as reflected in struggles over educational policy. Educational policy tends to be highly contested, since it provides the direction for one of society’s major institutions—schools—that are seen as holding the key to an individual’s future economic and social success. Given the significance of education, it is important to understand who governs, directs, and controls processes of educational policy. How? Under what terms? In this study, I address these questions in the specific context of teacher certification reform in New Jersey. I begin by describing the theoretical underpinnings of my work.

As mentioned earlier, there are several theoretical approaches that have been developed in public policy, sociology, and political science to address these questions and can be applied to educational policy. The pluralist theory (e.g., Dahl 1961; Lindblom 1977) and recent models that adopted its basic assumptions (like Kingdon’s [2003] agenda-setting model) have been—by far—the most popular approach to studying political processes at the local and national level among political scientists and continue to be so (Manley 1983).

Scholars working in the conflictual tradition offer a different approach. They are interested in understanding political outcomes as the product of a constant struggle among groups and individuals over the means of production (Marx 1967) or over larger sets of resources including economic means, social status, and political clout (Weber 1952). Educational policies, according to this approach, could be understood as political mechanisms that manifest the constant attempts of social agents (groups and individuals) to reconstruct the social reality of the educational field, that is, to alter the way in which the various resources of the field are being valued, allocated, and consumed.4 These struggles tend to produce winners and losers. Winners work to fortify their position by institutionalizing the social consequences of their victory. If they are successful, their hold of power will gradually be perceived less as a privilege that can be contested and more as a granted well-deserved and legitimate right, almost second nature.

Bourdieu’s Theory of Fields

In this article, I use a third framework: Bourdieu’s (1984, 1985, 1993) theory of fields, which attempts to understand concepts of power using a broad outlook, one that acknowledges the complexity of the social space and provides a practical framework for analyzing relationships between various players in it. Let us begin with the notion of field: “A network, or configuration, of
objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relations to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97).

In other words, a field is a space where individuals and groups (social agents) interact, work, produce, and struggle over power, based on a shared set of understandings, beliefs, values, and norms that constitute the logic and rules of the game for that field (Bourdieu 1985). A major assumption Bourdieu makes is that individuals are always motivated to maximize their gains based on and constrained by their unique set of dispositions, beliefs, and understanding of the fields within which they live and work. This means that social agents would seek, though not in a mindful way, to enhance their monetary gains (economic capital) and/or any other sort of specific capital depending on the field in which they operate. For example, Bourdieu wrote on the field of French poetry, which was defined by its disinterestedness and clear aversion to monetary attainments and popular appraisal. These kinds of patterns develop over time in each field and constitute a unique logic of action. This logic, although temporal, represents a perspective currently held by those who control the positions of power in the field (orthodoxy). Other agents who hold different views and ideologies (heterodoxy) constantly seek to challenge the orthodoxy’s position of domination (Bourdieu 2005). This basic state of conflict does not mean, however, that power is frequently shifted or that it is allocated democratically. Indeed, Bourdieu (1999) noted that power historically has been stripped from professionals (e.g., intellectuals, journalists) by the political and economic elites.

In order to better understand the field one also needs to become acquainted with the behavioral practices (habitus) of the social agents and the kinds of capital that help shape the habitus. Put in simple terms, habitus is the set of behaviors, beliefs, and values that one acquires through life. These are affected by one’s origin, education, and other features of the environment in which one grows. The habitus directs one’s understanding and responses to situations one is confronted with daily, or, as Bourdieu put it, the habitus is one’s “feel for the game.” But how does this sense of perception evolve? According to Bourdieu, the concept of habitus is not equivalent to what many call “individual agency.” Instead, the habitus should be understood as something that to a great extent is socially determined, that is, constrained and defined by the agent’s access to various sources of capital and position of power in the hierarchical structure of the field.

The social field is primarily stratified by the degrees of cultural and economic
capital that social agents enjoy (Bourdieu 1985). For Bourdieu, “the greater the difference in asset structure of these two types of capital, the more likely it is that individuals and groups will be opposed in their power struggle for domination” (Swartz 1997, 137). In other words, an agent’s capacity to gain or preserve domination in a given field is closely related to his relative possessions of economic and/or cultural capital (as well as other capitals) vis-à-vis his rivals. Here Bourdieu’s (1988, 2005) use of the concepts of orthodoxy and heterodoxy is very helpful. The “orthodoxy” of a field usually consists of the social agents who occupy the positions of power. These agents often have much in common. They tend to share similar concepts, notions, and general perspectives about the nature of the field and its future anticipated developments. They would also have a tendency to try to maintain their positions of power by opposing new ideas or any other suggestion that might shake the current status quo. The “heterodoxy” consists of the “opposition,” social agents who are not satisfied with the current direction of the field, who think that things should be done differently and that priorities need to be changed. Both the orthodoxy and the heterodoxy share, however, a deep conviction in the overall importance of the field; they both have a share in the field but would like to lead it in different directions.

So how might Bourdieu’s concepts shed light on New Jersey’s alternate route story? A hypothesis based on Bourdieu’s theory might argue that the introduction and successful passage of the alternate route policy was intended to officially and practically renounce teacher educators’ right to exclusively prepare teachers and control the professional gates of teaching. As a consequence, teacher educators, who had held key positions in the field, were increasingly marginalized by the increasing power and legitimacy of state-elected and -appointed officials.

While I will be using Bourdieu’s language to describe this struggle, it is important to note the contribution of Bernstein (1986, 1996) to this line of research in education. Bernstein argued that states have been trying to infiltrate the field of education by controlling pedagogic discourse and devices for quite some time: “There is always a struggle between social groups for ownership of the device. Those who own the device own the means of perpetuating their power through discursive means and establishing, or attempting to establish, their own ideological representations” (Bernstein 1996, 114).

Moreover, Bernstein points out that such struggles are likely to erupt between the state and teacher educators. He noted that “the recontextualizing field always consists of an Official recontextualizing field, created and dominated by the state for the construction and surveillance of state pedagogic discourse. There is usually (but not always) a Pedagogic recontextualizing field consisting of trainers of teachers . . . . Both fields may well have a range of ideological pedagogic positions which struggle for the control of the field . . . . Thus the
relative independence of the latter from the former is a matter of some im-
portance” (115). In what follows, I analyze the New Jersey case in light of
these theoretical propositions.

State, Unions, and Teacher Educators in Battle over Education Reform

I begin this section with a brief account of the relations among state authorities,
teacher unions, and teacher educators in New Jersey. By doing so, I hope to
establish the necessary context needed for understanding the struggles that
took place in New Jersey during the 1980s.

Before delving into the history, let me clarify what I mean to communicate
by using the term “state,” which will practically refer in the text to parts of
New Jersey’s executive branch, that is, the governor, his close staff, and the
Department of Education senior officials. This definition echoes those used
by political scientists such as Krasner (1978), who reduced the state to the
presidency and the Department of State, or by political sociologists such as
Skocpol (1979), who argued that the state is best represented in the actions
of the executive branch. The fact that I refer to these definitions should not,
however, suggest that I embrace a “statist” approach, one that “present[s] the
state as an autonomous entity whose actions are not reducible to or determined
by forces in society;” as Mitchell (1991) suggested to be the case with Krasner’s
and Skocpol’s scholarship. Instead, I tend to agree with approaches that refuse
to accept the division between state and society and see the state as a social
construction. Mitchell (1991) elaborated this point by relying on Foucault’s
concept of power. He writes: “The state needs to be analyzed as . . . structural
effect. That is to say, it should be examined not as an actual structure, but
as the powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures
appear to exist” (94).

Many view teacher education as a natural static part of the state or they
view teacher educators as a group whose members are simply subordinated
to state regulations. While this assertion might be true to a certain extent, I
argue that it masks conflicts and obscures the sociohistorical development of
power relations that led to the institutionalization of the current divisions of
power. For example, it is well known that for many years teacher certification
in the United States has been considered to be a community-led initiative,
and certainly not an issue to be regulated by the state (Sedlak 2008; Sedlak
and Schlossman 1986). Over time, however, districts and communities lost
control over teacher certification, as teachers were starting to press for an
enhanced occupational stature that would reflect their rising levels of prep-
aration. Instead of local districts and school principals, teachers vied for the
adoption of a standardized state code for teacher certification, one that would thwart any unethical conduct concerning the hiring process of teachers. Later, teachers joined teacher educators in calling to keep teacher certification under the control of normal schools, teacher colleges, and professional organizations like the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE; Angus 2001; Sedlak and Schlossman 1986). According to this historical interpretation, the state was drawn into regulating teacher certification because it was viewed by other agents as a relatively unbiased, disinterested player. Nevertheless, the state has gradually become an active and interested party in the field. Bourdieu’s theory can further help us conceptualize the underpinnings of this struggle. For Bourdieu (1994), “the state is the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural or (better) informational capital, and symbolic capital” (4).

Bourdieu (1994) noted that states have been successful in using their symbolic capital to shape and control other fields in the social space (Bourdieu, for example, noted the decreasing autonomy of intellectuals and professionals vis-à-vis the rising power of the state). Yet, for Bourdieu, social fields and social agents are dynamic forces that are constantly changing.

Indeed, the role of the state in New Jersey’s field of education has changed over time. For example, the state moved from being minimally involved in the funding of public education to becoming the primary contributor during the 1980s (Salmore and Salmore 1993). Nevertheless, I do not argue for a linear reading of New Jersey’s history: while the state has been gradually changing its position and interests regarding education, so were other social agents who were invested in the field.

Let me start by elaborating on the nature of these transformations and how they reshaped the stature, power, and authority held by teacher unions and teacher educators, those whom Bourdieu would refer to as the field’s orthodoxy, that is, the social agents who traditionally held control, and—at the same time—how changes in teacher certification policies inscribed and constituted new forms of power in the field.

The Educational Establishment Before and During the Alternate Route Struggle

During the 1950s and 1960s (and to a lesser extent through the 1970s), in what seemed to be the pattern in other states (Bestor 1953), the field of education in New Jersey was controlled by an alignment of three major agents: teacher unions, teacher educators, and the State Department of Education.

At that time, teacher educators and teacher unions were relatively close to
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the Department of Education, staffed by individuals who shared similar academic backgrounds, a progressive vision of education, and the goal of creating professional autonomy for teachers and teacher educators. For Bourdieu, a field’s autonomy primarily relates to the capacity of its agents to resist external intervention to impose new forms of logic, ideas, and interpretations of reality. One important aspect of autonomy in New Jersey involved the teacher unions, which had been relatively successful in improving teacher’s salaries and benefits, as well as building themselves into a powerful political institution. Another component of the field’s autonomy was the unofficial control held by teacher educators over teacher preparation and certification. This meant that prospective public schoolteachers studied only in education preparation programs with a curriculum guided by teacher educators. Teacher educators were also those who made the recommendations concerning teacher certification (which were then approved by the Department of Education). This was the case for years, although the official legal mandate for controlling teacher preparation and certification has been held by the State Board of Education and its executive arm, the Department of Education.

The system seemed to “work,” with very little turbulence or content. The reason—I contend—for this relative calmness among these seemingly different social agents was due to their similarities along lines of ideology, professional identity, academic experience, and occupational background. Most had been trained in teacher colleges or normal schools, went on to teaching, and then continued in leadership positions in schools, districts, unions, and the State Department of Education. They constituted what some have titled “the education establishment”—Bourdieu’s orthodoxy—a relatively homogeneous group of agents who controlled the positions of power in a field.

Nevertheless, all along tensions among agents were also part of the picture. When problems such as a teacher shortage arose, and when teacher preparation programs could not provide a solution, the state exercised its power by allowing districts to hire individuals and grant them emergency certificates (Cooperman et al. 1983a). Practically, this arrangement enabled districts to hire uncertified personnel as teacher substitutes whenever they faced staffing problems. While this arrangement did not contribute to improved teacher quality, it also did not seriously challenge the monopoly of teacher education programs over teacher preparation and certification. As a result, teacher educators were able to continue and preserve professional jurisdiction and power (with the help of the Department of Education).

One should also note that in the background, although not always directly connected to the field of education in New Jersey, the education establishment has occasionally been faced with serious challenges on issues related to its general ideology, perspectives, methods, and vision concerning teacher certification, preparation, and schooling. These social struggles have historically
led to the positioning of the field of education at the outskirts of academia and political power. Labaree (2004, 2005) for example, points to the longstanding failure of the field to mobilize and legitimize pedagogy and education as a scientific knowledge that equals other social science disciplines. Instead, the field has been stigmatized, suffering degradation of its knowledge (considered by many to be a pseudoscience at best). In addition, the field has been traditionally identified with women who were both poorly trained and compensated (Lanier with Little 1986; Sedlak and Schlossman 1986). To make things even worse, the field has been accused by many of refusing to consider criticism and being overwhelmingly defensive about its ideas and practices (Conant 1963; Hess 2005; Tamir 2006; Tamir and Wilson 2005; Wilson and Tamir 2008). Finally, the field has become unjustifiably associated with many pressing unsettled social problems (e.g., low performance of students, increased violence in schools, and consistently unfixed staggering educational inequality). Limitations of space and focus do not permit me to develop this point here. I simply note that, although many researchers agree that these problems could not be solved by educators—as they are the direct consequence of a capitalist-driven society (e.g., Rothstein 2004)—Americans in general and many educators among them believe that high-quality education provided by trained professional teachers can indeed make a difference in students’ lives, bridge the socioeconomic gaps, and provide every citizen a fair chance to thrive. As a result, teachers and teacher educators have been persistently subjected to waves of criticism accusing them of practices and programs that have led to the deterioration of public education (e.g., Cooperman and Klagholtz 1985; Hess 2003; Koerner 1963; Ravitch 2000).

These images were part of the larger context that shaped the growing criticism toward education during the late 1970s and 1980s in New Jersey. But it is the particularities of the New Jersey case that make it an important landmark, one that pushed governors and departments of education across the United States to rethink their relationship and position in the field of education. In part, this might be due to the fact that teacher unions in New Jersey—which held a powerful position in the field’s orthodoxy—became “contaminated” with politics and invested politically in only one side (i.e., the Democratic Party). The price for that has been painful and devastating, since teacher unions and the orthodoxy in general were not only losing political power, they were also gradually losing the public legitimacy of being a supposedly “objective,” professional, independent, and nonpartisan voice. I return to this issue, in detail, momentarily.

As I indicated above, for many years, the Department of Education in New Jersey willingly entrusted much of its official power and responsibility over teacher preparation and certification to teacher educators. Others in the executive branch—particularly the elected governors—did not show much in-
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interest in the field. Indeed, historically, the state of New Jersey had very little say on issues of education, leaving most decisions to local boards of education. As such, until the 1970s, public education was primarily supported by local taxes. The state, having no general income tax, was in many senses a marginal player in the game. This relative weakness of the state provided other agents the opportunity to hold more power in the field of education. In particular, this relates to the big teacher union—NJEA (and, to a significantly lesser extent, the New Jersey Federation of Teachers [NJFT])—which was considered, according to some, the most powerful agent in the field (see fig. 1). This fact is also illustrated by Pack (1974), who explained that, during the 1950s and 1960s, NJEA leaders used to have close ties with the education commissioner, Frederick Raubinger (1952–67). According to Pack, the commissioner and union leaders met regularly at a Princeton inn to discuss “tactics, general strategy, and intelligence on the political climate” (Pack 1974, cited in Salmore and Salmore 1993, 260). Salmore and Salmore (1993) add that “among the participants, NJEA, with its large membership and research capacity, ranked second in influence to the commissioner” (260). Two decades

Fig. 1.—Caricature of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), Newark Star-Ledger, May 15, 1983. © 1983 The Star-Ledger. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.
later the tables would turn and NJEA representatives would have to plead for months to meet for lunch with low-level aides of the governor.5

Early signs of a divide between the Department of Education and the teacher education establishment in New Jersey appeared after Raubinger’s retirement. It is clear, however, that Governor Kean’s election—a decade later—exacerbated the process and was a clear turning point in these relationships. I will elaborate on the reasons for this as it relates to the governor, below. Here I focus on developments on the education establishment side. Loyal to the professional and moderate union tradition of the National Education Association (NEA; Murphy 1990), NJEA opposed the state alternate route initiative, arguing that it is “a sham and delusion that would allow untrained people to work with children” (Braun 1983, 31). Connerton, the executive secretary of the NJEA, went on: “The Commissioner’s plan suggests there is really not that much to teaching, that, as long as you’re bright; you’re able to be a teacher . . . [thus he concluded] the plan mounts to an experiment with our kids and a risk” (Braun 1983).

However, after the state inserted minor changes in the alternate route plan and added the teacher minimum salary proposal, NJEA decided to support the alternate route (Carlson 1990, 2004; Jaroslaw 1984; Klagholz 2000). In contrast, the less prominent union, NJFT, which represented the teachers of Newark and those of a few small districts, as well as most of the teacher educators of New Jersey (Carlson 1990, 2004), opposed the alternate route much more forcefully (Carlson 1990).

The different historical traditions and constituents, as one might suspect, were important factors in the positions both unions developed toward the alternate route and other educational reforms proposed by Kean’s administration. Thus, in our case, once the state officials explicitly stated that the alternate route would provide an alternative to the current mediocre teacher preparation programs, NJFT stepped in and took the lead in resisting the proposal. Lacatena, the NJFT president, used his base of support in the federation (the Council of New Jersey State College Locals) to launch a counterattack. As part of this attack, the union published a booklet entitled Educational Reform: The New Jersey Experience, specifying the kinds of actions members of the profession should consider if the alternate route would be implemented in New Jersey. The booklet was distributed in the thousands to state politicians, policy makers, and leaders of the education field in New Jersey and around the country. In addition, Lacatena tried transferring “the battle to [the] national arena” (Carlson 1990, 50), by joining forces with the New Jersey Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NJACTE) to organize a last-minute conference (before the Board of Education hearings). The conference brought together teacher educators from around the country to discuss teacher preparation and the possible consequences of alternate routes for the teaching
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profession. Among the speakers were Myron Atkin (dean of the Stanford School of Education), Robert Egbert (chairman of the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education), and Albert Shanker (president of the American Federation of Teachers). Carlson (1990), who was the associate dean of Rutgers School of Education and a leading voice among the teacher educators, documented the conference. Atkin, he notes, argued that “teaching . . . requires more than initiation of a journeyman or master; it involves the understanding of underlying principles . . . the Commissioner’s plan was anti-intellectual and would keep teachers from understanding the nature of the profession and the institution in which they would be working.” Shanker added that “teacher educators are a bunch of anti-intellectuals who are now under attack by another bunch. . . . However, he went on to say that the New Jersey plan was a ‘hare-brained proposal that is absolutely ridiculous’” (Carlson 1990, 58–59).

The NJEA had much less at stake and thus was less combative. The Newark Star-Ledger report illuminated nicely the politically cautious, one may say opportunistic, position of the NJEA toward the state: “[Connerton the NJEA executive] said he believed teachers were unhappy with Cooperman’s performance, but said the NJEA would not try to campaign against him. ‘He’s too solidly supported now . . . he’s too tight with (Gov.) Kean. I would rather try to work with him and bring him around. If he sees the light, he’ll shift his policies’” (Braun 1983, 31).

Others, like Carlson (1990, 2004), argued that the union’s position was also based on its hope to be invited by the state to provide academic training in the new proposed program for alternate route teachers replacing de facto teacher educators. Moreover, the NJEA became even more content (and as a result was less likely to pose challenges) after the governor added the minimum salary proposal to his teacher quality reform package. Thus, eventually, the NJEA decided to support the policy after some minor tinkering.

These events may be explained in part by the implicit divide between teachers and teacher educators. Though the two groups have formed the loosely coupled orthodoxy of the field and share many interests, they occupy rather different positions in the field. Generally speaking, teachers have long occupied a rather subjugated position in the field of education (in terms of their cultural capital). They work in stark separation from each other, receive low salaries, and are subjected to the power of school administrators, district, and state administration. During the 1960s and 1970s, teachers, led by a militant union leadership, were able to exercise more power and gain significant economic returns (Angus 2001). Professionally, however, teachers remained dominated by educational researchers, the creators of educational knowledge, and teacher educators who usually used this knowledge to prepare new teachers in higher education. As Labaree (1992a, 1992b) pointed out in
his genealogy of the Holmes Group’s efforts to articulate and promote the teacher professionalism agenda, educational research had a strong implicit agenda of improving the status of education professors sometimes on the backs of schoolteachers. It is clear, then, that the two groups have different positions and interests in the field that could align or collide depending on the circumstances they encounter. In the case of New Jersey, the state proposal severely threatened to limit the power of teacher educators to control teacher preparation. Teachers, on the other hand, had less to lose. It was true that if entry into teaching was made easier, the field might face an oversupply of teachers, which in turn might hamper teachers’ bargaining power and eventually lower their salaries and benefits. However, the governor’s proposal to raise teachers’ minimum salary dampened these concerns. Another issue that was potentially divisive for teachers was how they were portrayed in the reform. State officials were cautious here too. Although teachers were criticized in the policy, most criticism was indirect in nature, arguing that teachers were the victims of an inadequate preparation system. Therefore, the NJEA, opportunistic as it may sound, took the position that teachers would gain only further hostility from the state and the public if they decided to shoulder the burden of the struggle with teacher educators.

Interestingly, educational administrators—who hold no doubt a very prominent position in the education field—showed very little active involvement in the alternate route struggle, and their influence on the policy was hardly noticed (Carlson 1990; Carlson and Silverman 1985). It is not the aim of this article to discuss the reasons for this, but one can assume that since the state’s aggressiveness here was not aimed at educational administrators’ professional turf, their response—staying out of the conflict—seems reasonable. Later, however, this strategy proved to be mistaken, when the state decided to build on its previous “success” and introduced the alternate route for administrators. As a result, those who refused to support members of their field and cooperated with the state became the next in line to pay the price for the state’s appetite for gaining more control over the field.

To sum up then, in the 1950s and 1960s, we witnessed an alignment among teacher unions, teacher educators, and the Department of Education, who had much in common in terms of how they understood teacher preparation and certification as well as many other issues. This alignment—the teacher education establishment—was able for some time to maintain a relatively robust and autonomous control over the field of education. During the late 1970s and 1980s, however, things changed, as criticism of public education mounted. State officials in many states felt that this was a good opportunity to step in and take more control. Gittell and McKenna (1999) argue that this tendency has steadily increased, as governors started identifying the education field as a promising site for intervention. Indeed, they wrote, “State governors
became more activist participants in state education policy regimes in the 1990s. Our study of state regimes in nine states revealed that most governors were influential in steering the direction of educational reform in their states, despite resistance from the legislature and the unions” (Gittell and McKenna 1999, 268). As we shall argue, New Jersey set the tone for this process.

Our story thus far suggests that such a struggle over teacher quality reform might be understood as a struggle between various social agents located in different sites of the field with different types and degrees of economic, symbolic, and cultural capital, thus having different interests, ideas, and beliefs to promote. The struggle between these agents (primarily teacher unions and teacher educators) is about the right to survive, occupy, control, and direct the vision and future of the field. Those who are able to occupy the leadership positions are then entitled to reshape the field’s normative agenda in ways aligned to their ideas and values.

Mapping the Emerging Heterodoxy of the State in the Field of Education

State-elected and -appointed officials hold a key position in the field of power, in terms of their possession of capital, as well as the capacity to use it for exercising control. Elected governors are paid well, are highly respected, and hold enormous political power, enabling them to play an important part in setting and implementing the political agenda of a state. In particular, New Jersey governors—during the time of this story—were considered to be the most powerful of all governors in America (Salmore and Salmore 1993). Senior appointed officials of the administration and state departments held considerable power as well. Kean (1988) elaborated this point: “I have almost total control over the policy-making apparatus in the state. I am not unhappy about it. A good governor should absolutely dominate the political debate in the state and set its agenda” (63).

This has not been always the case in New Jersey. In a state that was considered for years as no more than a passage between New York City and Philadelphia, where local corrupt bosses have controlled politics, and where even its elected governors used to reside out of their state (preferably in New York City), central government was almost irrelevant. The approval of New Jersey’s constitution in 1947 and above all else the establishment of a significant state income tax in 1976 were major political milestones that reflected a significant shift toward state-sponsored politics (Salmore and Salmore 1993). The tenure of Governor Kean should be understood in this context as one that has built heavily on the emerging signs of the state’s consolidation of authority.
The New Jersey Department of Education has also been marginalized for years and limited in making the core decisions in education. With minimal resources at hand and a strong local tradition of school governance, the department had a relatively small impact on educational matters. According to New Jersey’s laws, the commissioner brings all major decisions to the state board of education for approval. The 1973 Supreme Court ruling in Robinson v. Cahill signaled a shift in the department’s role in public education. The ruling demanded that the State create measures that would provide a thorough and efficient school system to all school children to replace the heavy financial reliance of schools on local tax arrangements (Prabhu 1992, 78–79). As a result, the department was forced to step in and exercise authority to make sure local school districts provide thorough and efficient education.

Paradoxically perhaps, at the same time that the Department of Education had very little power, the department did occupy a relatively powerful position (at least formally) in regards to teacher preparation and certification (Frazier 1938). This potential power was rarely used before the 1980s, at least partly because the department’s staff was socialized by teacher educators (Bestor 1953). As we shall see below, the case of New Jersey’s alternate route program illustrates a shift in this historical pattern, for the state started aggressively reasserting its authority over teacher certification seeking to redistribute power in the field, taking it out of the hands of the teacher education programs. Before then, in practice, teacher certification and preparation was more of a joint operation run by the Department of Education and teacher educators. The interesting question is, What can explain this phenomenon?

When Thomas Kean was elected governor, he was part of a new generation of (Republican) leaders who believed that governors should control the education system and not vice versa. This notion developed partly along with libertarian thought and partly as a backlash to the increased political activity of teacher unions in the service of Democrat candidates. Kean himself encountered and battled this sort of political activism when the NJEA openly and vigorously supported his rival, Democrat James Florio. From this angle, one could understand the struggle in New Jersey as one that was shaped by ideological beliefs (mainly neoliberal thought that embraces policies based on the principles of free market and competition), and by a political struggle over interests and power. The reality, however, is more complicated. Kean’s motivation to push for changes in the education system was stemmed also by his belief that excellent public education would drive economic prosperity for the state. Therefore, he put education reform at the top of his election agenda. In his position paper The Importance of Quality Education to a Vibrant New Jersey, Kean notes: “If our state is to regain the competitive edge it once enjoyed over the states that surround us, it is imperative that it do all it can to equip
its schools and institutions of higher education to turn out the skilled workers and capable managers those industries need" (Kean 1981, 4).

Kean demonstrated his libertarian views in office when he pushed for dismantling the barriers to teacher certification, which he believed kept qualified individuals from moving into teaching. Kean also believed that high-quality teaching was based on teachers' strong subject matter knowledge, preferably in the liberal arts and sciences. This led the state to try tightening its hold on the teacher preparation system to assure “proper” preparation with minimum emphasis on pedagogical input. In many ways, this could also be characterized as an attempt by the state to create/enforce a “new teacher,” a teacher who had a broad disciplinary background with limited required education courses. The state’s attempt to inscribe new meanings into the preparation, certification, and practice of teaching triggered a political struggle (between the profession and the state) over who should control professional authority, pedagogical capital, and economic resources. The struggle also reflected a deep ideological divide over what constitutes a good teaching and good preparation for teachers, and how teachers should be prepared and certified.

One theoretical explanation of the transformation that I have described is that pioneering actions take place when exceptional leaders, such as Governor Kean, decide to carry them through. But this idea reflects a narrow econometric conceptualization of individual agency, as reflected in rational choice theory. Bourdieu’s notion of habitus can be helpful in conceptualizing the tension between notions of agency and structure, showing how individuals, like Kean, embrace certain ideologies and develop certain beliefs and understanding regarding to education, politics, and social action. Let us consider Kean’s habitus in more detail.

Even a glimpse into Kean’s biography is illuminating. The son of a U.S. congressman and the grandson of a U.S. senator, Kean’s uncle was also a U.S. senator and his ancestor, John Kean, was a Congressman. His son, a New Jersey state senator, made—and lost—his own bid for the U.S. Senate in November 2006. Kean graduated from Princeton and received a masters in education from Teachers College, Columbia University. As a child, he chatted with presidents, senators, congressmen, and leading figures from corporate America. His family was among the richest families of New Jersey. In his early career, he worked a few years at his elite alma mater boarding school as a teacher; for many years he directed a summer school camp for disadvantaged teenagers from urban New Jersey. Later he went back and forth from his small business into local and state politics (Kean 1988). In short, Kean has lived in the high end of the field of power, enjoying high levels of social, economic, and cultural capital, which blended to a powerful symbolic capital of perceived aristocracy, political benevolence, economic privilege, and educational excellence. It is important to note that Kean maintained a strong
interest in education well before going into politics. Therefore, his interest in education reform as a governor should not—and could not—be dismissed simply as cynical political maneuvering. Rather, his interests in and commitments to education were considered as a genuine attempt to have an impact on schooling, a lifelong area of concern. In other words, Kean’s privileged background led him into teaching, directing a summer camp, and studying education in Columbia, which were key experiences that shaped his thinking about and understanding of education, as well as his motivation to reform it. The governor was not alone. He was surrounded by a group of loyal officials who eagerly carried out what might have been initially considered his vision but no doubt became theirs too. During the first few months in office, Kean directed his close aide and deputy chief of staff, Christopher Daggett, to recruit a new education commissioner, “whose first credential for the job—according to the governor himself—must be compatibility with Kean’s educational philosophy” (Braun 1982, 1). The man eventually chosen for the lucrative position—Cooperman—came as a surprise for many, since his candidacy was not supported by any significant group of educators, and his name was not mentioned along with other candidates on the news.12

Commissioner Cooperman had lean experience as a superintendent and was not aligned with the unions but received recommendations from business leaders and a university president.13 His lack of alignment to powerful groups in the educational establishment and his good connections with leaders in the business and academic communities turned out to be seen as important assets by his new employer. Another key official for passing the educational reform—the chancellor of higher education, Hollander—was reappointed by Kean for a second term, since his views were understood as compatible with those of the governor. These two officials had to cooperate closely to plan and promote the certification reform, as the details of the program were entangled within a jurisdiction that could be claimed by both.14 This forced cooperation, however, did not always go smoothly as the two, who seemed to agree on the general plan, differed on its details. An example of the tension between the two is well illustrated in a letter sent by Cooperman to Hollander. In the letter, Cooperman accused Hollander of having double standards and of trying to appear nice in the public eye while having his concealed interest served by Cooperman.15 This dispute, probably more than anything else, reflects an interdepartmental struggle over turf, rather than ideological differences. Moreover, in terms of the overall struggle, these internal differences did not crack the solid front built by the state to further the certification reform. The correspondences between state officials during the policy-making process illustrate this solid front of the state. Both the NJEA and the NJFT were perceived as a threat to the plan and hence were singled out and barred from participating on key committees (e.g., teacher unions and teacher educators from New
Jersey had no representatives sitting on the search committee for the commissioner position, or on the committees that were discussing the structure and content of the alternate route—and, most important, they had no representatives on the Boyer Commission. Eventually, representatives of the two unions were invited to attend only the last committee (Jaroslaw 1984), where they formed a small, insignificant minority. Teacher educators, the program’s most vocal opponents, were never invited by state officials to participate and had no representation in any part of the process (Carlson 1990). Numerous letters, memos, and alternative plans, in which teacher educators attempted to challenge the state’s plan, were dismissed as being driven by narrow self-serving interests of professors who were looking to secure their positions (e.g., Klagholz 2000).

Finally, the habitus of state agents in the field of education should also be considered as part of the broad political context of the field of power, which ultimately shaped the scope of possible strategies available for Kean’s administration to rely on. The turbulence of the 1980s—within a climate of a deep crisis and rising concerns over the quality of education (e.g., National Commission of Excellence in Education 1983), together with the political rivalry between Republican governors and workers’ unions—was not unique to New Jersey; it was felt around the nation. But Kean, unlike his peers, identified and understood these developments as an opportunity for the state to step in, promote alternative solutions for long-standing problems, and take more control over public education from local districts and professionals, whenever possible. To do so, he took advantage of the political climate and the abundance of state and national reports that undermined the professional stature of teacher unions and teacher educators, arguing that the education establishment was incapable of assuring the production of high-quality teachers. Others have followed, using the same criticism to implement standards, accountability, and transparency aimed at improving educational practice, but along the way—not accidentally—diminishing the power and autonomy of the education establishment, while establishing a new order in which the state takes a pivotal position.

Final Remarks on the Nature of the Struggle in New Jersey

The field of education or, more specifically, the field of educational policy, has various features that have made it relatively resistant to change for many years. We have seen how teacher educators and teacher unions in cooperation with the Department of Education were able to build the orthodoxy of the teacher education establishment that governed the field for years, especially in relation
to aspects of preparation and certification. No matter how one looks at it, the state of New Jersey had a relatively minor role in education before the 1980s.

During the 1980s, state-elected and -appointed officials refused to accept this reality. They came with different sets of ideas, interests, and visions, but at the same time argued that they had a stake in the field and shared the general concerns of educators regarding the importance of having well-qualified teachers in the classroom. Nevertheless, their understanding and interpretation of the “problem” as well as evaluation of its severity and possible “cures” were very different from those of the orthodoxy. I have argued that the solutions proposed by state officials reflect those differences and should be understood as evolving from their possession of capital, habitus, and the positions they occupied in the field of education and the field of power.

We have seen how, according to Bourdieu, this struggle over ideas, resources, and vision unfolded in the case of New Jersey, when state officials infiltrated the resourceful arena of teacher education. We have also seen how these kinds of attempts have developed in specific historical, sociological, and political contexts that enabled them to evolve the way they did.

The policy itself, which was designed and processed as a political master-work, sent two clear messages. The first message for teacher unions was that times have changed and the state is going to be much more involved in what used to be an area under their control—teacher education policy. The second message was directed to New Jersey’s teacher educators, claiming that they have so far proved incompetent at producing the quality teachers students deserve to have and thus they should prepare to give up their monopoly over teacher preparation. While teacher unions were warned, they also benefited from a series of new policies that were launched simultaneously with the alternate route (especially from the policy establishing a minimum starting salary for teachers that was enacted in 1985). Teacher educators, who did not enjoy as much political clout as teacher unions did, and were considered to have the lowest prestige among their fellow university professors, took the hardest blow from the alternate route policy. Indeed, the state identified them as the weakest brick in the wall of autonomy surrounding the orthodoxy of the field and used it to assume more control over the field.

Summary

Alternate routes have been formed to address two major problems: teacher quality and/or acute shortage of teachers (Zumwalt 1991). Economists might argue that, in the case of acute shortage, state agencies simply respond to the pressures of demand and create new passages for teachers to enter the system. I believe that even when this is the case there are always several policy options...
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representing different interests and interpretation that could be implemented and are decided through a political struggle. In the case of New Jersey, the shortage of teachers in urban areas was only a small part of a larger story of state officials who had an elaborate agenda for improving teacher quality in the state (Klagholz 2000; Zumwalt 1991). This is also one reason why New Jersey’s alternate route was established as a comprehensive state policy in contrast with the Los Angeles case, where the problem of an acute teacher shortage was addressed in the limited setting of a single school district. Thus, overall, I believe that the reasons for establishing the alternate route policy of New Jersey are best illuminated through a political, rather than an economic, perspective.

This study has traced back the historical roots of the first alternate route for teaching in the United States, which is also among the first initiatives to implement market-based policies into K–12 public education. Thus I have indicated that the pursuit of “quality” should be understood as part of the rise of the Republican Party with its neoliberal and libertarian ideologies. I argue that Bourdieu’s political sociology can be helpful in illuminating and analyzing the struggle that shaped the field of education in New Jersey during the 1980s. This approach views educational policy as a contested arena in which social agents vie for power. Based on this theory, I have shown how the teacher alternate route initiative in New Jersey was used by state agents to break the control of the orthodoxy (in particular, teacher educators) over issues related to educational training and certification of teachers. In the struggle that led to this shift of power, teacher educators lost not only their previous positions of power, but also the cultural and symbolic capital that enabled them to occupy these positions in the first place.

Understanding what happened in New Jersey two decades ago can serve as a meaningful lesson for understanding the logic of current political struggles, since in many ways it set the tone for educational politics as we know them today. Kean’s tenure in New Jersey—its ideological discourse, strategies of confrontation, and general concepts of public education—paved the way for aggressive Republican governors such as those of Michigan and Pennsylvania (who successfully limited the power of teacher unions) to reshape public education during the 1990s by using a similar set of strategies and policies (e.g., free market policies; Boyd et al. 2000). The mushrooming of alternate routes in 48 states is also evidence of this growing hegemony of states. As a result, today the powerful role of the state in shaping educational policy has become almost unquestionable. Indeed, in light of teacher unions and teacher educators’ relative weakness, especially in regard to policies concerning teacher certification, it seems that the next battleground might involve mainly the federal government and the states.

The emergence of the federally funded passport to teaching of the American
Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) might be an early sign of this development. As of today, seven states have joined voluntarily and accepted the certification as part of their requirements for beginning teachers at public schools (e.g., Lieb 2008). In the future, unlike the last episode of the NCLB, in which states determined independently the standards for their highly qualified teachers, the federal government might choose to use the infrastructure of the national certification and start requiring states to meet national standards. Having an elaborate and tested system of certification that states themselves have approved could help the federal government to make a claim in favor of increasing their control over teacher certification in the name of economic efficacy, standardization, and quality. Opposition to national certification includes those who fear losing power, such as the NEA (which thinks the “passport” undermines teacher professionalism) and the NCATE (which thinks the “passport” denies teachers and the public they serve from receiving professionally prepared teachers). Lately, it seems, more opponents to federal overreach in education have emerged from the Republican side. Hess and Finn (2007) called these opponents the “pushback caucus,” arguing that it is “led by Republicans like Senator Jim DeMint and Congressman Pete Hoekstra, and drawing plaudits from unlikely fellow travelers like the National Education Association” (Hess and Finn 2007).

Early signs show that the federal government, quite similarly to what we have seen in New Jersey, is using its economic resources (so far, ABCTE has received $40 million from U.S. Department of Education grants) and symbolic capital to promote an ideology and build legitimacy for a new vision of teacher certification, one that praises the importance of subject matter knowledge while denouncing the need for pedagogic training. This time, however, ABCTE not only challenges the “teacher education establishment,” but also sets a challenge (though so far it has not been more than implicit) to the powerful role states have acquired in the field of educational policy.16

These developments at the federal level are accompanied by various changes at the state level. Going back to our New Jersey case, it is true, for example, that there are many signs indicative of the growing power of the state. Yet, because of their political dynamics, social fields can sometimes be surprising. As groups realign, reorganize, and reassert their ideas in new ways, the structure of power in the field might change. Recent developments in New Jersey, two decades after the alternate route constitution, demonstrate this notion, as a new (old) debate over the alternate route erupted once again, this time with a move aimed at restoring the stature of traditional teacher preparation programs:

About 20 years ago, the state of New Jersey created the nation’s first alternate route to teacher certification. The program has served as ar-
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guably the best model in the country. But next month, the New Jersey State Board will be asked to approve revisions to the program, perhaps taking the “alt” out of “alt cert.”

The creators of the original landmark program, former New Jersey education commissioner Saul Cooperman and Leo Klagholz . . . have come out of retirement to vigorously challenge the changes that they believe would restore monopolistic control to the colleges of teacher education. (National Council on Teacher Quality 2003, 3)

This is a reminder that educational policies are constantly put under pressure to change by social agents vying for power. Even New Jersey’s alternate route, which started as a radical experiment that challenged the teacher education establishment but was aggressively institutionalized, becoming the most successful in the United States in terms of the rate of teachers it prepares (40 percent of the teaching force; Feistritzer 2006), could be vulnerable to counterattacks and political reconsideration. This also suggests that in the future changes might occur in some of the other 48 states that followed New Jersey and are today operating an alternate route. It is yet to be seen, however, how these changes at the state level and the relationships with the federal government will affect the prominent position that states have occupied in the field of educational policy in the past two decades.

Notes

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1. This term will serve as a general category that includes teachers, teachers unions, and professors of teacher education (i.e., those individuals and groups involved in the professional structure of the teaching profession). This definition excludes those who are involved in administrating and managing the profession (i.e., educational administrators, politicians, and state department of education bureaucrats whose practice and professional identities are different). While in the past, Bestor (1953) used this term in a more inclusive way (referring to all whose occupation deals with K–12 education), I will use the concept to describe a smaller group. The reasons for this will become apparent. In the past few years the term has been increasingly charged with negative meanings by several critics of educational institutions and practices. The usage of the term in this work, however, does not refer to any of these negative meanings; it is simply used as shorthand for a subset of interested parties.

2. The popular agenda-setting model of Kingdon’s (2003) as well as many works of other public policy theorists and analysts have been largely generated by and built on pluralist assumptions developed by early scholars such as Dahl (1961) and Lindblom (1977).

3. See, for example, the recent analysis by McDermott (2005) on the politics of

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alternative certification and pay incentives for teachers in Massachusetts, which utilized Kingdon’s (2003) agenda-setting model.

4. Resources can be any sort of good that is in demand by the agents and can shape or contribute to the allocation of power, for example, monetary goods, prestige, important institutional positions, educational attainments, political power, and so forth.

5. Details were taken from a correspondence between an NJEA official and one of the commissioner aides (Program to Enhance the Teaching Profession in New Jersey 1984, Box 12, nj_file03, New Jersey State Archive).

6. See Carlson (1990) for more details on the involvement of the NJACTE and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in opposing New Jersey’s alternate route to teaching.

7. In my interview with NJEA president Edith Fulton (2004), there was no mention of this issue. My other sources do not support or refute this important point.

8. The field of power is the space where the prominent (and less prominent) groups and individuals of society struggle over various types of capital. In Distinction (1984), one of Bourdieu’s most influential works, he demonstrated empirically how the field of power in France is stratified along lines of taste, consumption, and production, which in turn constitutes the distribution of capital among different fields and groups of society.


10. This tendency became pronounced as the NEA openly and enthusiastically supported the Democrat nominee for presidency, Jimmy Carter. Many believe that the upgrading of education to a department level in Carter’s administration came as a reward to the union for its support during the election. Since then, teacher union support of a nominee (usually Democrat) at the state or federal level has become a norm. For a general discussion on this topic, see Urban J. Wayne (2000). For an interesting account of Pennsylvania and Michigan, two states that used to be strongholds of teacher unions but ceased to be such during the 1990s, see Boyd et al. (2000).

11. Robert Braun (1982), the educational columnist for the Newark Star-Ledger, wrote: “The NJEA actively opposed Kean’s election and just as actively worked for, and contributed to, the campaign of Kean’s rival, democrat James Florio.”

12. Cooperman, it should be noted, was not the first preference of the governor and his aides. He became the commissioner only after the first nominee withdrew his candidacy due to accusations that he had plagiarized his doctoral dissertation.

13. Details were taken from recruitment files of the deputy chief of staff (1982, Box 2, nj_file08, New Jersey State Archive).

14. The teacher certification was authorized by the department of education and provided to graduates who went through approved education programs. At the same time, authority over colleges was assigned to the Department of Higher Education. This situation meant that any change had to be approved by both sides.

15. Hollander, according to Cooperman, supported the plan to reduce teacher education courses for prospective teachers, since it would force many teacher educators to leave universities and it would enable colleges to replace them with faculty from more “productive” in-demand disciplines. While keeping this plan in secrecy, Hollander has publicly backed some critical assertions made by Cooperman’s worst opponents—the teacher educators of New Jersey (Carlson 1990).

16. For a more detailed discussion of the field of teacher certification at the federal
level, its groups, and the various interests, ideologies, and visions that guide them, see Wilson and Tamir (2008).

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