

## The New Teacher— and a New Kind of Supervision?

DOUBTLESS there are many ways in which we might approach the problem of understanding the new status of teachers and what this may mean for us. Yet if we are to come to a satisfying redefinition of our roles as supervisors and curriculum directors, then perhaps we need to imagine: (a) what the behavior of the teacher as a fully professional person ought to be; (b) what our concept of the curriculum should be to enable a teacher to function professionally; and (c) what our own program of activities, whatever we may come to call it, ought to encompass to support the development of the kind of curriculum that is enabling to the teacher and also will meet new public expectations.

How do we define a really professional teacher? We can easily enough reject as naive and anachronistic the popular notion that rarity is his chief characteristic.

Indeed, we know that the number of able teachers has greatly increased. Better methods of selection for teacher education programs, better programs of teacher education, more years of educa-

tion prior to entry into service, more careful selection procedures for initial employment, more supervisory attention in the early years of service, extended programs of in-service education and more consultant help for experienced teachers at work, more opportunities for advanced training, and better salary schedules—all have combined to increase the supply of able teachers. Yet if we were to argue with the lay concept of the "master teacher," we would be missing the point that is to be gained from studying its significance. What it may project is a new level of independence for the teacher. The professional teacher, like any other professional person, is one who is free to test out new knowledge on his own terms and is supported in adding to this as he can. The question we may need to ask is whether we are operating in such way as to make it possible for the teacher to behave as a professional person.

Before turning to this question, however, we may find it useful to spell out what the teacher as a professional person looks like. We may do this by describing the new teacher and for the sake of clearer definition contrasting this picture with the older but still surviving image

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of the teacher as something less than professional.

### The Professional Teacher

The professional teacher, then, is one who has worked through to his own satisfaction the purposes of education and in terms of his convictions has developed a thorough grasp of the understandings, skills and attitudes that need to be learned by his students. Or, to use a more modern vocabulary, he has well in mind the frameworks or structures of concepts and generalizations that need to be mastered.

With such guidelines in mind, he is free to plan with and for learners from a great range of possible activities and resources. He is emancipated, so to speak, from dependence on any set sequence of learning opportunities or materials, being so well versed in aims that he can follow a great many roads to reach the same ends. He knows that the greatest importance attaches to "the relationship between the teacher, the subject, and the individual student at a given moment."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, he is truly a curriculum expert. The familiar definition of the curriculum that used to be parroted in the early 'fifties, that this was what transpired between teacher and pupils when the door into the classroom had been closed, becomes literally true for the fully professional teacher. His freedom to make choices is limited only by the presence of such agreements as are necessary to insure order in a school system, the availability of resources, and the exercise of his own imagination.

<sup>1</sup> *Labels and Fingerprints*. Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and others. n.d.; unpagged.

When we contrast with this the older image of the teacher, we are helped to see how important it may be for us to come clean in our thinking. Just what are we now really willing to accept and support as appropriate behavior for the professional teacher?

In the past, the teacher was too often thought of as generally inadequate. He was perceived as being possibly none too sharp to start with, poorly or at least incompletely trained, and likely to remain in need of continuous official attention. With such an outlook, leadership sometimes saw its task as being not only that of close supervision but the administrative provision of whatever might protect the learner from the teacher. We have had tremendous energies expended on designing perfect classrooms; room size and shape, lighting sources, and the kind of floor covering can become critical matters when the right answers are thought of as compensating for poor teachers. Prodigious efforts have also gone—and indeed are still going—into thinking up ingenious grouping and scheduling schemes that hopefully would make it possible for pupils to learn regardless of who their teacher might be. It is for such an anonymous incompetent that an uneasy superintendent may be led to exalt the textbook and the curriculum guide as freeing the teacher from "the unsuitable responsibility" of deciding what should be taught.<sup>2</sup> How much of our own time has been devoted to pursuit of the same end!

Our task, of course, is to bring our conception of the teacher into line with the facts of advancing education and competence. Then, again, we need to ask whether we ourselves are behaving in

<sup>2</sup> Carl F. Hansen. *The Amidon Elementary School*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962; p. 159.

such way as to be enabling to the professional teacher. Dare we continue to spend our time chiefly in the induction and orientation of new teachers, the preparation of so-called curriculum guides, and the selection of instructional materials? Indeed, may not some of our present activities actually interfere with the fully professional functioning of teachers? Equally important, can we think through with our teacher colleagues the kind of roles and functions we ought to fulfill that will enable more of them to become independent in the ways we are defining?<sup>3</sup>

### Concept of Curriculum

A second task closely allied to clarifying our thoughts on the professional teacher is to think through a modern concept of the curriculum. If the teacher is expected to behave as a professional person, what kind of curriculum does this take? Again, perhaps we can answer this question by contrasting a modern with an older picture.

Today we would probably choose to think of the organizing principles of the instructional program as being derived from larger wholes, from frameworks or structures of concepts and generalizations in relationship. The bases for such structures are several. Sometimes the framework will be derived from a discipline, as in current thinking about mathematics.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes it may come from seeking consistency or order of some kind

in a skills area; thus, we speak of a framework of skill development in reading. Or it may come from an area such as social studies and be comprised of those common themes or concerns that would seem to provide a satisfactory way of bringing ideas from several fields into a manageable framework for use in the selection of content, activities, and resources.

In our concept of curriculum, we see this process of selection as mainly a task for the teacher. Many choices could be made that would lead to the desired outcome. The teacher is supported in making the relevant curriculum and teaching decisions.

With such a concept of curriculum, learning is thought of as a search. The learner is supported in his discovery of what he has not learned yet, what he needs to learn as we see it and what he wants to learn as he sees it, and of course what he can learn. The emphasis is on the individual's search for sense, satisfaction and significance, with the expectation that learners will emerge with common understandings but also with each knowing much more than everybody has to learn. A central purpose of education is to support the development of the power to think through learning by discovery.<sup>5</sup>

The growth of learning under such a concept of curriculum is seen as spiral as well as sequential. Many returns will be made to basic concepts and generalizations and the relationships among them as the learner matures. Children's questions are answered now, but mastery

<sup>3</sup> See Reba M. Burnham and Martha L. King, *Supervision in Action*, Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1961, p. 33-64, for list of trends in supervision that would indicate a responsiveness to the new situation.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> See Educational Policies Commission, *The Central Purpose of Education*, Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1961; also, Jerome S. Bruner, *On Knowing*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1962, especially "The Act of Discovery," p. 81-96.

comes only with time and perhaps then is never fully achieved.

For contrast, we may recall the older concept of curriculum. Constructing the curriculum was thought of essentially as the careful grading of preselected items. Once so ordered, content was to be incorporated in perfected teaching materials that ideally would be practically self-teaching. Learning was conceived of as mastery of whatever was laid out to be learned. This was never very much, when thought of by the year, but was felt to be enough and was offered as identical for all. Pace was the only dimension of individual differences that really was built into learning.

Learning was aimed at mastery of the specified content. The practice was to take all learners through the same sequence of items or skills to be mastered with the apparent assumption that if we were successful teachers, everybody would finally come out in the end with the same knowledge of what had been taught. Of course, they never did; when we thought of it, we would concede that they did not all start in even and were widely different in need to know, will to learn, and capacity.

### Our Own Program

Perhaps it is not necessary at this point to indicate that the older position on the nature of the curriculum does not fit with the picture of the professional teacher as it is developing—and that we may need to think most earnestly about whether we have kept not only our image of the teacher up to date but also our idea of the instructional program. Through our activities, are we working to make a modern curriculum that supports the teacher as a professional person, or are

we living at least part of the time in an older world?

Thus our third task really can only be undertaken as we find that we have a consistent and defensible picture of the professional teacher and a concept of the curriculum that fits with the behavior of this new teacher. How we shall behave depends on what we see as needed for the support and further realization of the teacher in the suitably enriched teaching situation.

Rather than review once again the present uses of our time and whether they fit the current needs, it may be more helpful to project several possibly profitable lines for us to think more about.

One of these is certainly the extent and nature of the agreements we are going to need to maintain institutional unity. It is all very well, we may wish to say, to talk of the independence of the new teacher and the freedom he should and indeed must have to perform professionally. But we do live in an institution. We have many teachers in each grade or subject area. Families move from one part of town to another and in and out of the district. Moreover, we have local needs and wants for our students. And, of course, we must feel a continued responsibility for making sure somehow that what we feel needs to be learned has been taught.

Perhaps this last sentence contains the best clue to further study of the agreements we should work to reach. Too often perhaps we have begun with resources for teaching, textbooks and the like, and then moved back to the kinds of activities we thought likely to be most successful and then further back yet to the kinds of learnings we were after—

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and finally, if not exhausted, we may have pushed back all the way to what our purposes were for learning certain concepts and generalizations through selected activities that would require use of the specified materials. What we may need to do is to spend more time reaching agreement on purposes and on content relevant to purposes and less on activities and materials.<sup>6</sup>

Such a possibility may lead us properly to a second area of activity. This is the whole field of keeping professional knowledge of content up to date. The subsidized studies are giving us examples of various ways to approach this question. However these differ, all of them put our own past in-service education efforts to shame in terms of time and resources invested in the reeducation of teachers.

A major problem we face as we attempt to make use of national major curriculum studies is to figure out ways of learning enough about the new programs so that we can evaluate them. This evaluation must be not merely from the standpoint that these studies may be in competition. More fundamentally we must be enabled to choose from various studies the content that we believe will be valuable if added to what we presently hold as being suitable for realizing our local purposes. We have many questions to ask in the reworking of our in-service education programs to bring them up to date.

A third area in which we may need

<sup>6</sup> See Gordon Mackenzie for a useful discussion of "determinants" of the curriculum, "Sources and Process in Curriculum Development," especially p. 78-80, in *What Are the Sources of the Curriculum?*, Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1962.

to think through our activities can be related to the problem of learning new content. Many of us lived through the action research movement when we were, perhaps somewhat prematurely, being urged to engage in cooperative research projects aimed at thinking up and trying out new ideas. Now we are caught in the midst of tremendous activity of all kinds that demands some sort of testing out. The professional does test out new knowledge, not all of it, of course, but whatever promises to help him perform better. We need to exercise our best judgment in choosing the most promising new proposals for testing.

Yet we need also to remember that the professional adds to knowledge as well as he can. The hope for the profession is that more of us will find ways of working with our teacher colleagues on ventures into the unknown that will result in new knowledge of a kind that can genuinely make a difference in the quality of the opportunities we provide for children and youth. These are times when we are confronted and perhaps plagued by many proposals that are plainly nonprofessional and some that are possibly injurious. Unless we can turn some of our own best energies to the search for better answers,<sup>7</sup> we may find ourselves forced by the pressure for improvement into changes that we know ahead of time will be worthless.

The sense of urgency about improvement in instruction comes to us from a broad public context of concern for making more of our capacity in every aspect of national life. As we have tried to respond to the new expectations, we have undergone significant shifts in leadership roles and functions.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Frazier. "Our Search for Better Answers." *Educational Leadership* 20: 453-58; April 1963.

The attempt here has been to examine the resulting new status of teachers as it may affect the behavior of supervisors and curriculum workers. It has been contended that the teacher needs to be perceived as newly independent; that the curriculum must be conceived of as open to as much choice-making among specific activities and materials as is possible in light of the institutional nature of the school; and that we must ourselves learn a good many new things if we are to support the teacher in such a setting.

The question may remain as to whether we really need to make the effort to reformulate our roles and functions. Perhaps if we just bide our time, teachers will fade out of the curriculum limelight and superintendents will return to building programs and budgets. It is possible, of course, that a relaxation in public expectations may come about, yet this seems unlikely.

What we might better anticipate is that since curriculum leadership is newly identified with the administrator and curriculum expertness with the teacher, lay forces may begin to wonder at the need for specialized supervisory and curricular services. Indeed, this kind of doubt has already been aroused in several communities and more than one state.

Yet more worrisome to us may be that our ineffectiveness may cause the sources

of outside curriculum leadership to gain greater influence than they now have. We must learn to relate internally so that we have an adequate local apparatus for assessment and adaptation of proposals from outside and hopefully for development of creative programs inside. Otherwise, we may find that the functions pertaining to curriculum construction and in-service education have been altogether assumed by others. One thoughtful surveyor of present practice concedes that "Properly led, a group of able teachers may design a new type of instructional program even while they operate the old one." However, as he further remarks, "the question is not whether it can happen" but "whether we should depend upon it."<sup>8</sup> His doubt leads Brickell to propose a state program of instructional innovation that would seem to most of us to promise interference with our proper functioning.

Perhaps even more challenging to us should be our own professional response to the pressures recently defined by the Association for Childhood Education International. Can we somehow reinstitute a concern for basic human values as integral to learning at every level and for every purpose?<sup>9</sup>

This would seem to be the ultimate challenge to our professional insight and ingenuity. The perspective we represent and our expertness in defining purpose and clarifying process are essential to the support of the professional teacher in a soundly based, modern program of instruction. We must maintain both perspective and expertness. Can we do this? The only answer is that we must.

<sup>8</sup> Henry M. Brickell. *Organizing New York State for Educational Change*. Albany: State Education Department, 1961; p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> *Basic Human Values for Childhood Education*. Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1963.

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