

"The Supervisor's Role in Negotiation": A Critique

WALTER DOYLE*

FOR the past several years the issue of professionalization has dominated many of the deliberations of supervision specialists. During this period, various publications of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development have been devoted, at least in part, to this thorny problem. In keeping with this practice, a recent report of the ASCD Commission on Problems of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers employs the concept of professionalism as a central element in its long-range proposals relating to the supervisor's role in negotiations. In achieving its purpose, the report expresses, implicitly and explicitly, some fundamental viewpoints concerning the nature of the supervisory function and the meaning of professional relations in education. It is to the Commission's conceptualizations of professionalism and of the supervisory function that the present discussion is directed.

The term "profession" means many things to many people. To the Commission on Problems of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers it means a solution to the dilemma faced by supervisory personnel, a dilemma resulting from the continued utilization of negotiations by teacher groups. The Commission proposes that a professional model of intergroup relations in education be created and implemented. To understand the dimensions of this proposal, it is necessary to examine briefly the Commission's picture of educational circumstances today.

The Commission's argument against negotiation tactics is straightforward. On the

one hand, negotiation procedures have reaped important and long-overdue benefits for teachers. On the other hand, there have been serious "negative ramifications of the negotiation process" (p. 4).¹ According to the Commission, these "negative ramifications" fall into two interrelated categories. First, negotiation tactics have led to a "splintering" and a "polarization" of the various groups involved in the educational enterprise. A "we-they" attitude permeates relationships among groups which are organized around "centers of interest." Second, decisions on matters of curriculum and instruction are made in the context of a negotiation process which systematically excludes supervisors and curriculum workers. Supervisory "input" is not brought to bear on these decisions which profoundly affect the educational program of the school. The Commission feels that, as a result of these side effects of negotiation, supervisors are no longer free to "initiate and bring about instructional change" (p. 14).

The Commission further argues that these "negative ramifications" are inherent in the negotiation protocol currently employed in school systems. Present negotiation pro-

¹ All page citations in parentheses refer to: Commission on Problems of Supervisors and Curriculum Workers. *The Supervisor's Role in Negotiation*. William F. Young, editor. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1969.

* Walter Doyle, Assistant Professor of Education, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana

cedures, borrowed from business and industry, are, according to the Commission, based upon a model of labor-management conflict. By its very nature, this model emphasizes a "we-they" climate and group division according to "centers of interest." This confrontation process can only lead to splintering and polarization. The Commission maintains, however, that the imperative need in education today is for greater "cooperation" and "unification." Since the present negotiation process is inimical to unity and cooperative relations, the process itself must be totally restructured. The Commission calls for the "invention" of a "professional model" for intergroup relationships in education.²

The Professional Model

It is understandable that the Commission does not attempt, within the limits of its report, to construct a fully systematic professional model for intergroup relations in education. The development of such a model will obviously take long and arduous work by educational researchers. In making its recommendations, however, the Commission does operate on the basis of an implicit "model" of professional decision making. In other words, the Commission does identify, however indirectly, certain elements which will characterize professional intergroup relations in education. The analysis will now turn to the dimensions of this implicit "model" of professionalization.

The Commission maintains that the professional model would offer a viable alternative to the labor-management model of negotiation. In answer to splintering and polarization, the Commission's model would emphasize unity and cooperation among co-professionals. In answer to exclusive negotiation between teachers and the board of

education, the Commission's model would stress full participation by all parties in decisions which affect them. By emphasizing "centers of purpose" rather than centers of interest, the Commission's model would support "cooperative deliberation of professionals representing a variety of roles in a school system" (p. 3).

The Commission's professional model would seem to emerge with certain rather clear elements. The emphasis is on "soft" terms such as "cooperation," "unity," "purpose," "democratic approaches," and "selflessness." This focus is in direct contrast to such "hard" terminology as "conflict," "confrontation," and indeed "strike" and "sanction." The picture is one of a single, unified education profession or, in the words of the Commission's chairman, the "educational family" (p. 2; emphasis added).

It is possible to react to this model of professional relationships in several ways. The emphasis on "soft" terms is reminiscent of proposals for cooperative, democratic processes in supervision, proposals which began to appear in the literature several decades ago. It might be said that the model reflects a return to the ideology of yesterday rather than a confrontation with the realities of today. More important, the connotations of the term "family" (although proper to another sphere of society) hardly make the term applicable to a professional model of education. Neither labor unions nor professional groups are families. Unions may utilize the concept of "brotherhood," but the term connotes equality of peers rather than a father-son status differential. Similarly, professionals are *members* of a highly organized group in which kinship relations are seldom, if ever, relevant. On the other hand, neither are schools and similar organizations families. In fact, the very existence of distinct professional groups in society is hardly possible in a kinship (*gemeinschaft*) social or organizational climate.³

³ On the concept of *gemeinschaft* and the related concept of *gesellschaft*, see: Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*. C. P. Loomis, translator. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957.

² It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the use by teachers of a "labor-management" rather than a "professional" model. It could well be that the former model is more relevant to the present organizational and administrative structure of schools. Frequently educational administrators, borrowing administrative models from business and industry, have cast teachers in the role of "workers" rather than "professionals."

The central point to be made is that images of cooperation, unity, and family devotion are not always the result of professionalization and, in fact, are not always appropriate terms with which to describe professional behavior. Moreover, with reference to education, it may well be that the enterprise involves a collection of distinct professions rather than a single, unitary professional "family."

A Single, Unified Profession?

Clearly, the implementation of a professional model should receive highest priority in education. Professionalization is essential to improving the effectiveness of the total educational endeavor. It is necessary, however, to understand more fully the nature of the professional model. Without launching a detailed discussion of the theoretical issues involved in defining the term "profession," it is possible to underscore certain characteristics of the professional symbol which relate to the problem at hand. In the following discussion, an attempt will be made to delineate some of these characteristics as they relate to the Commission's report.

At the foundation of the Commission's report is the view that education represents a single, unified profession or, at least, should be considered in this light. The Commission does note that the "complexity of the education enterprise requires differentiation of roles, *functions*, training, and compensation" (p. 24; emphasis added). This differentiation operates, however, within the framework of one total profession. Each differentiated function would appear to represent merely one facet of this total professional body. In other words, education is, according to the Commission, a multifunctional profession.

The existence of a multifunctional profession would seem, however, to be somewhat doubtful. According to Talcott Parsons, one of the key defining characteristics of a profession is "specificity of function."⁴ The ex-

⁴ See: Talcott Parsons. *Essays in Sociological Theory*. Revised edition. New York: The Free Press, 1954. pp. 34-49.

pertise of a professional practitioner, and the authority which rests upon this expertise, refers to a specific field or domain of knowledge and skills. A profession performs a distinctive function in society and utilizes a specific body of theory and methodology. The authority of the professional practitioner, that is, the right to make decisions and issue prescriptions, is limited to the particular sphere in which his expertise lies.

In the case of education, it would seem that the technical competence necessary to administer a complex educational organization is functionally distinct from the competence necessary to teach a class. Ability in one area does not necessarily result in ability in the other. From this point of view, the functional differentiation necessary in a complex educational enterprise would not generate segments within one professional body, but rather would create distinct professions within one organizational setting. Each professional group would be defined according to the specific function which it contributes to the total educational task.

Group Boundary

Functional specificity enables a profession to differentiate between its own professional sphere and other occupational domains in society. The profession, in other words, has a *boundary* which clearly distinguishes the service provided by the group and the group members who will provide this service. This boundary marks off an exclusive domain in which the right to practice is controlled by the profession itself. Frymier refers to this process as one of "drawing a circle" which includes those trained in the behaviors of the profession and excludes those not so qualified.⁵ This right to control professional practice is in some cases, particularly medicine, supported by legal sanctions.

The phenomenon of group boundary has

⁵ Jack R. Frymier. "The Supervisor and His Professional Identity." In: William H. Lucio, editor. *The Supervisor: New Demands, New Dimensions*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1969. pp. 83-102.

several important functions for a profession. Most important, this boundary promotes group identity and solidarity. Ultimately this boundary generates group morale and increases the ability of the profession to control membership.

The control of member behavior is essential to the life of a profession, and the element of control permeates much of what is meant by the term "profession."

It is not possible to analyze fully the complex matter of professional control in the context of the present investigation. Of central importance, however, is the fact that decisions concerning professional practice are made by the profession itself. Persons outside the boundary of the profession do not possess the necessary technical competence to decide matters within the professional domain. Only those who are practicing members of the profession have the competence, and hence the authority, to determine professional practice. Professional decision making is a professional right and responsibility; the locus of control rests with the profession itself. Indeed the hallmark of an established profession is autonomy, that is, freedom from outside control of the content of professional practice.

In the context of the above discussion of functional specificity and professional control, the question of "centers of interest" vs. "centers of purpose" is no longer entirely relevant. Professional self-interest and professional purpose are closely intertwined. The interest of the profession is the function it performs and the purposes it achieves. In protecting professional interest, a profession safeguards professional practice and is thus able to attain its purpose in a more effective manner. Herein lie the major benefits to be derived from professionalization.

The differentiation of professional domains in education engenders several difficult problems for the field of supervision. According to the Commission, the supervisory function is twofold, viz., "the determination of the design of the learning environment as well as the process of carrying out the design" (p. 16). In more traditional terms, this function is defined as "leadership in the area

of curriculum development and instructional improvement" (p. 5).

If, however, teaching is to be a distinct profession (as proposed in the present discussion), the locus of instructional leadership and decision making is perhaps shifted. A professional practitioner is expected to possess expertise in his field. A professional cannot be told what to do in a particular situation but must decide appropriate action on the basis of his own technical competence. A professional consults with and seeks advice from fellow practitioners (within the same professional sphere), but the final decision is his. Ultimately the responsibility for instructional design and improvement would rest firmly with the teacher group. Moreover, the right to determine instructional processes would likewise rest with the teaching profession itself.

A Hierarchy of Authority

Within the domain of supervision the matter of functional differentiation is also problematic. As Turney has noted, multifunctional conceptualizations of supervision dominate the literature in the field.⁶ In other words, supervision itself is often said to involve a multiplicity of functions and duties. Even the Commission defines supervision in terms of the activities of nearly all personnel from principals to assistant superintendents. The lack of clear, precise conceptualizations of the unique contribution of the supervisory function to education merely compounds the professionalization problem for supervisors. In the words of the Commission, "supervisors must reassess the nature of their functions and the procedures they employ in carrying out their functions" (p. 27).

To conclude the present analysis, it is necessary to examine the Commission's view that the professional model will reduce conflict and ensure harmony and cooperation among the segments of the education enterprise. As indicated earlier, this assumption is not necessarily valid.

⁶ David Turney. "Beyond the Status Quo: A Reappraisal of Instructional Supervision." *Educational Leadership* 23 (8): 664-69; May 1966.

In essence, the present control structure of schools reflects a bureaucratic hierarchy of formal authority,⁷ that is, authority based upon position rather than necessarily upon personal competence. Final decision-making authority rests with those who occupy certain key positions in the organizational hierarchy. From a theoretical point of view, such a control structure is hardly applicable to an organization composed of professional practitioners and ultimately may hinder professional effectiveness.⁸ Research findings do indicate that professionals who function within such an organizational setting frequently experience conflicts between professional and organizational demands, reject the reward system of the organization, and are at odds with the organization itself.⁹ Moreover, research indicates that the movement toward greater professional identity by a group within a bureaucratic organization generates a marked increase in conflict and confrontation.¹⁰ Assuming no change in the present control structure of schools, the implementation of a professional model would appear to increase rather than decrease the potential for tension and conflict.

The matter of organizational conflict

⁷ On the "close and positive correlation between the ideal bureaucratic model proposed by Weber and the structure of educational organizations," see: Robert L. Saunders and John T. Lovell. "Negotiations: Inevitable Consequence of Bureaucracy?" *Educational Leadership* 26 (4): 351-54; January 1969.

⁸ For an excellent discussion of this question together with several suggestions for the conduct of professional organizations, see: Amitai Etzioni. "Authority Structure and Organizational Effectiveness." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 4 (1): 43-67; June 1959. See also: Warren G. Bennis and Edgar H. Schein, editors. *Leadership and Motivation: Essays of Douglas McGregor*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1966. pp. 21-29.

⁹ For a summary of this research, see: Peter M. Blau and W. Richard Scott. *Formal Organizations: A Comparative Approach*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1962. pp. 60-74. See also: W. G. Bennis, N. Berkowitz, M. Affinito, and M. Malone. "Authority, Power, and the Ability To Influence." *Human Relations* 11 (2): 143-55; May 1958.

¹⁰ On this point, see: Richard H. Hall. "Some Organizational Considerations in the Professional-Organizational Relationship." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 12 (3): 461-78; December 1967.

can be viewed from a slightly different frame of reference. To extend the professional model, it is possible to conceive of each functional specialty in the school in terms of a particular professional domain which is assigned full professional status.

Assuming also that the control structure were modified to accommodate this development, the result would be an enterprise conducted by distinct but interrelated professional groups.

At first glance this model would seem to be the ideal of cooperation and harmony. By its very nature, however, it would appear that tension is an essential ingredient in this model. Without tension or, in the Commission's words, a "balance of power," the distinctive boundaries of each professional group would easily be clouded. An "ours-yours" differential would be imperative to maintenance of professional identity and functional specificity. The close interrelationship and interdependency among the professional groups would seem to generate tension and maintain a level of conflict necessary for survival. The key point here is that tension and conflict are not necessarily deleterious but rather perform essential functions in the maintenance of organizational health and vitality.¹¹

The analysis contained in this paper is necessarily brief and hypothetical. Several tentative conclusions would seem, however, to have emerged. In general the Commission's concern for the "negative ramifications" of negotiation tactics would seem to be misdirected. Rather than lamenting the "evils" of negotiation, the Commission should rejoice in the realization that this process has called attention to the lack of specificity surrounding the supervisory function and the other professional functions in education. More significant, this process has injected into the educational enterprise the important element of tension, without which professional life in schools is impossible. □

¹¹ For an analysis of the positive functions of social conflict in the maintenance of group boundaries and solidarity, see: Leo A. Coser. *The Functions of Social Conflict*. Glencoe: The Free Press, 1956.

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