

# *Educating Teachers for Collaboration*

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**A** PRIME incentive urging teacher collaboration is the educator's own need to influence affairs, to regard himself as a potent force, a person of significance. Although such desires have been common to men of all occupations throughout time, more than ever before their achievement depends upon acceptance of the collaborative principle. That people in general are reluctant to accept this principle is illustrated by the substantial disparity between the kinds of roles our society requires and the symbolism with which we are able to celebrate their values. For instance, even though the talents of the "organization man" are indispensable, the very term is offensive to us.

If we were asked to conjure heroic myths about salesmen, office clerks, or assembly line workers, it would certainly strain our moral vocabulary. Instead we prefer to honor the cowboy, detective, bull fighter, and sportscar racer because these types embody the virtues our moral vocabulary is equipped to celebrate, namely individual achievement, individual exploits, individual strength. Most of our moral references derive from another era, the frontier days when both measure and symbols of excellence stressed a need for independence, autonomy, self-reliance, being and making it "on your own." It is not that these traits are unworthy today but that their expression and relevance as an exclusive

design for influence assume the bygone conditions of frontier life (Berger, 1963).

How an allegiance to time-honored personal qualities can generate feelings of impotence is seen in Green's (1968) modern rendition of the good Samaritan parable. In his version, a man driving down the highway finds a poor unfortunate person in the ditch who has been robbed, beaten, and left to die. The driver stops, cares for the victim, and brings him to the nearest motel at the next exit where he arranges medical assistance and leaves enough money to pay for the victim's convalescence. The driver then goes on his way feeling he has been helpful. But suppose the next week the same events are repeated and so on week after week. Under these conditions, the good Samaritan ceases to be a model of the moral agent and becomes instead the picture of an unwise and ineffectual man who relies exclusively on his own resources to correct an injustice.

He must go on to find out who patrols the road and what steps can be taken to prevent a recurrence of the crime. As soon as he raises such questions, the good Samaritan is inquiring about the community resources necessary to correct a dangerous situation.

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By adopting this procedure, he must no longer assume himself to be one of the few people with good intentions who by himself is incapable of effecting needed change. Rather, he continues to regard himself as important and accountable but realizes that to influence events the execution of his responsibility takes place in a different sphere.

By recognizing that our images of the moral agent primarily celebrate the righteousness of the individual, we can see why in urban America the symbols indicating our duties to neighbors are experienced less as wrong than as irrelevant and why so many people are perplexed not about what they ought to do for others but how to do it. On the frontier it was common for neighbors to travel miles in order to erect a new home for the family whose house had burned. Action was immediate, direct, and significant.

Today, however, our neighbors number in the millions, they are unknown to us by name, and the traditional method of help is inapplicable. It seems in contemporary society that the fulfillment of some responsibilities is highly social and political. What is required is not so much a person's strength as an individual but his readiness for corporate and social action. This presumes he has learned how to collaborate (Green, 1968).

## A New Achievement Orientation

Just as the role of citizen seems to require collaboration, the same can be said for the teacher role. My own recent research designed to predict the success of beginning inner city teachers raises the possibility that, by omitting as an evaluative criterion the ability to achieve via collaboration in favor of an exclusive concern for the ability to achieve via independence, we may inadvertently be eliminating from education some candidates who could serve well in the classroom (Strom and Larimore, 1970). In brief, this work involved the administration of a large battery of potential psychological correlates to a group of elementary staff newly assigned to 11 separate ghetto schools located in a Midwest urban center.

During their initial year of inner city teaching, the performance of each participant was monitored and rated by public school and university observers to produce four criterion measures. By using a step-wise regression analysis as the test selection methodology, a parsimonious subset of psychological measures was identified, yielding a highly accurate prediction for each of the criterion measures.

The major finding presented for elaboration here is that while achievement via conformance is an excellent predictor of inner city teacher success ( $>.05$  on three of four criteria), achievement via independence is not. According to its author, *Achievement via Conformance* is a California Psychological Inventory submeasure designed to identify those factors of interest and motivation which facilitate achievement in a setting where conformance is a positive behavior (Gough, 1964). To score high on this measure indicates that a person is capable, cooperative, efficient, organized, responsible, stable, and sincere; he is persistent and industrious, one who values intellectual activity and intellectual achievement. By contrast, the CPI subtest *Achievement via Independence* identifies those factors of interest and motivation which facilitate achievement in any setting where autonomy and independence are positive behaviors. High independence scores indicate the person is forceful, strong, dominant, and foresighted; a self-reliant individual with superior intellectual ability and judgment.

In summary, when the ratings of a teacher-educator and principal serve as criteria, having more or less *Achievement via Independence* does not seem to influence the assessment of inner city performance, whereas to *Achieve via Conformance* contributes directly to recognition as an effective teacher. In other words, *Achievement via Independence*—the criterion for success as a college student—may not prepare one for the collaborative role needed to succeed as a teacher. After college, unable to accommodate the teacher reward system by which satisfaction accrues from united effort rather than grade-getting behavior, some beginning educators leave the classroom for

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other occupations where the competitive orientation still applies and the self is celebrated. It should not be surprising that persons trained to achieve alone later find it difficult to succeed together. Yet somehow they must make the switch. Operationally defined, collaboration represents the transition from student behavior and its reward system to behaving like a faculty member whose authenticity reflects mutual intention and risk.<sup>1</sup>

However necessary learning to collaborate may be, it is unlikely to eventuate in the absence of proper training. Yet for most undergraduates, teacher preparation seldom includes working with colleagues. Instead,

<sup>1</sup> To enlarge the target, there is little doubt that some professors remain students all their lives—students in the poorest sense of the word. That is, having been so extensively trained for autonomous behavior, they fail to perceive conjunctive effort as necessary for them. To exempt themselves from cooperative pursuit, such persons usually express their aversion in terms of academic freedom. Obviously, if one is himself unable to work with others, he cannot train students to value group enterprise.

common practice dictates a competitive, individual orientation. Collaboration is forbidden and the talent of others is viewed as self-misfortune. This procedure which produces self-adequate loners perhaps made sense in the days of one-room schools. Teachers then had exclusive responsibility for their students and found it unnecessary to get along with colleagues in faculty or curriculum meetings because there were no colleagues. Today, however, the knowledge explosion, availability of resource personnel, and the viability of group-initiated change combine to make unreasonable any teacher preparation program which excludes the principle of shared responsibility.

There is a disturbing phenomenon among teachers who are untrained in communal efforts. When questioned about some obviously needed change in the school where they work, they often reply, "Yes, I know it should be changed. But what can I do? I am only one person." That is the major problem. They do not see themselves as persons in a

group; they have not been trained to perceive themselves as members of a faculty which as a unit can modify conditions within its influence. Their feeling of impotence or being unable to alter circumstance derives in part from the discrepancy between what a teacher has been trained for (individual competition) and what needs to be done to better serve children and effect institutional change (group collaboration).

This bears special significance for inner city educators in view of their need to cope with such a wide range in student abilities and the fact that their instructional influence is relatively unmatched by the family. It is becoming increasingly apparent that many more of poverty's children will grow up mentally and physically healthy only if we abandon that assumption which implies each teacher's talents are sufficient to meet all the needs of all his students. The beneficial effect of teacher influence can be greatly enlarged through staff collaboration.

The old cliché that "Knowledge is power" apparently stands in need of revision. It is paradoxical that some of the most knowledgeable people today feel relatively impotent and the more formally learned they become the less power they experience, while others

of less schooling feel great power and exert much influence. Let us ask whether we have learned anything from the students who found that individual complaints about school register little change but that collective dissent yields institutional accommodation. Surely their lesson for us is not that noise or volume is power.

Have we learned anything from the poor who as individuals have found that rational petition is routinely denied but that corporate demand brings concession? Surely their lesson for us is not that violence and intimidation are power. These and many other groups, all somewhat less knowledgeable than educators, have experienced power and registered significant change because they have learned that cohesion is power; in community resides power; by working together people can accomplish what individually has been shown to be impossible. What educators need to recognize is partially obstructed by their orientation toward individual effort, autonomy, and independent achievement. Somehow we must understand that knowledge is indeed power when men of different minds and mutual purpose combine their talents and voices to collaborate in enabling child development.

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