



# A New Professionalism

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**T**HE inability of citizens and educators to assess realistically the role of education in times of churning racial anxieties and fears is a tragic failing. The tendency to view the teacher as a kind, nice, and harmless lady in the "little red schoolhouse" has virtually disappeared. Apples for the teacher have been replaced by the weaponry of hostility and sarcasm. The attempt to inject into the classroom the unreal world of Hansel and Gretel, Jack and the Beanstalk, and Alice in Wonderland may still kindle sparks of wonderment in the eyes of children, but their dull, drab existence outside of class makes these efforts mockery.

The clutching to the heart of such values and limited insights in relation to currently unfolding events should notify teachers that the time has arrived for a New Professionalism. Not one that completely discounts contributing textbooks and techniques, but rather one that correlates direct application of the world outside of the classroom; its ethnic and geographical divisions; the roar of urban transition; the creeping tide of separatism; the destructive mark of white racism; the oppressive moves to curb liberalism; and the recalcitrant postures of conservatism. Add to this the imposing eyes of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; the angry protests of black militancy; the retreat by white America to the suburbs; the inequities and dire contrasts of school; *ad infinitum*.

It should be clear that the professionalism that developed within the "little red schoolhouse" is now lost in the myriad of change. The New Professionalism must view these changes as alarms. As a part of the city, the classroom becomes not only the magnet that draws children but also becomes a thermometer that measures the social temperature of our times.

Integration of staff presents a challenge to the New Professionalism. It is not an ideal situation, neither can it be exhibited as a positive change without our reminding ourselves of a few negative consequences.

## Integration Identity Crisis: Negative Factors

Staff integration, within black schools (with pupil desegregation not in sight), occasions alarm from both black students and teachers. Although this subject was not dealt with in depth in workshops, it revealed itself to be an underlying concern within the black school community. On the other hand, some black teachers and parents were totally oblivious to the problem of identity. The ramifications of racism as an institutional force are completely unknown to many

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blacks. For example, when a racism chart (swirls) was drawn to illustrate the manifestations of white racism in the black community, blacks were as astonished as whites at the connective linkage. In the hands of a white teacher, lessons from white-oriented textbooks and materials present a threat to black identity. The white teacher, even devoid of all racist tendencies and actions, will still simulate the image of power, authority, and control which the black child will soon believe to be the natural order to which his life must be geared.

In the primary grades particularly, even though textbooks have been adjusted to include black presence and the black experience, their treatment is noticeably different from the treatment of the white middle classes. It is as if blackness is being explained to whites. Current textbook orientation, therefore, in spite of black inclusion, is toward viewing blacks as "others." If the teacher is also white, double white images of power and importance are the consequences.

In one black elementary school, for example, a suggestion which was quickly picked up and expanded was to prepare lessons from the black perspective and setting, with whites being the race explained and viewed as persons unlike blacks. This could be accomplished by creating locally more pertinent materials and cutouts as an extension of current texts. In this way, the image of power and importance would be reduced considerably. This change in focus, or temporary adjustment, would further assist the presence of the white teacher, making it both more acceptable and believable. Pupil desegregation is and should be the ultimate goal, but staff integration and the black identity crisis must be creatively dealt with in the interim.

In a city that trembles with the fear of mushrooming black presence and where the delicate issue of racial balance becomes the weapon of political opportunists, the stage is being set for a new school year which unquestionably will project the future of the schools' promise or demise.

The decisions made at the start of this

delicate balance are crucial ones. Conversely, the community reactions to those decisions will be dramatic ones. A school board, already committed by policy to advance desegregation within the system (spurred onward by HEW), is now subjected to the emotional tremors of people. As a part of that community mix, and elected by them, the board acts out a vivid microcosm of the city's racial concerns. Each decision is myopic in light of responding to a constituency that invested the board with authority. The demand for statesmanship and profiles in courage unfortunately will be difficult to surface. Cities, according to the historical record of humans to avoid conflict, face the threat that such conflict and confrontation on racial issues might become the ammunition to be utilized by the conservative community in an all-out effort to still the tide of educational and social progression.

This time-worn weapon unfortunately measures conflict only in the limited time span of its existence but seldom in terms of the future of children. Neighborhood schools, the negative effects of bussing, violence and crime in the inner city, the trend of blacks toward segregation, open school enrollment opportunities, and financial cost of desegregation are strong arguments on the side of institutionalized racism. None of these approaches can be advanced as a single method by and through which an ideal education may be achieved. Yet what must be realized is that a white-black city, with ghettos posturing dire contrasts, is not an ideal city. It is impossible for idealistic education to be achieved in an environment that is unrealistically divided. These divisions are more than geographical; they are psychologically and physically punitive to both white and black children. These divisions establish foundations for mediocrity of scholastic accomplishments, and inferior and superior complexes in those geographical areas where the contrasts are sharp.

The necessity for reversing institutional trends calls for painful awareness, but it is the pangs of pain that blind and dull the senses. The awareness is further hampered by the insensitivity of whites to blacks that

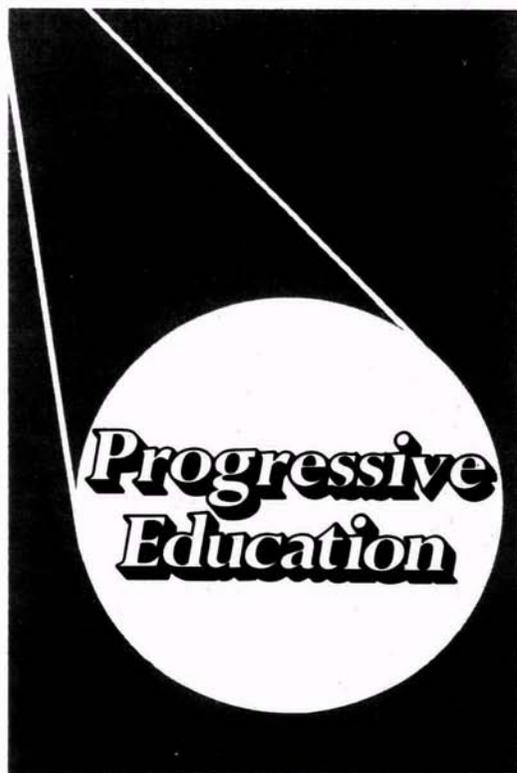
was nurtured by isolation and institutionalized by slavery. This needed awareness is frustrated by the narrow myopic view of black progress. In a city with a black mayor, with established and developing black business, and with advancing employment opportunities, these attainments by blacks are widely advertised by a guilty white community as evidence that things have changed—that blacks now have all doors open to them. White awareness is then restricted by the slowly emerging middle class blacks. Racial isolation and ghettoization are not considered to be problems any more—but conditions that blacks ought to change themselves—now that “progress” has been given them.

As a school system faces the desegrega-

tion transition, educators, administrators, and teachers must be cognizant of the deep mind-set of the white conservative community which has been victimized by limited insights and unsupportive rationales of black progression. When their own prejudices and racism (overt and covert) are added to the unnatural social mixture described, all efforts toward desegregation will be subjected to prevalent community resistance.

Political forces, astutely aware of the mood of the city, attempt to adjust to the dominant feelings of those who will ensure their continuance of control and power, or will take advantage of elections based upon the balances of the scale that tilts in the direction of their personal ambitions.

The forces of white racism can now be



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seen as the controller and manipulator of events that have direct and unsavory consequences for integrated quality education. This can be accomplished without any one person or organization being openly identified as a bigot or racist. No one needs to be thus exposed. The dynamics of the community fears and rationalizations, properly articulated and diplomatically stated, aid most conservatives and racists to pose under the banner of thinking, rational liberals.

Thus, when one man, such as a superintendent of schools, or a board of education establishes policy and administrative procedures to correct the inequities of this historical blindness that has led to racial isolation in the public schools, a battleground is established. Confrontation is assured. Unfortunately, the generals of desegregation are hampered by a limited army of believers, while the proponents of the status quo, the holders of racial fears, and the camouflaged white racists are legion.

The future of the city—its white and black children—hangs in that balance. Projections for the city and its future citizens are avoided as topics of discussion by conservatives intent on turning back the clock, or at best, stopping the hands where they are now postured. The here and now replaces tomorrow and the villains are cast as all those who dare shake the present and risk the future.

## The Black Community

Long accustomed to the tug of war, initiated at first by the black revolution, highlighted later by the Kerner Commission, and recently mandated by intervening federal officials (HEW), the black community grows increasingly weary—almost resigned—to unfolding scenes that either way do nothing to relieve the trauma of their daily existence. Even though the school system becomes the new battleground, there are no black generals left to assemble a black army to assault the bastions of white racism. It is not, however, complete resignation, it is more of an adjustment, the viewing of viable alternatives lest once more their futures are decided

by the determining factors of white attitudes and controls. When blacks are left to contemplate that a school election could place one man on the board who would decidedly shift the welfare and future of black children, as well as the city, they no longer feel outright anger, but disgust and disdain.

A deeper entrenchment within the black community is now viewed as the only hope for future survival. Although blacks have long been accustomed to viewing the future with eyes of hope, that hope, because of past white failures, is gradually dissipating.

The desegregation movement calls upon the blacks, not the whites, to become pioneers in the deep white ocean of uncharted waters, with strong currents and formidable shoals clearly visible. It is the black child who will eventually be required to be lifted from his natural habitat, while all that is asked of the white child is to adjust to a new face. Such lifting of the black child will not be fought by black parents, even though the shifts are not enthusiastically welcomed; change, in any form, rekindles the low embers of hope for the best.

The teacher alignment, therefore, with all of its built-in negative factors (image of continuous white dominant presence in black settings, etc.) offers to the system, and to blacks, a psychological upbeat. The abrupt corrective measure creates a forced awareness of the underlying problems that have long been ignored: a panel for open discussion; a sensitivity setting for past teacher insensitivity; the visible example of idealistic social balances; a laboratory for children who have been denied social and educational experimentation; the weeding out of misfits; the increased need for new meanings of professionalism; a special program in living color; a testing of strengths. All of these produce a foundation that sets the stage for solid measurable advancement without the plea for time, which has long since run out.

Teachers in the arena of desegregation, whether they recognize it or like it, are the new vanguard for the city, the new saviors of the youth, and the new testers of the thin ice that covers up the sparkling water of integrated quality education. □

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