

Professionalism Regained?

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How can school people, now scattered in many different directions, once again take up the long, arduous journey toward professionalism? Only then can educators turn their full attention toward improvement of practice.

JUDGING from the current educational scene, one might reasonably conclude that educators have lost all ambition to make teaching a profession. One might conclude that they have abandoned all effort in that direction, that they have left the path which they had over the years traveled so far. They have, it appears, surrendered to the attacks of the swarms of anti-professional forces of recent years.

It is doubtful, however, that all educators have abandoned all hope. Surely there are educators scattered over the country who fully appreciate the importance of making education a profession. They understand the nature of professionalism in education. They know what to do to make education a profession. They would participate aggressively in a concerted effort in that direction. But they are temporarily disorganized. Were they to become re-organized, articulate, active, they would find a ready response from many educators who have unwittingly yielded to anti-professional influences. They could then in small and large ways launch the occupation once again on the long, arduous course

toward professionalism. They would take the journey step by step and eventually arrive at their goal.

Probably their first step should be to unite in a single-purpose association. A strong association would provide mutual stimulus and make it possible to take concerted action.

Their first undertaking as an association would be to articulate the importance of making education a profession. Their position would be that the importance of professionalism lies first in the protection that it affords to the child, to the parents, to society. It lies second in the potentiality it carries for the improvement of practice. It derives from the nature of professionalism in education. It is symbolized in the credential.

Their next step might be to list, elaborate, and refine the characteristics of the education profession and hence the characteristics of the professional. The list would include at least the following:

1. Mastery of an extensive body of professional knowledge, including the history of education, the philosophy of education, democratic philosophy and practice, methods of research, educational research, educational psychology, growth and development, personality, classroom programs, classroom organization and procedure, materials and facilities, school administration and supervision, ethical relationships

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2. Mastery of an extensive body of academic knowledge and skills with a focus on academic knowledge and skills usable in the classroom at all levels

3. Commitment to a detailed and rigid ethical code, including a consecration and dedication to service to the child and to society

4. Selection from the most competent people in our society, people with the healthiest psyches, with the best mental health, the highest moral standards, the most altruistic motives

5. Autonomy in professional initiative, decision making, and practice, the only limitation on autonomy being professionally established administrative policy and procedure.

Practices To Eliminate

A next step might be to identify and eliminate or undo all of the anti-professional developments that have crept into practice in recent years. Among the most anti-professional and therefore anti-child and anti-society they might identify the following:

1. *Legislative interference with professional prerogative and autonomy.* Interference includes required instruction and required classroom and administrative practice. It includes limitations placed upon such practice. In California, for instance, it includes the use of certain textbooks, the teaching of prescribed subjects, the state testing program, the program in accountability, regulation of professional relationships, treatment of children, graduation requirements. The legislature thus would limit itself to provision for the public school system and to matters of general policy as determined by professional advisers. Similarly, governing boards would refrain from interference.

2. *The use of teacher aides and tutors.* Parents and society must have the assurance that their children are in the hands of fully credentialed workers at all times—in all classroom activities, in the cafeteria, on the

playground. The credential, with all that it means, is their assurance that their children will be treated professionally.

If people without credentials are permitted to work with children, possession of a credential is superfluous. If the credential means nothing, professional training means nothing. All training institutions might well be discontinued, letting teaching become finally, as it is rapidly becoming today, unskilled labor.

3. *Unionization.* Unionization carries with it collective bargaining, sanctions, strikes, overtime pay, selfish welfare activities, hierarchical and dictatorial officialdom, and similar practices. It is highly divisive, driving a wedge between teachers and administrators, for instance, and thus preventing healthy staff unity and effort. It is ruinous to professional relationships. It eliminates administrative responsibility. It perverts or supplants associations of educators devoting their efforts to the improvement of practice.

Unionism is, in short, the exact antithesis of professionalism. It is totally inimical to the professionalization and hence to the practice of education.

4. *Miscellaneous innovations.* The *voucher system*, if extended to private schools, as was its original intent, would quickly destroy the public school system as it is constituted today. If confined to public schools, it would reduce the practice of education to totally unprofessional competition among totally unprofessional mercenaries.

Alternative schools are the ultimate in abdication of professional responsibility and prerogative. Like the voucher system, they reduce educators to the role of mindless panderers to prejudice.

C/PBTE symbolizes the anti-professional thinking that has crept into education. It is aimed at the production of teacher robots.

Accountability programs imposed by legislatures or governing bodies constitute the final denial of professionalism, of professional prerogative, or professional autonomy.

One course, then, would be to form a strong, united, single-minded association of

educators from all levels of the system consciously committed to the professionalization of education. The association would urge upon all training institutions the adoption of a profound, rigorous course of training for candidates for the credential. It would develop and adopt a detailed code of ethics to which all of its members must subscribe. It would initiate and strengthen professional autonomy by influencing legislatures to eliminate all laws limiting professional decision. It would work toward the elimination of aides, tutors, and similar lay roles. It would proscribe union membership or activity on the part of any of its members and it would itself refrain totally from any kind of union activity. It would work toward the elimination of all other anti-professional programs and practices.

Once again launched on the tortuous path toward professionalism, educators could and would turn their attention to the improvement of practice. They would establish an open market for educational thought, research, and reports of practice. They would critically evaluate the philosophy under which we now operate and try to develop a better one. If they developed a better philosophy, they would, of course, develop a better program. All of this they would do from a background of extensive and profound professional knowledge and understanding. The net result to our children would be better lives in a better society.

Such an outcome will take time. It might take generations, because progress in such an intensely human enterprise is bound to be slow. Professional educators, freed from all of the constricting influences existing today and all of the burdensome errors of the past will hurry it along all they can, but they will move deliberately and soundly. They will, however, get there. But shackled as they are today by legislatures and by all other anti-professional forces, they will never get there. They will sink lower and lower and the results to our children and to society will be disastrous.

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