

The Past and Future of Teaching—

You've Come a Long Way

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"Teachers and the conditions under which they work have changed a great deal over the past 200 years. We are on the threshold of becoming a truly professional group in every sense of the word."

EARLY in the history of American school practice the pattern of teaching was dominated by groups of people and sets of social relationships that were often known collectively as the "standing order." This was a complex arrangement serving the interests of the ruling groups who held political power and the aristocratic classes who exerted religious power. Over the years the collective ideal was united with humanitarian liberalism to create the idea of a democratic system of schools supported by the State.

This idea has continued to guide the nature of schooling and resulting teaching practices. Further, this idea was uppermost in Horace Mann's mind as he labored to provide learning opportunities for a greater number of the young nation's children. In fact, two of the specific elements that guided Horace Mann's work remain at the cornerstone of current educational thought and practice. The first element was his unswerving commitment to (a) the ideal of equality of educational opportunity and to his unshakable belief in (b) the power of the public

school to nurture, shape, and influence a sound sense of personal and public virtue and morality in future generations of American citizens. These two elements continue to be the general criteria by which we create standards for judging the impact and worth of teaching.

200 Years of Teaching in America

In early America, the teacher's lot was not an enviable one. A fairly representative description of the teacher's image about 200 years ago indicates that teachers were viewed as unproductive workers, there was no job security, there were many rules of behavior to govern a teacher's personal life, the rate of turnover was high, job conditions were personally unrewarding. There was no consideration of professional status for teachers. The teacher of that day was clearly dispensable and held in very low esteem. Given such a state of affairs, professional practice had to take a back seat to survival.

For quite some time, there has been concern about the nature of the content and instructional patterns that characterize teach-

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ing. In fact, the supervision of instruction grew out of the desire of community representatives to see that teachers remained orthodox in their teaching. While teaching practice and outcomes are still central to the concerns of community members, the nature of accountability in teaching has been broadened considerably.

The teaching content of early common schools was primarily concerned with the ability to read and understand the principles of religion and the laws of our country. The extent to which this was achieved is questionable. This conclusion can be drawn partly on the basis of teacher selection practices and the employment expectations.

Somewhere between the Revolution and the Civil War free tax-supported schools were accepted by the body politic. The teacher's lot took an upward turn and the politics of education were awarded a permanent and important place in the social order. This change in the status of teaching was accompanied by educational leaders gaining influence with leaders in other professions, by scholars writing about the critical contribution of education to the vitality and development of the country, and by states passing the necessary legislation to provide education for all free children.

As the value of education became a widely accepted notion, the need for improving teaching practice through systematic preparation gained much support from all quarters. This led to the establishment of institutions (normal schools) that would be primarily concerned with teacher training. Many of these teacher training institutions were established about 30 years prior to the advent of the Civil War. From the period immediately following the Civil War until the turn of the century, teacher training institutions were established at the rate of two or three per year throughout the United States. This pattern of institution development established the need and means for the continuous education of teachers and provided a broad base for supplying teachers in local communities in all sections of the country. This was a critical step in the professionalization of teaching practice.

By the time the first study of teacher characteristics was conducted in 1911, it was noted that the average age of teachers was 24, they were mostly female and had been teaching about 5 years. As a group they averaged four years of training beyond elementary school. The majority of the parents of these teachers were native born, with fathers working as farmers or tradesmen. In the main, these teachers had to earn their own way. A study completed about 15 years later shows that the demographic pattern did not change much. Some additional characteristics suggested that most of the teachers came from small areas or small towns, had never traveled more than 200 miles from home, had very limited exposure to the fine arts, and read infrequently. These studies served as a catalyst for efforts to improve and broaden the preparation of teachers. The job to be done in 1918 was both massive and extensive for, according to the records of the National Education Association, half of the 600,000 teachers then in the classroom lacked special training and about one-sixth were without even a tenth-grade education. As late as 1926, 15 states still had no definite scholarship requirements for a certificate.

It was not until after the first quarter of the century that teachers began to move toward a more professional style that led directly to changes in how they viewed themselves and were viewed by others. Part of the changes were attributable to the "surge of activity"—chiefly conducted through local and state professional organizations at first,

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then rising to the national level—aimed at achieving better salaries, tenure, higher certification standards, a larger role in setting school policies, and greater personal freedom. Though the tangible gains made toward these aims were slight, they provided the blueprint for professional action up to the present. Steady progress has been made by all teachers in each area outlined and many of the conditions the teachers experienced have reached a level that is acceptable for professional activity.

Professionalization of Teachers

The development of a strong teaching profession goes beyond the special interests and private concerns of teachers and other education personnel. The public welfare is well served when there exists a strong, secure, well-trained, and politically effective profession of teaching that has the wherewithal to contribute to the formulation of public intelligence for solving social problems. In that regard the building of a quality teaching profession serves teachers and other educators individually and contributes to the public welfare.

A profession is an organized interest group made up of people specializing in the same kind of work. As the teaching profession emerged, practitioners were motivated by the recognition of common interests to attempt to form a professional association. These attempts were made during the early days of the profession, and so strong were the motives impelling them to form professional associations, that they will continue their efforts until success comes. The professionalization of teaching is the result of better trained teachers realizing that they possess a certain craft different from other workers in the society. As a consequence, the associations formed by teachers sought to confine membership to those possessing certain minimum qualifications.

How far has the professionalization of teaching progressed? The answer to this question can only be approximated since different aspects of the profession are at different stages of development. There are

six criteria that could be used to judge the level of professionalization teachers have reached. These six criteria are: (a) professions involve essentially intellectual operations with large individual responsibility; (b) they derive their raw material from science and learning; (c) this material they work up to a practical and definite end; (d) they possess an educationally communicable technique; (e) they tend to self-organization; and (f) they are becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation.

Using the six criteria outlined here, we can judge the extent of the progress that has been made toward the professionalization of teaching. Though we have made tremendous strides toward making intellectual operations and individual responsibility a common practice among teachers, we still have not reached a point where this is a reality for the majority. While many teachers are encouraged and permitted to utilize their own thinking about a problem as a basis for determining what action to take in guiding the learning of children, most teachers are not afforded the opportunity to utilize a free, resourceful, and unhampered intelligence applied to instructional problems and to seeking different ways to understand and master them.

There is still too much restriction placed on individual thought and action of teachers by school authorities, professional organizations (including unions), and educational theorists to permit the average teacher to use his/her intellectual talents to make independent decisions and act upon them. As long as teachers' thoughts and instructional activities are controlled by official authority, fixed schedules, programmed instructional materials, and restricted outcome expectations, they will not reach a level of performance on the criterion of utilizing intellectual operations and individual responsibilities to claim significant progress toward professionalization.

The second criterion required by a profession, derivation of raw materials from science and learning, is more commonly present in the lives of teachers. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that new

ideas from basic studies are finding greater acceptance among educators. Much of the content used to train teachers is taken from other disciplines and is adapted to deal with educational and instructional problems. The best example of this criterion's existence is the curriculum reform movement in the 1960's. It can be concluded that materials for teaching practice are derived from science and learning and that they serve as one indication that the professionalization of teachers is moving forward.

The third criterion that helps to determine whether or not teachers have achieved professional status refers to the extent to which they have used material derived from science and learning to achieve practical and definite ends. On this criterion, progress has not been extensive enough to reach levels required in professional standards. Part of the problem is tied to the fact that teachers as practitioners do not utilize the primary sources of knowledge and learning to plan their instructional strategies. There is still too much dependence upon the expert curriculum developer/specialist to provide the teacher with a package that is practical and that achieves intended objectives. Until teachers assume the responsibility for making raw material from science and learning practical for achieving ends they have determined to be most appropriate for the children they teach, we will not have reached a level of dealing with this criterion to justify a claim for professional status for teachers.

The fourth criterion, the possession of an educationally communicable technique, is definitely in evidence among teachers but probably not at a level to meet professional status standards. We have to acknowledge the fact that techniques of practice have been developed and employed effectively and successfully in individual instances. However, we have not been very effective in transporting proven practice to other localities. In this sense, we have not been able to disseminate good practice on a systematic quality controlled basis. A group cannot reach the level of a profession until it is able to educate its members in utilizing the techniques of the trade. While this does occur

among teachers, it is much too haphazard and unpredictable to further the professionalization of teachers at the present time.

On the basis of the fifth criterion, tendency toward self-organization, teachers have made great strides toward professionalization. We have finally reached a point wherein all teachers are members of at least one organized group that they have created to deal with professional issues and problems. In addition, there is almost universal acceptance of the idea that teachers need to organize themselves for purposes of improving both the substance and conditions of professional practice. This trend toward self-organization has already reached the level of professional status and is likely to help teachers make great inroads in achieving the standards required by the other criteria used to judge the extent of professionalization of teachers.

The sixth criterion, increasingly altruistic in motivation, is in evidence and becoming more so. There exists more of a community of feeling, action, and concern among teachers as they have come together to deal with professional issues and problems. However, we have not arrived at the point wherein teachers' professional activities are so definite, so absorbing in interest, so rich in duties and responsibilities that members are completely engaged and involved voluntarily. Further, teachers (including families) have not come to the point of organizing their social and personal lives around a professional nucleus, though the trend is definitely in that direction. Until a total identification with the membership emerges, there will be no development of a strong class consciousness that is a requirement for achieving professional status. On the basis of this criterion, the professionalization of teachers has much room for progress.

This surface look at criteria that are used to judge the extent of professionalization teachers have achieved suggests much progress has been made over the years. Most of the move toward greater professionalization has occurred during the past 25 years. However, the foundation was laid earlier in this century for our present pattern of pro-

fessionalization. We know something about the conditions and the criteria required for the professionalization of teachers and have some ideas concerning where we must go from here. As we employ the past to help understand the present and plan for the future, the specific requirements of professionalization must guide our actions.

During our Bicentennial celebration it is instructive to pause and rethink where we are with regard to the professionalization of teachers. While formulating and adhering to criteria might provide a meaningful blueprint for moving closer to the professionalization of teachers, all contingencies cannot be covered adequately if we do not take into account the reality factors affecting teachers today. Some of the realities to be considered are collective bargaining, alternative schools and programs, free schools, folk schools, school desegregation, and multiethnic education. Each one of these realities has different implications for the direction the professionalization of teachers should take. However, collective bargaining is the one reality that has the power to shape and redirect the pattern of professionalization of teachers. Therefore any notion of the future professionalization of teachers must be sufficiently flexible to take into account changes that result from collective bargaining.

Professionalization in the Future

The future of the professionalization of teachers is closely tied to their ability to make progress in specific areas of teaching. To the extent these specific areas of teaching can be identified and made a part of teacher concerns, we will move closer to the professionalization of teachers that is desired by many teachers. If further progress is forthcoming in this area, there are some patterns that should guide the behavior of teachers. These patterns can be derived from this list:

1. The practice of teaching should have a theoretical base that is known, systematic, and predictive. Teachers must begin to employ a body of theory and knowledge that provides the basis for practice.

2. Teachers must raise their status in the eyes of the members of the community. They must develop enough power to influence decisions that affect the practice of teaching.

3. Teaching must be seen as a career by the vast majority of teachers.

4. The salaries teachers earn must be commensurate with the service performed for the community. A teacher's salary should enable him/her to have a good life.

5. The standards of professional training must be raised to ensure a more highly trained professional.

6. Fragmentation resulting from the many subdivisions and special interests teachers value must be reduced so that the unity of purpose is more common.

7. Teachers will have to be able to avoid pressures exerted on them by special interests. Especially when these pressures are detrimental to sound practice.

8. The personal freedom of teachers must be expanded so that they take an active part in all facets of community life.

9. Teachers' organizations must continue to grow in strength and wisdom. These organizations must be strong enough to serve their members well and clever enough to provide the appropriate leadership and services.

The future of American education is very closely tied to the professionalization of teachers. More specifically the kinds of curriculum that get development and attention and the nature of the instruction will be very much dependent on the nature of professional development that teachers undergo. In terms of the type of education that America's young people will experience in the future, the individual development of teachers is very closely tied to the welfare of the public. As we approach the future we must not forget that professionalization of teachers is likely to be a critical determinant in the direction of the development of our society. The role of the teacher is critical to maintaining and extending the quality of life for all people.

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