

Dreams of a united profession speaking with one voice have fallen flat, but that may not be so bad; there is strength in cooperative diversity.

Prospects for Professional Unity

For more years than we care to count, idealistic educators have cherished a beautiful dream of a strong and unified profession that could speak to the entire nation with the clear authority of a single voice. That dream has been shattered on at least three occasions in the past three decades; a study of those failures should be instructive.

Dream Number One

A professional utopia seemed clearly ahead of us in the mid-50s as half a million members of the National Education Association built their "house of hope," the NEA Center in Washington, D.C. Under one umbrella, diverse professional interests were brought together there: the Department of Classroom Teachers, the American Association of School Administrators, the elementary and secondary school principals associations, and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. There were many others, too, including the subject area councils—all of them, in fact, except the National Council of Teachers of English.

The dream of a harmonious and unified profession knew no bounds. In time, some of us dreamt, the goal of 100 percent membership in the NEA would be achieved at the local level and a great educational and political alliance would then be formed in which educators of all specialties, in schools, colleges, and state departments of education would unite under the grand NEA banner. True enough, there was a minor obstacle to the dream called the American Federation of Teachers. Numerically, the AFT was only a fraction—a tenth or less—of the NEA. On ideological grounds it was discounted

Sam Wiggins is Professor of Education and Robert H. MacNaughton is Associate Professor of Education; both at Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio.

SAM WIGGINS AND
ROBERT H. MACNAUGHTON

as being a "nonprofessional" union organization that dared to strike, on occasion. Clearly unbecoming of professionals!

But those were also the years in which the NEA began to change its tune. First, the classroom teachers felt their Department was dominated by the administrators (NEA presidents were usually school superintendents), and they wanted a stronger voice and higher leadership visibility. Benign paternalism had to go! Second, the AFT's growth was making



inroads into NEA membership. The time had come to revise ethical principles to ensure equitable treatment of teachers at the bargaining table and to swell the NEA ranks to a million or more. The bubble of the dream burst as the house of hope became a Tower of Babel. Many organizations voluntarily pulled out or were pushed out, in order to make NEA "teacher-pure." ASCD, in 1974, was among the last to leave.

Today, whether we need a two-party system of classroom teachers or not, we are clearly stuck with it, and the prospect for a merger of the NEA and AFT, which had flickered faintly in recent years, seems now to

be completely extinguished. A united profession? Hardly, without a foundation of unity within the teaching sector upon which to build.

Dream Number Two

A second version of the Big Dream emerged in the late 60s among diverse teacher education organizations. This movement was spearheaded by the Association for Student Teaching (AST) and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), and resulted in the formation of the Associated Organizations for Teacher Education (AOTE). Over the past decade, NEA joined this new dream of cooperative effort, along with the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, AASA, the National Business Education Association, and more than a dozen other organizations. ASCD was a party to the dream as a temporary member in the late 70s but withdrew from it in 1980 due to limited staff resources for this will-o'-the-wisp search for unity.

The long-range goal of the AOTE was to lay a foundation of solidarity in the education profession so that, gradually, a single voice might emerge on policy issues at state and national levels. The immediate goal was to become a clearinghouse of ideas, policies, and activities, to minimize the threat of professional organizations working at cross purposes, which was so short-sighted and self-defeating. A slightly ulterior purpose was to gain a voting seat on the then powerful National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NEA and AACTE, however, clung precariously to their own balance of power "detente," which delayed this prospect indefinitely. AOTE recently became the Associated Organizations for Professionals in Education (AOPE) in an effort to broaden its base.

In 1980, the AOEPE dream barely survives on a broken shoestring budget. In April, only seven member organizations had paid their annual dues, totaling \$4,801.25. Five organizations had been invoiced without a response. Three others, including ASCD, decided not to persevere with this faint hope. The AOEPE dream remains intact and we must not write it off yet for keeps, but today it is far from vigor and health.

ASCD, meanwhile, began to develop its own "mini-dream" a few years ago in the form of an Educational Leaders Consortium. Its modest goals have been to bring together the elected presidents and staff heads from such organizations as the elementary and secondary school principals associations and the school boards association, to discover what common ground they have and to cooperate without great fanfare or loss of autonomy. More on that concept later.

Dream Number Three

The big bang of a dream, though, came in the late 70s and was an unprecedented combination of professional unity and national clout. The U.S. Commissioner of Education was invited, in 1974, to attend an international conference on "teacher policies" convened in Paris by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). OECD was created under a convention designed to develop policies leading to economic growth and employment in member nations, and to contribute to healthy expansion of world trade on a multilateral, non-discriminatory basis. In addition to the nations of free Europe, OECD membership includes Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The hope for strengthened unofficial cooperation had been fulfilled in substantive ways, and in the process the strategic importance of public education had become increasingly recognized, giving rise to the Teacher Policies Conference.

The Commissioner hastily gathered an American delegation to the Paris conference and designated the Director of the Teacher Corps to chair it. The chief elected leaders of a wide range of national organizations were selected as delegates symbolizing the broad base of American pub-

lic education. Among the organizations chosen were the NEA, AFT, AASA, AACTE, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA-NCPT), the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), and the National School Boards Association (NSBA). The National Institute of Education (NIE) was asked to join the entourage to round out the federal representation.

The organizational meeting of the American delegation spawned a new dream of professional unity. The Big Dream was on again!

The years of 1975-76 were exhilarating for what came to be known as "The Forum." Staff background papers were developed to deal with such matters as financing the schools, the promise and threat of voucher plans, increasing the relevance and effectiveness of inservice education, collective bargaining, and revision of national program practices for improving child care and childhood education. Members of the Forum appeared, individually or in groups, on national programs of CCSSO, AFT, and AACTE. Both privately and publicly, a new level of professional solidarity was taking shape.

Finally, at the initiative of the American Federation of Teachers, a proposal was developed in the area of Early Childhood Education to be established under the auspices of the

public schools. The National Congress of Parents and Teachers endorsed the idea but insisted on a stronger role for parents in program development. AFT quickly concurred. Then AACTE, in its turn, stressed the need for a collegiate-sponsored program of teacher training for the new professional roles. AFT softly acquiesced, indicating this omission to have been largely an oversight in earlier planning. Other adjustments were made until a final "package" seemed agreed upon. The aura of professional unity was incredible.

At long last the Forum was going "public" on a major program in the public interest. Congress would hear from the education profession, virtually in unison at long last, on a heated national issue. A press conference was scheduled in Washington, and elected leaders or chief staff representatives from all organizations within the Forum were to be on hand.

Alas! A few hours before the scheduled press conference, NEA indicated some remaining misgivings about the proposal and raised doubts about their own continuance in the Forum. Veteran news reporters smelled dissension and the dream of unity was dashed to the ground. The organization lives on as a forlorn hope, but the dream of rallying national professional unity is sadly vitiated.



Despite the demise of these grandiose dreams, a strong, diverse profession is yet within our collective grasp. Two "prototype" models of organizations seeking to preserve full autonomy while fostering cooperation among professional "equals" are the Association of Teacher Educators and ASCD. In a less dramatic but perhaps more substantive way, they are developing the "Art of the Possible."

ATE's sometimes agonizing struggle for unity and influence is shown both in its effort to develop a policy on self-governance and its wrestling with other organizations for a fair share of representation in shaping teacher education policies, especially at the state level. The membership of ATE includes strong constituencies both from schools and from institutions of higher education. Politically, then, ATE must remain sensitively

aware of the need to hold an equitable stance on representation within its own organizational governance, and in its alliance with state departments of education.

ATE resolutions during the 70s reflect a growing malaise over attempts to achieve, not a shared system of governance, but a form of monopolistic control, especially as reflected by NEA's so-called "Model Teaching Act," which would vest majority representation in every state licensure commission with members holding teacher's certificates in grades K-12. State departments of education have been pressured to cave in to the Model Teaching Act, and ATE has been instrumental in helping to retain a broad base of governance on teaching licensure matters.

While protecting their own professional turf, ATE has also sought closer links with other associations having similar or compatible interests. In New York and Ohio, for example, joint meetings have been held with the state AACTE which have strengthened and broadened professional fellowship and also joined the groups in promoting or blocking legislation in the educational arena.

ASCD, like ATE, is composed of members from elementary and secondary schools as well as from post-secondary institutions. Unlike ATE, which focuses its attention on teacher education in a somewhat formal sense, ASCD concentrates its energies on improving the making and revision of curriculum, broadly conceived, through the medium of sensitive and skilled educational leadership within classrooms and beyond. ASCD has a long experience, also, of seeking to model a dynamic and democratic professional approach to the governance of American education as a means of improving its quality.

From the standpoint of process, the concept of ideas "bubbling up and trickling down" has been its basic *modus operandi*. ASCD's resolutions process reflects this way of working through a mechanism by which grassroots consensus finds expression in policy resolutions passed during the Annual Conference each March. These resolutions are not empty rhetoric; they constitute a political and educational action program. Each of the 15 resolutions

passed this year by ASCD, ranging from a "balanced education" stance to a legislative action network, reflects the concept of a participatory democracy within our profession.

Beyond getting its own house in order as the first piece of business, at state and national levels ASCD continues to explore prospects for timely joint efforts—what may be called "ad hoc coalition." No two organizations will find themselves in agreement over the gamut of issues facing them, but they can make progress together if they will search out joint territory.

At the state level, to use Ohio as an example, professional comradery and unity have reached a high water mark as OASCD explores, with state principals associations, the possibility of developing a state professional periodical, which none of the organizations would be able to do single-handedly. At the national level, the previously mentioned Educational Leaders Consortium initiated by ASCD provides a base for cooperative efforts as natural opportunities present themselves.

A Simple Recipe for Strong Professional Governance

On the one hand, we have witnessed the illusion of national professional unity in the sense of a single voice speaking for the profession of education. In the absence of a genuine meeting of the minds, a single voice is bound to sound a spurious tone. At best it may be dismissed as a utopian pipe dream.

On the other hand, we can take heart at the degree of professional unity and strength displayed by exemplary professional associations, and at the open outreach toward cooperative action and close communication reflected by them. With these two views in mind, we subscribe to a "doctrine of limited goals" which may be genuinely achievable and offer a self-evident recipe for their attainment. There are only three ingredients.

First, we must recognize our individual duty to keep one eye on our professional responsibilities while at the same time looking out for our own personal well-being. One day we handle our collective bargaining role with fervor, within the bounds of ethical constraints. The next day we're selflessly involved in a cause,

without concern for profit or prestige. It is this balance of professional altruism with self-interest for which we must struggle before we can contribute to the same balance and perspective within the profession as a whole. Our individual role becomes more difficult if our institutional role runs counter to our personal perceptions of appropriate behavior. Even so, that is the *sine qua non* of professional self-governance in the collective sense. As individuals within associations, we can change the script or give the organization a tilt in the right direction.

Second, we must seek out ways to cultivate progress by organizational "ad hoc coalition." Through developing and maintaining continuous lines of open communication, associations can find an increasing amount of common ground and press together with multiplied strength in ad hoc coalitions. The ACOPE may yet find its niche in this context. The need for it is undiminished.

Third, as we find our associations at variance with one another, either with regard to goals or the means for achieving them, we must establish clear ground rules so that occasional conflict situations will not rupture our potential for joint efforts.

As we look down the trail of shattered dreams, we come to a new perspective. Perhaps it is better, after all, that these dreams did not succeed. A monolithic profession could have come only at the exorbitant price of freedom of dissent. Our dream could have become a nightmare; neither the nation nor the profession would benefit from the Orwellian "one speak." Let us be thankful these big dreams did not work, and set for ourselves the less dramatic goal of making a variety of little dreams come true. ■

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