

Teaching as a Profession: A Goal within Reach

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

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271
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I am a professional
teacher. My skills
are on display.
Address comments
to Principal Smith
at 555-1234.

Change the "teacher" to "driver" and this sign will be easily recognizable. It is commonly seen on the back of trailer-trucks driving our nations highways (Goodlad, 106). But what does the sign mean, and how does it apply to the teachers in our schools?

When seen on the back of a truck, this sign implies that the driver has a "mastery" of the gears of his vehicle, that his provided service is special in some way, and that his delivery will be as efficient and safe as possible (Goodlad, 106). Are these the principle characteristics of a profession? If this is so, ask again, how does this apply to the teachers in our schools? What kind of response would a sign like this receive?

At first, this seems to be quite ludicrous, but at further investigation, it brings to the surface many questions about the word "professional". Can any sign or educational degree be hung on a person's wall thereby declaring him a professional? If not, what does it take for an individual to be known as a professional?

Joseph W. Newman of the University of South Alabama believes that the three major characteristics of a profession are as follows: a profession performs a unique, essential service for society, has a defined body of knowledge and has autonomy. Because teaching is an

occupation that only fulfills these standards to an intermediate level, some choose to label it a "semi-profession" or an "emerging profession", a phrase with more positive connotations (91).

If, however, teaching can only be called a "semi-profession", what will it take to elevate it to a profession? Because of the controversy over teacher professionalization and the apparent need to reach this goal, a recent report was issued by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. This 1986 report, A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century, proposed fundamental reforms for the teaching occupation (Newman, 47). These reforms, when applied to Newman's three characteristics of a profession, help to put education on the track to becoming a profession and educators becoming professionals.

A profession provides for society a unique and essential service. This is Newman's first characteristic of a profession, one which is, contrary to common belief, concisely fulfilled by education. It has been vehemently argued by some that education is not unique. After all, anyone can spread around knowledge, or at least information, and nearly everyone has done so at some point or another. Many people instruct others on how to do jobs. Parents teach their children how to tie their shoes, how to say thank you and please, how to count and say the alphabet, and sometimes even how to read before they get to school. It is a general attitude that anyone can teach, but perhaps the uniqueness of public education can be better revealed by discussing the purpose of the school.

In an article for Phi Delta Kappan, Elaine Yaffe argues that society has pronounced schools to be a "cure-all" for its ills. With

the consequential role expansion from educator to societal "band-aid" has come an inadequate response from schools and an inevitable lack of respect from the public (452). Obligation to report suspected child abuse cases, secretaries and volunteers spending a total of 4,597 hours checking children's immunization records, and pressures to institute day care before and after school (453) are some examples Yaffes cites using the Colorado Springs District II schools as a reference (452).

Yaffe seems to strike the key problem when she explains that:

Last spring a Colorado County health department asked a high school to supply it with a spring clean-up of the city; some District II students were excused from classes to "serve the community." (A worthwhile experience, perhaps, but did it do anything to improve SAT scores, a source of criticism?)

(453)

Society is expecting schools to live up to a double standard, and the schools are failing. Presently, it appears that schools are "neither educating young people nor adequately bringing them up" (Yaffe, 454). And so the pendulum must swing in one direction or another. Society must allow schools to return to their academic role.

The uniqueness of teaching can only be found in its academic role. It is also this role that secures the essential service education provides. The roots of this essentialism can be traced to our Founding Fathers who established what would become our public education. According to Thomas Jefferson, the democracy which had been built could not survive without education for all citizens. Education was to make available to all the knowledge necessary to

"exercise the responsibility of citizenship", thus serving a democratic society (Ornstein, 165).

The content of democratic education allows a citizen to understand public issues and therefore make conscious decisions. According to Stephen M. Cahn, in Education and the Democratic Ideal, this citizen must be able to communicate clearly, have knowledge of history, natural and social science, math, literature and foreign languages, and be able to "think clearly and to recognize fallacious reasoning."

It is the responsibility of our educators to provide all students with such a democratic education. Students cannot be formed to fit our capitalistic economy where social structure determines one's advantages or disadvantages. Each child can be given the tools to make sound democratic citizens. This responsibility of educators is what exemplifies the unique and essential service they provide to society. Again it was Thomas Jefferson whose words carry on. "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and will never be" (Ornstein, 163).

The second characteristic of a profession, according to Newman, is that the profession possess a defined body of knowledge. For example, the public will generally agree that lawyers are experts on the body of knowledge known as "law" and that this knowledge is a result of diligent educational training. Any doubt left in the minds of the public is then put to rest through the Bar examination, the last proof that a lawyer is competent in his area (Newman, 93). Perhaps what educators must learn from this example is the need for more strength in teacher education and consistent standards for certification.

Historically, however, teacher education has been a battle grounds for reform. Schools of education have vacillated continuously between the argument for strict scientific training on how to teach and the argument that the "art of instructing others" came naturally through individual intelligence (Newman, 53). According to Richard Wood, president of Earlham College, schools of education have made their mistake by trying to teach people how to teach. Again in reference to the law profession he explains by saying, "Law schools do not teach people how to practice law; they equip them to learn that practice (14).

Considering these comparisons, what then is the body of knowledge that a school of education should be passing on to its students? And what basic structure should be followed as a guide to the education of educators? The content needed to fill this emerging structure becomes more apparent only after the framework itself has been examined.

There have been several recent proposals to change the undergraduate degree for a teaching major. The Carnegie Forum suggests the idea of a four year degree dealing with the student's academic area of interest. Following this liberal arts degree, a master's degree in education would be required for full certification (Newman, 60). Critics of this proposition say that it is detrimental to professional education, but the report puts the issue into the positive by saying that teacher education "would be lengthened to five years rather than cut back to one" (Newman, 60).

An example of a student progressing through this structure would be one who wishes to teach mathematics at the secondary level. He would first receive his degree through the department of mathematics,

while taking only one or two education courses during those four years (Newman, 61). At that point the graduate is allowed to teach. However, before he can become fully certified, he must return to the university for a master's degree in education. This new structure would also apply to elementary education majors. These students would now be required to have an undergraduate major in the areas of language and literature, mathematics, science, social science, and the arts. In addition, the student would fulfill hours "roughly equivalent" to a minor in the other four areas (Newman, 61).

This structure of teacher education has been implemented in several institutions but has met resistance from many universities asked to test the theory. One reason for this resistance, according to Newman, is the loss in a money-making undergraduate program. He ridicules this prioritized cowardice pointing out that "In smaller state universities and four-year public and private colleges, the change could touch off a riot. Why, it would threaten faculty jobs. It would deprive undergraduates of a popular major. I would..." (61). Obviously, these excuses have little to do with the quality of teachers the university would produce.

Unfortunately, because of the longitudinal implications of such a structural change, very little can be determined about its effectiveness. It appears as though, however, this new type of degree could only strengthen the base of knowledge of the teachers coming through this program. After concentrating on a specific area of specialization, the education student could then concentrate on theories and practice of education, which leads to another area of discussion. What body of knowledge should be taught in schools of education?

Returning to the law profession, it seems quite obvious that students aspiring to be lawyers study law. So what then do students aspiring to be educators study? Education? Teaching? The latter seems to be the most accessible answer, but what can be defined as the study of teaching? We must also ask ourselves that if "very few classroom teachers conduct, much less publish, research on teaching" (Garrison, 488), how can a scientific knowledge about teaching be built?

James W. Garrison of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University continues his discussion of teachers and their scientific base of knowledge in the following way:

Since they do not produce research there is a very real sense in which the scientific knowledge base of teaching is not the intellectual property of classroom teachers at all unless they purchase it from the original owners. Of course teachers have a great deal of practitioner knowledge, but because only scientific knowledge is considered legitimate knowledge their practical knowledge is devalued to the point where it imparts little if any power to the practitioners who possess it. When I say that practical knowledge imparts relatively little power to teachers I do not mean that it will not make them better teachers, I only meant that teachers may find it difficult to document and demonstrate their abilities publicly unless the scientific research base detects and legitimates their knowledge. So far this has not been the case.

(488)

This passage demonstrates the dilemma connected to the base of

knowledge for teacher education. Considering the lack of such a scientific base, the education of educators must achieve its goals through alternative means.

This alternate route to a sound base for teacher education must include a broad liberal education, a strong base in the specific teaching field (Newman, 55), and a foundation in social and educational theory and ideology (Giroux, 163). Carnegie's proposal for an undergraduate degree free from education courses leaves ample room for the first to areas to grow. John I. Goodlad, director of the Center for Educational Renewal at the University of Washington, Seattle, writes that one of the voids in education is that students are allowed to "side-step the knowledge of our civilization that all teachers should have" (108). Taking courses in humanities, arts, and sciences during undergraduate work broadens a student's scope of views and thoughts and transmits "a common culture" to all (Newman, 56).

The undergraduate degree in specialized training allows a student to become comfortable with his own mastery of the subject. If, however, a student spends his undergraduate work with a major in secondary education, he spends only one-fourth of his time in his teaching field. Although it is said that this student will gain more of the "how" and "why" of teaching, without a greater mastery of his subject, there is no "what" to teach (Newman, 57). The same can be applied to the elementary education major. Too often children lack a sound beginning in arts and sciences, because their primary teachers lacked basic abilities in any of these areas. By requiring a major and for equivalent minors, the Carnegie Forum has begun to hold elementary teachers accountable for these subjects.

Another advantage of this study of the disciplines is given by Harry S. Broudy, of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. He believes such studies would "give the teacher a broader conceptual context of what is to be taught" (63). If, for example, a teacher of English literature does not study English history also, he lacks a framework for the literature. "This is content to teach with, not necessary content to teach to" (Broudy, 63).

The fifth year proposed by the Carnegie Forum is the final step to producing professionally sound teachers. In order to fulfill this goal, the emphasis must be placed on the foundations of social theory.

The lack of attention to critical social theory has deprived student teachers of a theoretical framework necessary for understanding, evaluating, and affirming the meanings which their students socially construct about themselves and school and has therefore diminished the possibility of granting them the means to self-knowledge and social empowerment. For many student teachers who find themselves teaching working-class or minority students, the lack of a well articulated framework for understanding the class, cultural, ideological, and gender dimensions of pedagogical practice becomes an occasion for the production of an alienated defensiveness and personal and pedagogical armor that often translates into cultural distance between "us" and "them."

(Giroux, 163)

In order for a student of teacher education to form his own theory of education, he must be exposed to the American societal culture through the philosophy, sociology, and history of education. The usefulness

for these courses has been questioned however, especially by prospective teachers, because "from such humanistic foundational studies no rules for pedagogical practice can be deduced" (Broudy, 56). Harry Broudy defends such studies by pointing out that "they provide the context of practice rather than the rules for practice" (56). He continues by writing, "Knowledge of social context, therefore, affect the general strategy of education, of appraising the teaching situation in many dimensions, and for making decisions that take account of these dimensions" (57).

Although a majority of teachers reject theory courses as applicable because immediate answers are not made obvious, these studies cannot be abandoned. Rather their usefulness must be stressed. Too often, a teacher cannot comprehend said usefulness until he reaches a void in his own teaching (Broudy, 58). Again, we must not attempt to teach our students how to teach. We must "supply the ideas and attitudes one teaches with, not to, the pupils" (Broudy, 58), through social theory.

Finally, completion of a teacher education program is not sufficient for the certification of a prospective teacher. Indeed, completion of such training is not sufficient for any profession. These professions license persons with respect to performance on an exam, for example the bar or architectural registration exams (Meek, 13). Education, too, has certification exams that all teachers must pass, but the controversy over their content and standards leaves them far from acceptable.

Arguments over tests, such as the National Teacher Examinations (NTE), begin with questions of what can be defined as "general

knowledge" (Newman, 69). To questions such as "Who cares who discovered radium? Where are the Alleghenies, anyway?" and to cries of cultural bias, Newman replies, "the bias is toward a culture they want schools to transmit. It is unfortunate and unjust that he schools do not expose every student to that culture, but every prospective teacher has an obligation to acquire it" (69). And arguments continue with questions of what is needed in the area of "professional knowledge" (Newman, 70). As director of the Rand Corporation's Education and Human Resources Program, Linda Darling-Hammond studied this section of the NTE. She found that for approximately forty percent of the questions, a test taker could answer the question correctly based on his theory of education and not receive credit. Similar controversy has led the Educational Testing Services (ETS) to eliminate the NTE by the year 1992 (Newman, 71).

Also in response to controversy over teacher certification, the Carnegie Forum has set in place the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards with the intent to develop national certification tests. It is their intent to limit the use of multiple choice tests and to instigate the use of essay formats, which allow analysis and choice by the test taker, and performance evaluations, which demonstrate the individual's actual teaching abilities (Newman, 73).

The strengthening of the education and certification of teachers is an important means to establishing a defined body of knowledge for educators. This in turn draws the teaching occupation one step closer to being a profession. The effort must come, however, from all teachers to work together and solve the above controversies together. The Carnegie Forum is working hard to include teachers in decision making, but more must be done on all fronts.

This points only to the final characteristic on the short list for professionals, autonomy. Quite a simple idea. In this context, it means the power of the group to make decisions for the group. Contrary to its simplistic appearance, this is the most important requirement for teacher professionalization. Sally Mertens, an education consultant from Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, and Sam J. Yarger, Dean of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Education, explain the importance of teacher empowerment in the following way:

Central to the understanding of professionalism is an appreciation for the importance of positive morale derived from confidence and pride in one's competence. Morale is intimately related to being able to do one's work in a manner consistent with one's standards and values. A first step, therefore, in the professionalization of teaching must be to ensure that teachers are empowered with the authority to teach in accordance with the professional standards that pertain to their work. (35).

One of the key recommendations of the Carnegie Task Force report was to "restructure the traditional, hierarchical staffing system found in most schools, turning to a group of 'lead teachers' to run the school themselves or having them choose a nonteaching administrator to manage it for them" (Rist, 18). Here the report is referring to the observed system for control. Members of the school board and administrators are given priority over teachers for decisions about what is to happen in the classroom. Even though it is teachers who interact with the students daily and who witness more closely the needs and concerns of the students, the only authority

teachers are able to exercise is the authority for what happens in individual classrooms (Mertens and Yarger, 35). This individual autonomy must give way to a new collective autonomy (Brandt, 24). Perhaps the proposition of a group of teachers having singular control over the school is an extreme example of collective autonomy, but teachers can no longer be denied a larger amount of empowerment.

Dade County, Florida, is one of the most widely known systems to implement one version of the Carnegie proposal. The new contract, built from cooperation between the superintendent of the schools and the president of the union, is based on two requirements. The power must be shared among the teachers and the administrators, and measurable improvement must be shown by the students. Individual schools control the size of the classes, the hours in a school day, and the curriculum to be taught (Newman, 97).

And Dade County is seeing results. Longer hours are being spent by teachers to improve plans for running their school. They are excited about working longer and harder hours to solve their own problems. According to Pat Tornillo, president of the United Teachers of Dade, everyone involved in the reform was told "to approach this as if they had no rules, regulations, or contract provisions and could do what they want to provide the best educational environment for students in their school" (Rist, 17). After dreams are formed into plans, schools are allowed to ask that any restrictive policy, directive or provision be waived. The cooperation and success can be seen by the fact that at last count, 150 waivers had been requested and 150 waivers had been approved (Rist, 17).

Running throughout the push for teacher empowerment are two

strong oppositional concerns. Both deal with the definition of roles, the new role of the principal and the role of the union. Ann Lieberman, Executive Director of the Puget Sound Educational Consortium at the University of Washington, thinks that there are two common misconceptions about the role of principals. On one end of the spectrum there are those who believe that if a school is effective, a principal created this positive environment on his own. At the other extreme, however, are those who see teacher empowerment as the extinction of the principal (Brandt, 26). If both of these perspectives are false, what exactly is the new role of the principal in an empowered school?

In his report on the study of ten principals whose schools have moved toward teacher autonomy, Paul V. Bredeson of Pennsylvania State University sheds some light onto this dilemma of roles. Unanimously, the ten principals answered "no" when asked if teacher empowerment meant the end of principal existence. Even as teachers assume new responsibilities, the principal has connections with the community and social and legal work for the children that he must attend to personally. One principal described his revised role by saying, "You need a person that anyone can call. If for nothing else, just to begin the process, the contact. You have easier access to principals than to classroom teachers." And another explained that to a principal empowerment means "...getting more input. It requires more, not less. More daily things that somebody must do and decide about" (Bredeson, 15). It may even come as a surprise that, generally, the principal's role was increased with new responsibilities (Bredeson, 16).

Bredeson also concludes that role changes for the principal fell into five areas. As planning and decision making is dispersed among teachers, principals recognize that better communication skills are needed and that they can facilitate the improvement of these skills by becoming better listeners. There is also an increase in community responsibility, a step beyond the school. One participant in the study added, "There is a desire for more involvement of principals with the community, forming parent partnerships" (Bredeson 16). The third and fourth areas of change both involve the expectations and perceptions of the principal by others. When parents are concerned or have a problem, they do not understand why a principal must go to a teacher for an explanation, and some teachers still expect the principal to give the orders. Finally, the demand of time has increased. Bredeson states that "six of the ten respondents listed either lack of time or the amount of time required to carry out shared governance processes as the major disadvantage of teacher empowerment in their schools" (16).

A change such as teacher empowerment naturally requires a change in administrative style. The difference between the old style and the necessarily new style can be compared to the difference between a manager and a leader. Pat Tornillo explains:

A manager says, "I'm going to manage the resources we have and direct them where I want them to go." A leader...has vision, recognizes talent and thinking among people, marshals that talent, and gives everyone a piece of ownership in the philosophy and objectives of the school system.

(Rist, 29)

Also in the undercurrent of concern is the fear of teacher unions and their role in empowerment. There is a feeling among some school administrators that teacher empowerment is merely a causeway for unions to attain more power (Rist, 17). Accusations by critics imply that the only beneficiaries of such a change would be the teachers. They claim that moves by the unions to increase standards for education and certification in order to increase salaries and to stop the common lowering of standards in times of crisis are all "self serving" (Newman, 98).

Unions have defended themselves by referring to the American Medical Association (AMA). When medicine was made a highly selective occupation, the benefit was for the public as well as for the doctors. The argument goes as follows:

When shortages of doctors develop today, state medical boards do not allow people with partial or no medical education to fill in, even on an emergency basis; instead, the profession maintains its standards, fees for medical care rise, medicine becomes even more attractive to young people, and a greater supply of licensed, fully trained physicians eventually meets the need...What the public loses in short-term convenience it more than makes up in long-term quality.

(Newman, 98)

To increase the quality of public education is the goal for the teacher unions. Following the steps of the AMA is a means for reaching such a goal.

The president of the American Federation of Teachers (A.F.T.), Albert Shanker, stands strong on his position that a teacher union "is

a vital element of school reform" (Rist, 17). Fortunately, Shanker and the unions are receiving support from outside areas. A bit of this support comes from a recent study done by the Rand Corporation. This study concluded that a strong union is "indispensable" in protecting the teachers and giving them new found confidence. The report continues by saying that if teachers are unorganized or without leadership, no person or group can succeed in persuading them to make critical changes in the classroom (Rist, 17).

Cooperation between union and management committees is a must in order to create successful contracts. Carnegie's Ernest Boyer believes this cooperation can begin only when basic trust is established. He suggests that "teacher engagement" or "teacher participation", terms having a more neutral connotation, be used to differentiate between teacher empowerment and union empowerment and avoid further union/management conflict. Tom Mooney, president of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers affiliated with the A.F.T., believes in the importance of a good contract. He emphasizes his point by saying, "Unless something is in black and white, in print, in specific language, nothing happens..[because teachers]..have seen too many good ideas fail [when] they were badly implemented" (Rist, 17). Only cooperation from both sides can assure satisfaction for all.

As with all changes in a system, the march toward teacher autonomy through empowerment has shown positive and negative effects. As the principals of Bredeson's study pointed out, one of the major disadvantages to this change is the lack of time. This lack of time was apparent in committee work, in pressing decision-making, and in working with teachers (14). Adam Urbanski, president of the Rochester

Teachers Association, says he sees opposition from teachers who "thought they could take the money and run...or think reform is futile" (Rist, 19). Finally, the greatest opposition Ann Lieberman has faced is impatience. New organizations of people and methods of thinking take time to establish themselves. She fears that energy needed to nurture teacher autonomy will fail before any positive effects can start to grow (Brandt, 25).

In all appearances, the positive effects seem to carry the most weight. The Dade County project has produced more excited and harder working teachers. Specifically, these teachers work better in teams, taking on projects and creating solutions together, are more creative and motivational, and provide one another with moral support (Bredeson, 14). Bredeson also accounts for another positive change having to do with new roles within the school. "As lines of authority become blurred, communications become more open, and teachers are more willing to share professional knowledge, insights and concerns" (14). New contracts exchange autonomy and higher salaries for more teacher accountability (Rist, 17). Because teachers have "ownership" of their decisions, they are better prepared to support, defend and deal with what is their own (Bredeson, 14). All of these positive effects, in turn, lead our teachers closer to becoming professionals.

By following such reforms as those proposed by the Carnegie Forum along a basic structure like that proposed by Newman, growth can occur for teaching as a profession. Once reforms have been given a healthy start, the cycle for better schools and better teachers can begin. This cycle begins with higher standards and better education for educators, which leads to a smaller more competent field of

prospective teachers, which leads to a higher salary schedule, which finally leads to an increase in capable students entering the schools of education.

The controversy of salary has not been mentioned thus far. In a brief but to the point statement, one author says, "To be talented and paid for the display or exercise of talent is to be professional. To be talented but not paid for the display or exercise of that talent is to be an amateur" (Goodlad, 196). It is time for educators to have salaries equivalent to members of other professions who have an equivalent education.

Not until recently have teachers even been a majority on committees and task forces whose goal is in one way or another to improve teaching. For some reason, teachers are not trusted or respected enough to make such decisions. Society does not believe that teachers have the students' best interests in mind. Looking elsewhere, would members of society insist on being leaders in the AMA and making decisions that dictate what standards and guidelines a doctor must follow? Why then do they feel so empowered to do so to educators.

Every change mentioned previously can be met. Every goal of the teachers and administrators can be reached. But unfortunately, nothing will change unless the attitude toward teachers begins to change. Teachers must be given the respect they have worked so hard for.

A single teacher, Nancy E. Shumate of Fort Campbell High School in Kentucky, writes that the largest problem for teachers today is "that nebulous something that eats away at teachers self esteem - lack

of respect for who teachers are and what we do" (410). Shumate's article was a direct result of having to defend her actions to a parent, a student, and a janitor in a time period of one week. Respectively, their complaints were that she was not "sticking to the textbook", that she was teaching religion by referring to the bible while explaining a title's significance, and that she had left the desks in a circle at the end of the day (410). These "minor annoyances" caused her to question why everyone "feels free to instruct the instructor" (410).

And how will we know when teaching has reached the level deemed professional? Perhaps it will be when teachers and their practices are no longer scrutinized and questioned. Students will recognize the change when their parents and professors no longer discourage them from becoming an educator. This change in attitude is pertinent to the goal because "teacher will not achieve professional status until the public perceives them as professionals" (Shumate, 410).

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