



New Roles for Educators

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MOST educators and some laymen know that professional roles in school systems are being redefined. Despite general awareness of these changes, the causes are only partially understood and the likely results relatively unexplored. Within the changes already identifiable may lie the forces to bring about the complete restructuring of public education which its critics have been demanding. Indeed, as the necessity to redefine roles gains momentum, public education, often characterized as monolithic, bureaucratic, and incapable of change, may become so responsive and flexible that its bewildering diversity will defy description.

Much current discussion of changing roles is concerned with the effect of teacher militancy and the relationships between teachers and administrators. Other concerns relate to the application of managerial technology, program budgeting, or performance contracting to education. Some see the struggle for governing power as the central cause for role change. Others point to the ultimate effect of technology on learning modes.

Many arguments still center on attempts to standardize role definitions for newfound specializations. While all of these factors have impact in the development of new roles for educators, they are, for the most part, only peripheral, and in some cases

counter, to the basic force which is redefining educational roles.

The Teacher's Role Redefined

The really fundamental change is that "teaching as telling" and the role of the teacher as the dispenser of knowledge are at long last defunct. The thought is not new, of course, because our theory has long considered the role inappropriate. Enlightened teachers have always played a larger role.

Unfortunately, translation of theory to practice has been slow in coming. New conditions now force the issue. These new conditions include a public now convinced that education is too important to be left solely to the educator, a student body which is essentially emancipated from adult control, a society which demands that every individual be a lifelong learner, an explosion of knowledge which ensures the obsolescence of our most recent information, and a technology that can easily perform the knowledge dispensing function.

Assumption of the role of director of learning activities and organizer of learning environments—the role of diagnostician, prescriber, and coordinator—is forced upon the educator. Staffing of school systems to

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play these roles becomes a matter of survival rather than a matter of theory.

Evidence that this change is already upon us is easy to find. While most new school construction seeks "flexible space," the bolder innovators argue for discarding the whole concept of school as a specific building. The idea of "open classrooms" is not only a description of a kind of space but also a new concept in learning method. Teaching teams are commonplace, take on an infinite variety of forms, but more importantly evolve into learning teams.

The use of volunteers, aides, and paraprofessionals multiplies. A "multi-unit" approach to school organization changes grade placement concepts, and a "zero-reject" model for handling atypical children challenges traditional grouping practices. Continuous progress delivery packages of instructional materials and independent learning contracts finally do something about individual differences.

Implications for role changes are far-reaching. Perhaps the most important impact is that only a limited number of roles may have much permanence. Although roles will be more specific to tasks, they may frequently be changed to accomplish new tasks and will seldom be fitted into universally accepted definitions by which the role player can recognize his counterpart.

The old idea that a school building is staffed with a collection of teachers, each like the other, and each assigned a pro-rated number of students, is no longer viable. Nor is it likely that any one conception of a teaching team will be so successful as to become the accepted model or the new standard. On the contrary, in the same way that task forces and ad hoc groups are proliferating in business and governmental operations, much of educational organization may well follow the "ad hoc" model so brilliantly described in Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*.

The Learning Team

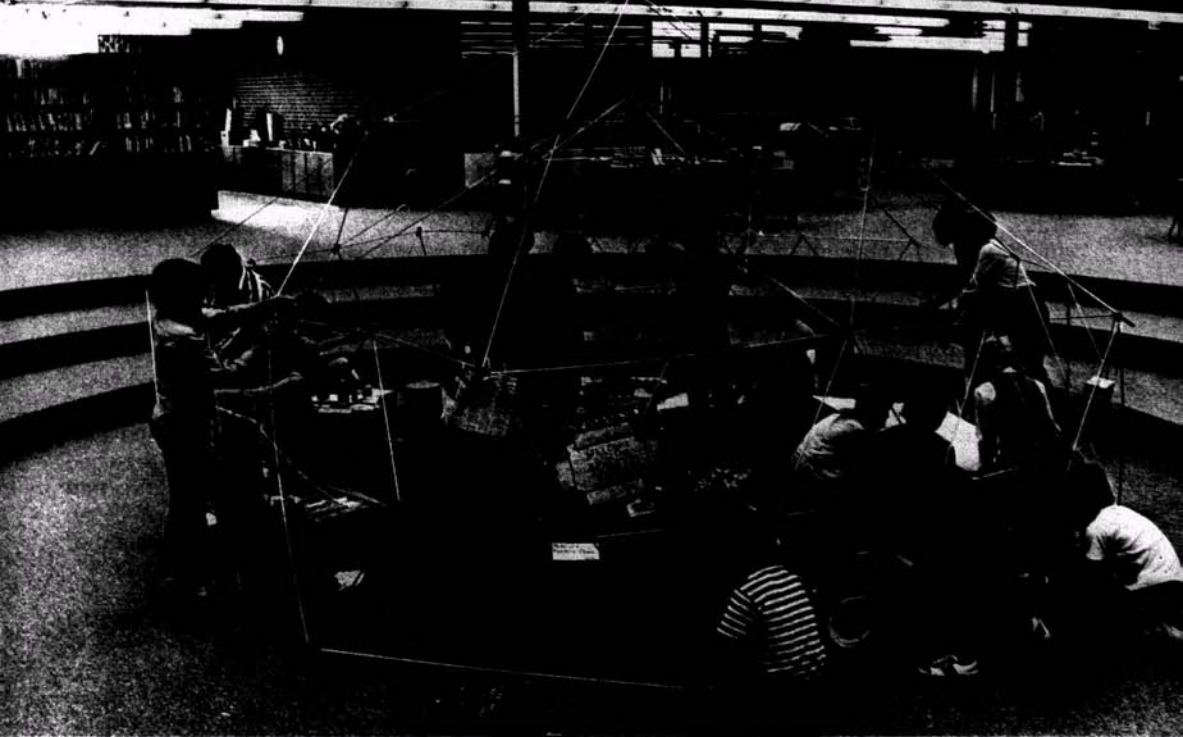
An important consequence of our resulting inability to describe the future teaching role with precision is the removal of the

differences between teacher and learner. The distinction between teacher and learner gives way to distinctions of roles on the learning team. Each contact with a learning experience may well increase the educator's ability to organize the environment for maximum learning. One of the more interesting consequences of this new relationship is the possibility that experience can be as much of a liability as an asset. Schools will become communities of learners.

Another facet of the same phenomenon will be the blurring of distinctions between preservice and in-service training of professional educators. No longer will the prescribed collection of undergraduate credits ending with "student teaching" and capped with an automatic credential from the state department comprise teacher preparation. More likely, the potential educator will, in addition to some undergraduate course work, become a long-term member of a teaching task force or learning team. Accreditation, if it survives as a concept, may be judged in terms of demonstrated effectiveness in a number of skills. Certainly accreditation will be on a short-term rather than a lifetime basis.

Since the emphasis will be on maintaining as well as learning skills and since the skills themselves may change, the experienced educator as well as the neophyte must be continuously retraining. Under such conditions, the teacher trainer becomes the specialist who selects and defines the necessary skills, packages the required instruction and skill practice, and establishes the criteria for deciding when proficiency is attained. Significantly, he can play this role best as a member of the teaching-learning team. Teachers will be more involved in the training of other teachers on a continuous basis.

Although the relationship may be fluid, educational task forces will have an internal hierarchical arrangement at any given time. The result will be a departure from the familiar flat organizational patterns in which all the teachers in a building report directly to a principal. Part of the necessity for a multi-layered organization arises from the addition of nonprofessional aides.



With a redefinition of educational roles, the distinction between teacher and learner gives way to distinctions of roles on the learning team.

Increased dependence upon media and greater sophistication of devices for mediating instruction may produce two fairly distinct new roles. On the one hand will emerge a paraprofessional—a mechanic type, if you please, who will keep all the gadgets in running order and set them up for instructional use. The building engineer title with which we have glorified the custodian may yet inherit a more accurate meaning. On the other hand, a new type research professional will specialize in the design and evaluation of instructional packages. Counter to what has been said of the impermanence of other roles, these two, by virtue of their relationship to things rather than people, may follow the old pattern of careful definition, crystallization, and credentialing.

Need for a single person in charge may provide permanence to the principal's title but in no sense will stabilize his role. Although still in charge, he is now heading up a different organization. In the best sense of the word he becomes the manager, ensur-

ing that resources are brought together in the most effective combinations, always with a cautious eye to cost effectiveness and a positive program of public relations. Planning will demand an increasing portion of his time. Undoubtedly he will relinquish much of his direct supervisory role over individuals in the building.

New Role of Central Office

Central office functions are apt to become more service and support oriented and less uniformly directive. No longer will there need be prescriptive curriculum materials for all activities throughout the district. This is not to say that there will be fewer controls, but is to point out that they will be exercised in a different form. Programs will be described in terms of expected outcomes rather than by number of staff, amount of budget, or description of activities. It becomes the central office function to assess needs, establish goals, audit outcomes, and to support

and enable those activities which building staffs select. The most important part of that support will be in staff development.

Central office departments of business affairs will become more rather than less important as the logistics of support become more complicated. The ubiquitous computer will gradually move from business applications to instructional uses and give new stature to the business office in the process. Planning, evaluation, and management services will be increasingly important central office functions. Administrators need retraining to use effectively the existing management tools.

Specialists who now work directly with children on a referral basis will increasingly deal with the problem in a more comprehensive way. Gone is the expectation that the simple act of referral banishes a child to a special class or brings in an expert who solves the problem. More likely the specialist becomes the consultant to the learning team. He will observe more and treat less.

Resistance to Change

Although instruction will be improved none of these changes will produce a panacea. Many a hazardous turn and much

difficult terrain lie on the road to accomplishment. For example, it is obvious that the labor-management model of collective bargaining promotes a different relationship than needs to exist in a teaching-learning-research team. Current rumblings in the professional organization about the use of aides and resistance to "differentiated staffing" are only the early symptoms of a massive struggle on these issues, sharpened by the sudden shift in teacher supply-demand realities. Likewise, there is growing tension on some fronts between established teacher education institutions and public schools, sometimes fueled by U.S. Office of Education efforts to reform both. Finally, there is no doubt about the immensity of the problem of keeping the public informed and supportive of institutional change, even when that change is already in motion and is irresistible.

Life will be harder rather than easier for professional educators in their new roles. There is little security in the prospect of ever-shifting and ill-defined functions. Dispensing information was a more comfortable task. This being the case, an important new characteristic among the many required qualities for success in education is the pioneering spirit of adventure. □

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