

Changing Conceptions of Professional Identities

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ABOUT 33 years ago, Harold Benjamin in his delightfully whimsical style told the profession about the three major subjects of *The Saber-Tooth Curriculum*: fish-grabbing-with-the-bare-hands, wooly-horse-clubbing, and saber-tooth-tiger-scaring-with-fire. The writing in these 20 short pages was entertaining and humorous, but the single message was clear, profound, and very difficult to practice—the school must anticipate rather than lag behind social change.

That our ideas, sanctions, and modes of behavior are outmoded should be a major incentive for constant curriculum improvement. This message underlies both this editorial and this issue of *Educational Leadership*.

No one's crystal ball is very clear about what the future might bring. Even the present offers clouded and contradictory trends in both social and professional changes. It is clear, however, that our conceptions of professional identities and roles are changing and must change. What these conceptions now are probably could be ascertained through status studies. What they *should be* involves many contradictions and choices. Only a few of the latter will be presented here.

Professional and Lay Powers

Perhaps a good place to begin to confound the issues is with the unclear role that the community should play in the school. Nearly all those in professional education would agree that methodological considerations belong to the profession. Many laymen will concede this, but some would tell us how to teach reading and everything else.

Most educators who have given serious thought to curriculum development relegate the real power for the determination of objectives to the lay public. It would seem that no segment of the general public should have the right to tell parents what their children should be like or to tell all citizens what their community, state, nation, and world should be like.

There is much confusion in the matter of policy making. The profession has long recognized the powers of local boards of education and legislative bodies at all levels as makers of general policy, with the term "general" very unclear. Yet those who separate budget making from policy decisions live in a dream world. This is what negotiations and lobbying are all about, and most budget decisions reflect directly on the curriculum.

Even more confused is the question of what part, if any, the lay public should play in the determination of content—the question of what content is of most worth. Here both the profession and the public seem to be split internally and to range all the way from complete professional to complete lay control. It might be expected that most from both groups would see content determination as a cooperative venture, but many laymen would either plead ignorance or express respect for the profession and take a “hands-off” position.

Since this is an editorial, the author has not only the right but the responsibility to express opinions, and these may help to explain later positions. With professional help and even initiative, determination of general (as opposed to professional) objectives is a responsibility and right of the lay public. Matters of general policy undergirding administration, curriculum making, and instruction must involve a balance of powers between the public and the profession. Negotiations and lobbies provide two of the more obvious routes to this balance. Both content determination and methodology are professional matters and should be guarded jealously.

If we do not know what content, teaching strategies, and methods are best routes to the realization of objectives, we keep searching for these, and our educated guesses are surely better informed than those of laymen. Whether the above analysis and point of view are accepted or rejected, some separation of professional and lay powers and responsibilities is essential to clarification of professional identities and roles.

Some Confusions and Contradictions

Social problems tend to be characterized by conflicts between social trends and conflicts between the basic values underlying these. School problems reflect these and are a part of them. Both space and knowledge limitations must restrict this discussion to a few illustrations of these as they are reflected in the lives of professional educators.

Firmly committed to the ideal of equal

educational opportunity for all the children of all the people, we find this an increasingly difficult task, and the answers do not lie entirely with more time, money, and facilities. There are also conflicts in both goals and methods. It once seemed that the “separate but equal” discriminatory goal was replaced by that of integration; yet some of the majority never sought integration, and a number of minority leaders argue with both words and actions for separatism. Introduction of Black History and Black Literature is only a tip of the iceberg of separatism showing in school practices.

Equality is seen by some as either aping the curriculum of the affluent suburb or offering the same curriculum for all children. Overlooking the obvious fact that suburban education may not deserve to be copied, both of these goals distort the real meaning of equality of opportunity. The same error is not made with the even stronger, and much more desirable, trend toward personalization of instruction in accordance with individual and social needs. As our identities and roles change to deal with these problems, we must strengthen our dedication to equality in the classical democratic tradition. One good route to this is through increased individualization or personalization of instruction.

Aided, as always, by pressures outside the profession, the past 15 years have seen many curriculum changes toward academic excellence in the traditional subjects. With content reselected according to either the structure or the processes (or both) of the disciplines, these “new,” old programs are subject oriented. If we grant that the subject content is better than what it replaced, we can still question its validity as a complete curriculum.

What happened to the “whole child” concept? The truth of this concept did not die with the progressive education movement of the 1930’s. It is still reflected in our objectives. As our jobs change we must recognize that values, attitudes, appreciations, and even “feelings toward” have been sadly neglected. We should have full recognition of the fact that certain curriculum areas

(art, music, physical education, home economics, consumer education, industrial arts, crafts, and others) are often shorted when either time or money is at a premium.

"Relevance" may be an overused and misused term, but it has real meaning for many who use it. If it means that what is taught must make a real difference to me and to those with whom I associate, our youth may be reteaching us an old lesson. The felt needs of children and youth cannot be ignored. Those of us who are sure that we know what is good for them may be at least partly in error, and we are surely in error when we do not know what they think, feel, and want. Those competent with teaching strategies and methods can surely find a middle ground between what adults and children deem necessities.

Mention of the term "efficiency in educating" invites immediate bristling from some who view this as the antithesis to "humanizing the school," providing more of the "open school," or causing a more understanding and intimate teacher-student relationship. In all fairness, these people may have cause for alarm. Some administrative devices, some programming, some uses of multimedia (especially in mass presentations) do seem to regard the learner as a robot simply to be plugged in. Yet there must be more and less efficient approaches to desirable innovations. Perhaps our jobs do not change much when we continue to balance gains against losses as we strive toward efficiency.

Ramifications Related to Negotiated Contracts

Surely negotiated contracts for teachers and other school personnel have had profound effects upon the work lives of nearly all professional educators. In this reorganized world, old rules and roles do not work as they once did. Perceptions of self and others are remolded. Former expectations are no longer realistic, and familiar communication routes are now blocked or rerouted. In this power struggle a neutral position is nearly a futile hope. If one does

not belong in one camp, then he must belong to or sympathize with the other. With relatively little experience in this realm, and much of that recent and unpleasant, the trust and faith that have long characterized personnel relationships in the best schools are often sadly lacking.

Assuming that dedication to the education of children and youth remains uppermost in the minds of all educators, which may be a large and erroneous assumption in war-like times, the problems of furthering these aims are compounded by the many facets of the labor-management type struggle. Teachers want, demand, and should have an active voice in all aspects of curriculum development, but they do not want to be "used," and full participation requires extra time and effort. Then some curriculum decisions are negotiated—a practice antithetical to cooperative planning.

A basic tenet in educational administration has been that the building principal is the instructional leader for the primary unit of curriculum change. Many principals, and others in the administrative line and staff, feel that at heart they are teachers. Yet their position in the administrative structure and real or imagined suspicions regarding their loyalties and motives make functional leadership extremely difficult.

Overwhelming managerial tasks complicated by personnel problems leave little time for the instructional leadership that many principals see as their most important job. With teachers wanting active participation in decision making, with administrators realizing that such participation is essential to effective administration, but with each overburdened and wary, it is truly difficult to educate in the best ways. Real ingenuity must characterize the identities and roles we fashion for ourselves under these conditions.

The long honored and often effective practice of supervision through frequent and sustained classroom visitations has not been feasible in most schools for many years. Its passing left tears in the eyes of some supervisors and took some of the joy from their professional lives. Role changing is not easy. That new patterns of supervision have de-

veloped and are yet developing is obvious. What these will be we can number among our problems, and we can be certain that they too will be affected by negotiation patterns.

Professional roles and identities are invariably related to allegiances and organizational ties. Thus it would be a major omission to pass over the fragmentation of educational organizations now taking place. That this has been and is happening within the NEA structure is obvious to all. Much of this, of course, reflects the NEA as a bargaining agent.

That this fragmentation is also happening within smaller and more closely knit organizations may not be so obvious. Wanting to deal with "the heart of the matter," many subgroups think that they find it in a different place. There are too many fragments even to illustrate them adequately here, but the identity we find and the role we assume may depend in part on what we see as the really crucial aspects of education and on the organizational and other support we can muster as we get at these.

In summary, the intent of this piece is to point to the significance of this issue of *Educational Leadership*, to explore a few of the more obvious changes in the society at large as well as in the schools that force changes in professional identities and roles, and to remind us all that as we face these new realities we can be guided by some very fundamental tenets of good education. Such advice brings to mind an anonymous version of an old story that was recently posted on the wall of our college lounge.

This story read:

The objective of all school employees should be to analyze thoroughly all situations, anticipate all problems prior to their occurrence, have answers for these problems, and move swiftly to solve these problems when called upon.

However—

When you are knee-deep in alligators, it is difficult to remind yourself that your initial objective was to drain the swamp.

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Educational Leadership Announces Proposed Themes for 1972-73

Manuscripts relevant to the proposed themes for the 1972-73 issues of *Educational Leadership* are now being solicited from the readers by the editor.

Planning for the upcoming publication year of the journal will be completed by the ASCD Publications Committee at meetings during the 1972 Annual Conference in Philadelphia, March 5-8. Tentative topics, and deadlines for receipt of manuscripts for examination, are the following:

October: "Protest and Conflict: Why?" (May 15, 1972)

November: "Using Resources at the Local Level" (May 15)

December: "Education for Career Development" (June 1)

January: "Curriculum Management: A Panacea?" (July 1)

February: "Shifts in University/School Role" (August 1)

March: "Innovation as an Ongoing Process" (September 1)

April: "Whatever Happened to Curriculum Content Revision?" (October 1)

May: "Methods That Can Make a Difference" (November 1).

Length of manuscripts should be approximately 1400 words (about five pages), typed double-spaced. General style should conform to that of the journal. Photographs or other illustrative materials are requested.

Decisions on materials will be made as promptly as possible, and all unused manuscripts will be returned.

Materials should be addressed to: Robert R. Leeper, Editor, *Educational Leadership*, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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