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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of the classroom teacher under an accountability program, and raises questions about the extent to which teachers can be held accountable in different areas of school programs. The author defines issues raised at the ACT national study conference on accountability in education, and enumerates responsibilities of teachers in subject matter knowledge, pupil development, and curriculum selection. The author concludes that teachers, through their professional associations, should become more involved in decisionmaking on performance contracts. Related documents are EA 003 347, EA 003 356, EA 003 358, EA 003 387, and EA 003 391. (JF)

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"The Practitioner and Accountability"*

Donald F. Wilson, President, ACT

In the last two decades there has been a continuing demand for change in public education, and teachers have been among those who have voiced that demand. Recently, however, our voices have been drowned out by a chorus of critics who call for "accountability in education"; who claim that schools are not producing results commensurate with the money spent on them.

To classroom teachers, who have borne the brunt of much of this criticism, the charge raises a question: Why are classroom teachers in this situation?

I think several parallel threads in recent history can be traced in the backdrop of accountability. With the launching of Sputnik, national attention was drawn dramatically to the product emerging from the American public schools. Sputnik also marked the beginning of the infusion of greater amounts of federal funds into education through the passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958.

Many spokesmen from the universities, the Federal Government, business, and the media immediately urged a concentration on the disciplines, especially mathematics and the physical sciences. Attention was focused on the college-bound youth. Criticism was directed at the public schools because they continued their attempts to serve the needs of all children. But these critics were saying little or nothing at that time about the plight of the disadvantaged.

The issue of the disadvantaged youth was brought into sharp focus by the Negro revolution, which began in the 1950's and came to national prominence in the 60's. Sputnik had started the first thrust. Freedom rides and freedom schools became symbols of the second thrust--an awakening of the

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national conscience to the inadequacies of public education in relation to all disadvantaged children and especially the children of the minority groups. This new awareness contributed to the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 with its array of titles, many directed to programs for the disadvantaged. Passage of ESEA was an about-face in terms of demands placed on the schools; an about-face on the part of the critics of classroom teachers.

The increased expenditure of federal funds on the public schools brought into sharp focus the issue of accountability. It prompted Congress to question whether it was getting a big enough bang for its educational buck.

In the late 1960's, Congressmen intensified their concern for objective, hard-nosed evaluation of the educational system.

Concurrently large-scale federal funding combined with developments in automation and technology brought education to the attention of business and industry. Thoughts of profits lured dozens of companies to take the "education plunge"--to move beyond production of school equipment and materials into the actual education process. Many firms working in the realm of technological change turned their attention and resources to technological change in education.

Throughout these developments one segment of the teaching profession in my opinion had been conspicuously overlooked--the classroom teachers. In breaking into the education market, business, industry, and government had used the channels of the school administration. They did not seek out classroom teachers around whom the accountability controversy was ultimately to revolve. Yet consider the context in which accountability is so widely discussed today, both in education circles and in the mass media: the accountability of the classroom teacher.

Meanwhile, another sort of revolution was in the making. Rising expectations of classroom teachers created a new teacher militancy. Recognizing the impact and success of social protest as used by other groups, classroom teachers were taking strong collective action to win welfare benefits, and, equally if not more important, to enter the area of school policy making. But the roots of teacher militancy ran deeper than this.

One of the roots lay in the ambivalence of society toward its teachers and its schools. First, society was quite willing to pay lip service to the importance of teachers and education but was unwilling to give teachers the power and resources to bring about needed changes in the schools. This ambivalent attitude--coupled with the conditions of teaching and learning to which teachers and students were subjected and the growing impersonality of the schools due to increases in enrollment without comparable increases in teaching personnel--especially in the inner city--were major factors in the alienation of teachers from the schools and communities they served. As schools became larger and more rigidly structured, classroom teachers were removed from the central operation of the school while administrative and supervisory personnel grew in number and status. Each day posed new limitations on the freedom and creativity of classroom teachers. The philosophy seemed to be, "Adhere to the status quo, and do as I say--not as I do."

Teachers responded predictably to these conditions. Working through their local, state, and national association structures, the new breed of teachers took militant actions in seeking negotiation rights and utilized, when necessary, sanctions and strikes.

When as a result of negotiations by teachers the level of funding for education was forced upward, and teacher participation in educational decision making was initiated, more and more public criticism was directed at the teachers and schools. Calls for assessment of performance came louder and

faster. To complicate the problem certain administrators, along with local school boards and state legislators, all fearing erosion of their power, began considering the possibility of seeking repeal of legislation that provided teacher tenure and other forms of job security.

Ironically, teacher militancy directed toward a realignment of national priorities and a needed change in the status quo in education generated reaction against them by the very people who had called for educational change Increasing numbers of parents, also experiencing rising expectations, charged that teachers had failed when children did not learn.

To complicate the issues even further, students entered the controversy. Students began saying that change was needed in the schools. The responsible activists sought awareness of the needs of a new generation and demanded a relevant curriculum and a voice in the policy determination and in programs that affected them.

Teachers and parents had not understood that they had more in common than in conflict. Now both were misunderstanding the motivation of students. In reality all were seeking the same objective, but ironically all were fighting each other.

Against this historical background the issue of teacher accountability has come into focus today. The most recent developments fall into these areas--

- o the growing signs of a public revolt against the teaching profession
- o the emphasis of the Nixon administration on "accountability," including the movement toward performance contracting.

Indications of the public dissatisfaction with the teaching profession can be seen in the Gallup poll published recently. Voting patterns confirm taxpayer resistance to increased revenue for schools and support for a system that would make teachers and administrators more accountable for pupil progress.

The attitude of the Nixon administration is reflected in the President's March 1970 message on education, in which he said, ". .what we have too often been doing is avoiding accountability for our own local performance. We have, as a nation, too long avoided thinking of the productivity of schools." The tone of the message, in essence, helped to create a credibility gap in the public mind concerning the role and effectiveness of public education. It appears that this administration will continue to emphasize accountability, performance, and productivity either for increased efficiency in education or as a way to slow increases in school expenditures.

The practice of performance contracting appears to have become the hottest issue in the broad area of accountability. Despite doubts about the effectiveness and validity of results of the initial performance contracting project in Texarkana, Texas, more school systems are turning part of their responsibilities over to a private educational firm in exchange for a money-back guarantee to increase student learning, ususally in reading or mathematics. The stimulus for this activity has been the Office of Economic Opportunity. OEO-financed experiments involve 18 school systems and six educational companies. In other communities there are contracts between the school system and the educational company, with no federal agency involved. A recent development has been OEO-financed performance contracts between the school administrations and NEA affiliates in Stockton, California, and Mesa, Arizona. The school systems subcontracted with the associations to operate the projects. The two contracts offer possible bonuses to individual teachers who boost their pupils' reading and mathematical skills by specified levels. Money can also be spent on incentives for pupils or on special teaching materials.

How does the broad issue of accountability and the narrower issue of performance contracting relate to the Association of Classroom Teachers that I represent and to classroom teachers in general?

ACT has long-standing policy positions with which the current interpretation of accountability would seem to conflict. For example, ACT's resolution on "The Local Association and Instruction" states that "teachers have the right to speak unequivocally on all matters relating to curriculum and instruction." The resolution urges local associations to "negotiate guarantees that the voice of the classroom teacher will be heard at all levels where decisions on instruction are made."

An ACT resolution on "School Policies and Professional Responsibility" states ACT's belief that "boards of education and members of the teaching profession should view the consideration of matters of mutual concern as a joint responsibility." The resolution recognizes that "the schools belong to the people and that school boards, as representatives of the people, are vested with the legal authority to establish school policies and long-range educational objectives for their respective school district," but affirms that "the development and implementation of these objectives in the instructiona program remain the responsibility of professionally prepared and legally certificated educators, both individually and through their professional associations--local, state, and national."

And we classroom teachers are raising a number of legitimate concerns about the issue of accountability.

- Can we be held accountable when we actually have very little authority; when we have only limited influence on the school program, on conditions of teaching and learning, and on governance of the profession?
- Are we teachers the only persons who are being held accountable? If we are accountable for our performance, to what degree are other segments of the education profession accountable for theirs? To what degree are school boards accountable for the operation of the schools? To what degree are communities accountable for their

degree of support and commitment to education? How will each be evaluated?

- Is the future of public education threatened by performance-minded interests who have too narrow a view of the process of teaching and learning and too limited an understanding of the real world of the public schools?
- Is the present trend an effort to impose on and adapt to the public schools management techniques growing out of operations research and systems analysis theory?
- Are the leadership and decision making in education being taken out of the hands of school personnel and being put into the hand of the business-industry complex?
- Are the programs being conducted by government, higher education, and school administrations such that they tend to keep us classroom teachers out of any role in policy determination?
- Are those local associations that are involved in performance contracts being given the same planning time and resources that have been granted the partners in previous contracts?
- Can teacher performance be tied to student achievement? Or is student's growth influenced by other factors--his home, his previous experiences, his potential, his health, the school setting? Is the teacher's performance influenced by other factors--conditions of work, freedom to teach, professional activities, educational policies? Does the current concept of accountability adequately take these factors into account?
- Can the industry-oriented approach be used to measure student achievement? Can we guarantee that X number of students will make certain predetermined gains in so many hours of instruction?

Or do we hold to the idea that teaching students how to think logically and how to get along with others is more important than the mere imparting of the three R's?

In November 1970 ACT sponsored the Classroom Teachers National Study Conference on Accountability in Education. Some 55 classroom teachers from across the country explored in depth two questions:

1. For what specific areas of education can and should classroom teachers be held accountable and to whom?
2. Under what conditions is it reasonable to expect classroom teachers to be held accountable?

In seeking answers to these questions, conference participants considered some basic issues.

First, they considered how teachers should respond to the issue of accountability: whether we assume a posture of apologetic defensiveness, or whether we talk about accountability from a position of strength; whether we reject completely what the critics say, or whether we refine their statements and say clearly where we classroom teachers believe the major responsibility lies for innovations in education and for the task of defining the learning process and how it happens.

Second, they considered the role of the professional association, especially at the local level, as it faces the question of change and responds to the calls for accountability of classroom teachers.

That conference marked the first time that classroom teachers had been given an opportunity to come to grips with the issue of accountability in education. Part of the problem has been that classroom teachers as a professional group have been ignored. This was our chance and our challenge to speak, to voice our concerns, to help shape classroom teacher thinking, and ultimately to give direction to the education profession.

I can report to you that conference participants dealt with accountability in a forthright manner. They declared emphatically that classroom teachers are accountable, and they spelled out the conditions under which we can be held accountable. Conference participants stated that classroom teachers are accountable for knowledge of subject matter; for an adequate academic background; for upgrading of professional skills; for active participation in community affairs; for ethical conduct; and for involvement in educational and social concerns.

With regard to the student, participants said that classroom teachers are accountable for a knowledge of and a concern for student needs; and for ensuring that programs are tailored to meet those needs; for developing the intellect and social consciousness of students; and for recognizing students as unique individuals.

In the area of classroom management, participants said that classroom teachers are accountable for maintaining discipline in the classroom; for creating a classroom environment conducive to learning; and for providing a way of utilizing the available resources.

In the area of instruction, participants said that classroom teachers are accountable for determining curricula; for selecting learning materials; and for determining staffing patterns.

Participants also said that classroom teachers are accountable for proper communications with the community and with parents. They said classroom teachers ultimately must be accountable for the governance of the teaching profession; for determining who enters and remains in the profession; for deciding what is proper teacher training, both pre-service and in-service; for establishing professional standards; and for enforcing those standards.

In replying to the question, "To whom are classroom teachers accountable?" participants said that we are accountable to ourselves and to our students; to our peers and to our profession; to school administrations and to the public.

They said quite clearly, however, that there are certain conditions that must be met if classroom teachers are to be held accountable. We must have the

time to prepare and time to teach. We must have the appropriate and sufficient materials and resources. We must have the proper physical facilities. We must have the services of a supportive staff of aides and paraprofessionals. We must have guidance and personnel services for students. We must have a strong public commitment to education, in philosophy and in finances. We must have the right to share in developing school policies that affect us. We must have the right to negotiate terms and conditions of employment in comprehensive master contracts. In fact, participants said that classroom teachers cannot be held accountable for results unless we have the right to share in determining curriculum and the freedom to utilize facilities as our expertise dictates.

In the November issue of the American School Board Journal, Harold Webb, executive director of the National School Boards Association, stated that school board members generally have a favorable attitude towards performance contracting. He gave as one of the reasons the belief that board members feel that teachers have turned from a commitment to children as their primary responsibility to a commitment to their own occupational interests. Based on what I heard at the ACE study conference, I believe teachers would reject that argument.

NEA's total involvement with performance contracting to date includes considerable staff activity in the Division of Field Services, to which a number of local associations have come for guidance. Two of these associations--Houston, Texas, and Hammond, Indiana--were given an opportunity to become a party to performance contracts, and in each case, and for different reasons, they were advised not to participate.

The NEA Research Division has approached the performance contract both from the area of school finance and of student measurement. The NEA Division of Government Relations and Citizenship has spoken out against the involvement of the Office of Economic Opportunity in performance contracting and in other school matters, which it feels are properly the responsibility of the U.S. Office of Education.

Involvement of the U.S. Office of Education in a performance contract does not necessarily safeguard the interests of classroom teachers and the professional associations. Recently the U.S. Office of Education entered into an estimated $300,000 contract with the Rand Corporation to analyze performance contracts and to aid school administrators in negotiating such contracts. I would hope that the Office of Education would come to the point of involving classroom teachers through their professional associations; otherwise experiments and innovations do not stand much of a chance of success.

The classroom teachers of this nation must raise issues about some of the trends we see developing. For example, recently a state attorney general issued an opinion in an effort to legalize temporarily certain experiements with performance contracting. This action could have serious implications for certification, negotiations, and the ultimate delegation of responsibility for education. Even though flexibility in regulations may be necessary to develop some innovations, unless classroom teachers are involved through their professional associations in the broad area of accountability and in the narrower area of performance contracting, the end result will be short-term and fragmented, and I have little hope for the success of performance contracting.

We classroom teachers believe we bear the major responsibility for innovations in education and for defining the learning process and how it happens. We are ready to go on record as saying to all parties--administrators, school boards, the public, industry, and government agencies: If you are sincere about the interests of students and the public, then we classroom teachers must be involved in educational decision-making through our professional associations.