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ABSTRACT

In order for education to evolve from a craft to a profession, a spirit of inquiry must be infused into the beliefs and activities of education faculty members and practicing teachers. For faculty members in professional schools, the responsibilities of teaching, research, and service should be integrated activities for which inquiry serves as the guiding force. Colleges of education in major research universities can provide the most favorable conditions for developing this professional approach among teacher educators. Practicing teachers can be helped to become more professional in their approach to teaching if research concepts and methods are redesigned to account more fully for real world practice, if an effort is made to incorporate new knowledge into practice more rapidly, and if research activities can be conducted more collegially, involving practitioners in the process of inquiry. (PGD)

The Nature of Inquiry and Developing a Profession

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The purpose of this brief paper is to propose that in order for education to evolve from a craft to a profession a spirit of inquiry must be infused into the beliefs and activities of education faculty members and practicing teachers. In addition I will contend that this transformation can most likely begin in Colleges of Education in major research universities.

Most often the distinguishing characteristics cited to denote a profession are socio-economic status and professional autonomy. While these are certainly associated with modern professions, I contend that a more significant characteristic is the essence of a profession -- a pervasive, all-encompassing spirit of inquiry that is infused in the beliefs and practices of members of the profession, regardless of their particular role -- researcher, faculty member, or practitioner. Professionals live a life of inquiry. They must exercise judgment and adapt to changing conditions. They are engaged in constant inquiry regarding the whys and wherefores of their practice and seek new knowledge to improve their practice.

With regard to a faculty member in a professional school the responsibilities of teaching, research, and service become integrated activities because of the dominance of inquiry as the guiding force; there is a commitment to inquiry in all aspects of professional life.

Allow me to share with you a short vignette about how medical school faculty members exemplify my thesis:

> He (Dr. Arthur J. Moss, Clinical Professor of Medicine and Director, Heart Research Followup Program) estimates that he spends about half of his professional time in clinical cardiac consultation, splitting the remainder between research and teaching.
>
> "But why not just set up a private practice somewhere and avoid the rigors of research?
>
> I've always believed that part of my responsibility after receiving a good college education and a good medical school education was to contribute to the progress of medical science. My clinical practice provides stimulation and focus for my research, and the problems I see clinically are the questions I bring into the research program and try to solve. Similarly, my research work enhances the quality of my patient care.
>
> Besides, one has only a lifetime to live, one likes to make a contribution."[1]

Like most of his peers, Dr. Moss combines three complementary aspects of his professional life in his clinical practice and research program -- teaching, research, and service.

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1. Vicki Zeldin. "Matters of the Heart," Rochester Review (Winter 1984): 1.

One final comment on Dr. Moss, when asked how he can stay current with the literature in his field -- he replied, "You go first to the library -- every day."[2]

How often do we hear colleagues in colleges of education lament the fact that they are responsible for all three functions? How often have we heard them say each faculty member should be responsible for only one, two at most, of the functions? As members of the academic community how can we responsibly fulfill any of our activities if they are not guided by a quest to know and to generate new knowledge? If our activities are not so guided, then why be part of a university faculty? Could we not restructure the functions and responsibilities of colleges of education to facilitate functional integration for faculty members and students?

Colleges of education in major research universities (about 100) have had, at least, the continued demand for scholarly productivity of faculty members. In addition they generally exist on the same campus as other professional schools that can provide a role model for integrated functions guided by inquiry. The transformation in regional campuses where the faculty have heavy teaching and supervisory responsibilities and limited expectations or experience in research will be very difficult, if now impossible.

Having established the aforegoing paradigm leaves yet the task of infusing the same spirit and behavior in educational practitioners. While faculty role-modeling can be infectious for students -- it alone will not suffice.

Without detailing what others have so well-stated, practitioners in education often view the results of educational research as having limited value to practice. Despite our occasional weak protestations we have reified and institutionalized positivism and its inherent reductionism. Our tug-of-war with practitioners may be due to their intuitive knowledge that our representations of reality are inventions that are often inaccurate or inadquate. Our rush to mimic the physical sciences has caused us to leave behind our rich inheritance of explanatory tools from the humanities -- epistemology, logic, argumentation, metaphor, perception of configurations in space, and patterns of context. We left behind many legitimate sources of authority. As Eisner has suggested we need a language of criticism to describe, interpret, and appraise educational life: "A language of criticism will not provide prescriptions, but it can illuminate precisely those aspects of classroom life that propositional discourse cannot locate. It enables the teacher to see and therefore have a basis on which his or her intelligence can operate."[3] While it is advantageous to borrow conceptual apparatus and research from a multitude of disciplines, we need, as Eisner indicates, conceptual apparatus and research methods that are unique to educational practice.[4]

In achieving this goal we can advance our own understanding and more fully describe educational practice beyond "what will work on Monday." The pragmatism of practitioners may be the primary reason why teaching is a craft learned by apprenticeship, as opposed to a profession guided by inquiry.

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1. ibid, p. 2.
3. Elliot W. Eisner, "Can Educational Research Inform Educational Practice," Phi Delta Kappan (March 1984): 451.
4. ibid, p. 451.

Even the recent NEA blueprint for teacher education, Excellence in Our Schools: Teacher Education, is replete with statements that assert the preparation of teachers should be based primarily on what practicing teachers believe are the essential skills and knowledge necessary for successful practice and on extended periods of practice teaching. Much of this, of course, would be valuable, but many practitioners' beliefs are the result of habit and often are unexamined. Often the beliefs of teachers are related only to what has been or what is, and rarely related to the future that the students will inhabit. An epistemology for educational practice is rarely discussed.

Whether it be in teacher education programs or educational practice in schools and other settings, the flow of new knowledge into the curricula or changes in practice come very slowly. Yet in other professional schools one can observe a rather rapid loop from the time new knowledge is generated to the time it enters the preparation program and practice. In a profession there is a high value placed on new knowledge and new methods of practice. As Gage has eloquently detailed for us, all professions are both science and art, and especially teaching:

> "The prospect that lies before research on teaching is one in which more effective kinds of teacher behavior will gradually emerge from the experiments just beginning to be conducted. Those experiments will yield some main effects that will have general value for all teaching, whatever the grade level, subject matter, or character of the student. Other findings will reveal that certain other ways of teaching prove superior only for certain combinations of grade level, subject matter, and student characteristics. Probably none of the generalizations that survive the test of experimentation will permit highly exact prediction or unerring control of educational results. Nonetheless, they will improve substantially on the unaided common sense or raw experience of the teacher."[5]

This leads me to the final consideration for what I see as the necessary evolution for teaching from its current craft-state to a professional-state. In addition to the conditions for change discussed thus far, it is essential that much of the research activity be conducted collegially within the profession.

If inquiry is to become a compelling force in the profession and if the results of inquiry are to be valued it will require the active participation of practitioners as well as researchers and university faculty members in a collegial relationship in the enterprise of research. Research teams composed of faculty, students, and practitioners, like those in other professions, would over time achieve these goals.

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5. Nate L. Gage, The Scientific Basis of the Art of Teaching (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 93.

Tikunoff and Mergendollar have detailed for some of the benefits of team research in education in their studies noting the collegial team research becomes, "...an intervention process which brings about changes in the way teachers, researchers, and trainer/developers conceive and manage their professional roles."[6] Some of the benefits include a greater commitment to using research in professional decision-making to analyze and adjust processes of instruction, and new habits of thinking about one's work that are more reflective and analytical. Parenthetically, team research projects become a form of staff development for everyone involved.

Functional integration could be enhanced by reorganizing our curriculum and instructional practices in formats and time blocks more amenable to research-based clinical instruction than our current habit of organizing our instruction in the usual mode of the liberal arts. If inquiry becomes the guiding force, rather than the dissemination of information, we can envision new models for preparation that make essential changes in how we do things, as opposed to the current preoccupation of many colleagues to simply add-on another year of preparation.

I believe the major research universities are the ones to lead this transformation. The majority of educational research is conducted in those universities now; they have the expertise and the necessary norms to do the task. They exist in universities that have other professional schools that integrate their activities to support inquiry and they value clinical preparation; those schools can serve as role models by which to explain our transformation to others.

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