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ABSTRACT

This essay defines autonomy as the responsible self-direction of teachers engaged in planning and carrying out instruction in the schools in which they teach, particularly in their own classrooms. This 'professional' definition excludes the influence of teachers on district- or state-level policies, regulations, guidelines, or plans. The essay asks why teachers act as they do in their own classrooms and schools, because that is where a teacher's autonomy can be most frequently exercised. Lack of autonomy is defined as failure to exercise responsible self-direction, not as freedom from supervision, because responsible self-direction is a quality of action rather than a state of being. The discussion here assumes that whatever the state of the profession of teaching, there are measures that individual teachers can take to exercise responsible self-direction in their own classrooms. The discussion asks why comparatively few teachers adopt such measures. (Author/JD)

IMPROVING THE AUTONOMY OF TEACHERS:

THE COMPETING ROLES OF SCHOLARSHIP AND LEGITIMATION

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Abstract

Autonomous teachers are responsible and self-directed, yet schooling in the US is based on teachers' adaptation to institutional functions and organizational structures that undermine their exercise of responsible self-direction in the classroom. The thesis of this article is that lack of teacher autonomy is a functional feature of schooling in the US and that an understanding of this issue should determine the nature of reforms to improve teachers' autonomy. The article concludes with suggestions to develop and support a cadre of autonomous teachers.

A number of observers have recommended increased autonomy for teachers as a way to improve students' learning (e.g., Carnegie Forum, 1986; Dollar, 1983; Lortie, 1975; Sizer, 1985). Ironically, a number of empirical and theoretical studies report that teachers already have considerable autonomy (e.g., Diorio, 1982; Leon, Nason, Omari, Bastos, & Blumberg, 1982; McCleary, 1980). The source of this apparent contradiction is that the observers fail to define the means and ends of autonomy. Often they fail to define the term at all. As a result, their discussions obscure the reasons teachers so often fail to exercise autonomy.

This essay defines autonomy as the responsible self-direction of teachers engaged in planning and carrying out instruction in the schools in which they teach, particularly in their own classrooms (cf. Good & Brophy, 1984, p. 322 and Tibbetts, 1979, p. 11). This "professional" definition excludes the influence of teachers on district- or state-level policies, regulations, guidelines, or plans. The essay asks why teachers act as they do in their own classrooms and schools, because that is where a teacher's autonomy can be most freely exercised. Lack of autonomy is defined as failure to exercise responsible self-direction, not as freedom from supervision, because responsible self-direction is a quality of action rather than a state

of being. The discussion here assumes that, whatever the state of the profession of teaching, there are measures that individual teachers can take to exercise responsible self-direction in their own classrooms. The discussion asks why comparatively few teachers adopt such measures.

Current Woes, Ultimate Aims, and Approximate Autonomy

American educators are distressed to learn from international studies that our students seem to perform at or below the median among an assortment of industrialized and developing countries. Perhaps we even find it insulting to be compared with Japanese and Soviet societies, which do not value the American virtue of rugged individualism (cf. Popkewitz, 1985). This last observation, of course, renders the comparative lack of teacher autonomy in American schools more puzzling still.

Perhaps, however, the place of scholarship in our culture has more to do with our current educational troubles than we realize (Fallows, 1987). We do not value knowledge and learning highly (Coleman, 1961; Counts, 1930; Hofstadter, 1963); scholarship is especially suspect as an extreme form of knowledgeableness. Webb and Sherman (1985) pointedly note that current reform efforts will "assure that college of education faculty no longer discuss, or even tolerate, conversations that address the issue of educational aims or theory" (p. 26).

If these observers are correct, then the assertion that the aim of learning "is to help the private person communicate with, evaluate, and reform the public world" (Nash & Agne, 1973, p. 361) may be in danger. This essay, however, accepts this traditional formulation of the aims of education (cf. Howley, Howley, & Pendarvis, 1986, pp. 19-20). It will relate these aims to the exercise of responsible self-direction among teachers.

How do these aims fare in our culture? The recent reports about the pedagogical status of the nation (e.g., Commission on Excellence, 1983; McGeever, 1983; Southern Regional Educational Board, 1985, 1986) indicate that students and teachers alike are not doing as well as the writers of the reports would expect, even on the first and simplest of these aims (i.e., communicating with the public world).

The second aim--evaluating the public world--implicates the kind of higher-order cognition commonly termed "critical thinking." According to the reports, our schools have not begun to teach critical thinking. Moreover, no one (with the possible exception of Mortimer Adler) seems to have a clear idea of how to proceed to cultivate critical thinking among school children. However, because Adler asks a great deal of teachers, his program of reading great books has received only limited attention from schools.

As for the third objective, it is so ultimate as not to be addressed in any major representation of our current troubles. Our schools are devoted, not to reforming the public world (that was John Dewey's fiat for them) but to reproducing the public world (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bronfenbrenner, 1984; Giroux, 1985; Popkewitz, 1985). When schools seek to "socialize" students to the public "world of work," an aim that increases in popularity as professional jobs disappear and menial jobs proliferate (Leontieff, 1982; Rumberger, 1984), they are acting desperately. In <u>this</u> public world, it is good for students to know how to communicate, but bad for them to evaluate the public world, and perhaps idealistic for them to presume to reform it (cf. Webb & Sherman, 1985).

This essay attempts to establish that in this sort of public world, though teachers may be free from effective supervision, they are not prepared to exercise autonomy: they may have autonomy, but dare not use it. The exercise of autonomy may be a characteristic that teachers deem dangerous to their job security (see, for example, Porter, Floden, Freeman, Schmidt, & Schwille, 1986).

Views and Findings About Teachers' Autonomy

One way to learn about the autonomy of teachers is to examine the characteristics of teachers who are respected by students for their effectiveness. Such teachers typically set a productive academic agenda, ask good questions, incorporate student comments in discussions, provide corrective academic feedback, adapt standard materials and produce original materials. As a result of these practices, they seem to their students to be respectful and to be enthusiastic about what they teach (e.g., Flanders, 1967; Gage, 1979; Good & Brophy, 1984; Sizer, 1985).

Another way to learn about the autonomy of teachers is to examine the organization of schools. This view relates teachers' autonomy to their authority to make certain kinds of decisions; teachers' autonomy increases as the authority of the principal decreases. British teachers, for example, are often considered to be more autonomous than American teachers because they have greater authority over the curricula and policies of the schools in which they work than their colleagues in the US (Parker, 1979). Similar findings have been found in other educational systems that, like the British system, are more centralized than the American system (Leon et al., 1982). Retsinas

(1982), in an historical review of autonomy, found that teachers in the US have traditionally had little autonomy because of the way schools are organized. She believed that the use of "school-based management" (cf. Parker, 1979 and Sizer, 1985) promised to increase teachers' autonomy in the classroom and school building. Popkewitz (1985), however, implies that the history of educational thought and practice in the US argues against the success of this alternative.

Yet another way to view autonomy is to examine the representations of teachers' professional organizations. In their view, autonomy is often considered to be an issue of training and professional development. According to Ervay (1979), the National Education Association supports the notion "that good teachers are produced by other good teachers, who allow challenging responsibilities," whereas colleges of education and state educational agencies support the view that the "clarification of what good teaching is and the creation and use of specific measures toward which candidates strive" is the way to produce good teachers (p. 62). The NEA bases its efforts on the collaboration of practicing teachers; the agencies with which it is often in conflict establish a consensus that purports to define good practice to which both neophytes and experienced teachers alike are expected to conform.

Finally, one can view autonomy as an issue of knowledge and practice. Diorio (1982) has written an excellent essay that articulates this view. When faultless practice can be evaluated by clearly warranted and agreed-upon standards, the sphere of autonomy is small, according to Diorio. As an example of a field in which the sphere of autonomy is small, he cites carpentry. The sphere of autonomy is larger when some practices of a field

cannot be evaluated by clearly warranted and agreed-upon standards of faultless performance. As an example of a field in which the sphere of autonomy is larger, he cites medicine.

According to Diorio, the professions are characterized by greater autonomy than the trades because the base of knowledge is inadequate to establish standards of faultless performance in some cases; in these cases the autonomy of professional judgment guides practice, but individual professionals cannot be held accountable for unfortunate results (as in the death of a cancer patient).

Diorio (1982) believes that in teaching it is impossible to evaluate any practices as faultless because what is known about teaching practice is a "highly contentious knowledge of highly questionable worth" (p. 279). This is the familiar argument that the preparation of teachers is grounded on an insubstantial knowledge base. Gage (1979) refutes this argument farily well, however. Schlechty (1985) implies that the worth of knowledge about teaching is less important than its acceptability as a normative standard.

Diorio's observations are nonetheless consonant with the views characterized as typical of teacher organizations, above. Like those organizations, he believes that attempts to define a consensus of standards to which teachers can be held accountable are artificial and therefore false. Diorio concludes, therefore, that teachers can and should be held accountable only for general standards of ethics and knowledge. This insight is critical to the argument and proposals of this essay, even though it is necessary to look more critically at Diorio's assertions about the usefulness of knowledge about teaching.

While all these views are interesting, none attempts to explain why teachers do not act autonomously in the classroom; indeed, some contest that assertion. Diorio's view, in fact, implies that teachers cannot fail to act autonomously--any teaching act is inherently autonomous. These definitions and conclusions vary from the definition adopted here and from the conclusions that will be drawn. These views also fail to relate their observations to educational aims (cf. Webb & Sherman, 1985).

The Dilemma of the Knowledgeable Teacher

A responsibly self-directed teacher is a knowledgeable teacher, because good teaching--autonomous teaching--is based on internalized knowledge and judgment (Sizer, 1985). As both Diorio (1982) and Sherman and Webb (1985) note, these qualities are in large part the product of general, not specialized learning. Moreover, the development of such teachers has a great deal to do with critical thinking ("evaluating the public world").

The development of teachers' ability to evaluate and judge (to think critically) will be dealt with in greater detail in the next section of the essay; for now, the discussion is limited to the continuous instructional dilemma that confronts responsibly self-directed teachers. The dilemma has less to do with the kinds of teaching skills elaborated by Good and Brophy (1984) than with the intellectual and social context of education in this country. The discussion begins by considering the induction of prospective teachers who are academically well prepared.

The ordeal of bright student teachers. Though the experience of such student teachers has not been investigated in the research literature, the author and a number of colleagues have observed the difficulties of a succession of very bright student teachers.

All of these student teachers were females who had exceptional knowledge and judgment (skills to communicate and evaluate); all scored well within the upper quartile of ability that is so poorly represented in the teaching force (Vance & Schlechty, 1982); and they all professed an interest in reforming (i.e, improving) the public world of educational practice. However, each student experienced extraordinarily similar crises of self-doubt and conflict that their much less able classmates did not.

The immediate cause of their crises was that they were placed by the cooperating school system with at least one teacher who was not responsibly self-directed. These cooperating teachers modeled behaviors that appalled the bright student teachers--strict adherence to teacher's manuals, slavish adherence to administrative and curricular directives, failure to exploit opportune moments, and cyncial attitudes toward students.

The common response of these bright student teachers was the tendency to perceive themselves in error, out of place, and in jeopardy when confronted with ignorant teaching. All confessed imagined personal shortcomings and very real professional self-doubts to supportive college advisors. Without counsel and support, and without the opportunity for better subsequent placements, these bright prospective teachers might have accepted the status quo of bad instruction as a norm to be modelled (cf. Ervay, 1979); they might have decided to abandon the profession.

The bright student teachers proceeded subsequently to placements with better cooperating teachers, and some were invited to model their performance for veteran teachers. None of them decided to leave education as a result of their experiences in student teaching, but some have decided to pursue graduate programs that will remove them from the classroom within several years.

The painful experience of these bright student teachers provoked initial professional growth and taught them some valuable lessons about autonomy. They learned that schools are difficult places to work, that administrative mandates need to be evaluated, and that their colleagues cannot always be trusted to cherish students' best interests. They also learned the advisability of shopping for jobs. In short, they learned to keep their own professional counsel and to pursue their own professional ends.

Thought crime and reflectiveness among practicing teachers. The lessons that these bright student teachers learned are familiar to knowledgeable veteran teachers. These knowledgeable teachers know that the conditions of their work are not what they should be, and they develop routines (cf. Yinger, 1980) and compromises (cf. Sizer, 1985) to make whatever improvements they can within their classrooms. This is the sphere of autonomy targeted by the definition used in this essay.

The tools of good teaching are, however, a matter of debate, as noted above. Diorio (1982) observes that the models of teaching on which practicing teachers may draw represent not a series "of comprehensive approaches only one of which should be selected by the student as a personal style, but rather as a sort of smorgasbord of conceptualizations and strategies which can be mixed

and matched as the situation seems to require" (p. 272). He believes that such repertoires are "grab bags" of alternatives rather than "tool kits" of techniques appropriate to particular ends. As a result, Diorio believes that teachers cannot be held accountable for their professional actions, except on the same general principles applicable to all persons.

In Diorio's view, this situation represents autonomy, but he fails to examine critically the role of scholarship among the general principles to which he believes teachers can be held accountable. In accord with the definition of this essay, however, teachers must exercise their potential to choose from the "grab bag" if they are to be considered responsible and self-directed (i.e., if they are to be considered autonomous).

Many teachers fail to exercise their potential to choose; many more are severely limited in their preparedness to choose from the instructonal grab bag (Flanders, 1967; Gallagher, Aschner, & Jenne, 1967; Good & Brophy, 1984; Sizer, 1985; Wilcox, 1982). Why? The discussion now turns to the conditions that undermine and support the exercise of autonomy.

Certainly teachers are exposed to textbook models and not all such textbook discussions can be without merit (cf. Diorio, 1982 and Gage, 1979); certainly resources and equipment to adapt standard instructional materials are available in many schools; certainly various sectors of the US educational establishment value reform and innovation; certainly freedom and improvisation are vigorous cultural values in this country.

The failure of the teaching profession to engage in responsible self-directed instructional practices is in one way easy to explain; in another way it is very difficult to explain. On one hand, teachers fail to

become responsibly self-directed for familiar external reasons--the principal insists that 23 minutes be scheduled in the afternoon for social studies; the central office insists that all students be on the same page of the textbook on th same day; at least two grades must be recorded for each student in each subject each week; and so forth. The official requirements foisted upon teachers are often ridiculous, contradictory, or self-defeating (Sizer, 1985). Many teachers are probably intimidated (Porter et al., 1986). Schlechty (1985) observes that such requirements indicate the degree to which professional induction is faulty.

Though often ridiculous, administrative requirements must be taken seriously even by very competent teachers. Most evaluations of teachers include an assessment of teachers' adherence to such requirements, and those who give the impression of taking them seriously can be acknowledged to be good employees.

At the same time, however, teachers are subject to very little scrutiny. According to Sizer (1985) teachers work alone 95% of the time. The requirements that teachers are expected to meet are so ridiculous and so ornate that school systems cannot police compliance. Such requirements exist mostly to protect the school system, not to advance learning (Sizer, 1985).

However, teachers also fail to become responsibly self-directed for less familiar internal reasons. As the previous discussion noted, responsibly self-directed teaching is based on internalized knowledge and judgment.

Knowledgeable teachers are reflective (Yinger, 1980). They think constantly about what happens in their classrooms; they devise activities and responses to the ways their students act; and they question their own actions as well as the actions of their students (and of administrators).

Knowledgeable teachers practice thought crime, the act of thinking critically about matters not officially within their professional jurisdication. That is, they are able to judge the foolishness of counterproductive administrative requirements, and they comply fully only when compliance is warranted. They can work around unwarranted requirements, keeping their own professional counsel and pursuing their own professional ends. Usually, the ends they pursue are quite ordinary--coaching student performance, explaining tough ideas, exploring pithy contradictions, building a classroom culture in which intellect and learning are valued and accessible to students (Good & Brophy, 1984). As Brophy (1982) notes, such teachers "are probably brighter and more dedicated than average" (p. 529).

These teachers act autonomously because they have the knowledge and ability to evaluate the public world in which they act (schools and the bureaucracy of schooling). Without such knowledge and ability to evaluate, however, they could not act autonomously, even if all the external restraints that officially seem to diminish the autonomy of teachers were to disappear. Knowledgeable teachers act autonomously in spite of the poor conditions that characterize their role as employees (cf. Sizer, 1985). Diorio (1982) recognizes this fact, but does not analyze it. Why are knowledgeable teachers able to act this way?

Reasons that Knowledgeableness Develops Autonomy

In recent years the work of the Carnegie Forum (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986) has enjoyed some influence, or at least notoriety. These organizations suggested that prospective teachers--even elementary school

teachers--needed to complete a full liberal arts undergraduate program in addition to teacher training. Even though what they propose cannot be accomplished easily, and even though the potential harm to schools of education from short-sighted responses is large (Monahan, 1986), these proposals confront the central issue of teachers' scholarship, an issue that has been ignored too long (Meyer, 1986; Popkewitz, 1985; Webb & Sherman, 1985).

Sizer (1985) notes, however, that even liberal arts preparation hardly guarantees a sufficient level of scholarship to support good teaching. To Sizer, however, liberal education is not quite the same thing as an institution's "general education" or academic "specialization" requirements. Instead, liberal education is the commitment to learning and thought at which such formal requirements aim. Sizer, then, would require of prospective teachers an even higher level of knowledgeableness than the Carnegie Forum and the Holmes Group! What are the intellectual activities that comprise a good liberal education as they relate to the exercise of autonomy--both general intellectual autonomy and the autonomy of teachers?

Reading. A good liberal education requires students to read and to debate original sources; in fact, the reading required in good courses is only the start of a liberal education. A good liberal education permanently instills the need to read excellent texts as a way of "communicating with and evaluating" the public world in which we live (Webb & Sherman, 1985). Students--and teachers--who read only at the behest of their instructors are not engaged in learning, but in a sham enacted to acquire credentials. Liberal education coursework should cultivate the habit of reading. Most teachers, even at the secondary level, do not model good reading to their students (Rieck, 1977). Most teachers do not read much (Mitchell, 1981).

Reflection. If many teachers do not read, it follows that the same teachers do not write. And yet writing, as educators are being told more frequently of late, is thinking (Mitchell, 1979). Writing is the most explicit, most organized form of reflection. It is the only way to perfect one's grasp of complex ideas as they emerge in one's thought (Mitchell, 1979). A good liberal education cultivates the need to write just as it cultivates the need to read. The devotion to writing, like the devotion to reading, does not end with the acquisition of a credential.

Skepticism and scientific temper. Reading and writing about complex ideas teaches students to think critically (Adler, 1983; Webb & Sherman, 1985). Another way to put this idea is to say that reading and writing teach skepticism. They develop what might be called "scientific temper" (Eidell, personal communication, November 19, 1986). That is, they develop the ability to observe, to weigh alternatives, to refrain from premature judgment, and to make warranted judgments, skills that are essential to practicing teachers (Schlechty, 1985). If teachers are not well-read, if they cannot reflect skeptically, how can they contrast what they are told (by administrative fiat, by erroneous professional consensus, or by ill-conceived argument) to what they know or what they can do? Uninformed and unreflective teachers are easy prey for irrational policies and unprincipled manipulations (cf. Popkewitz, 1985 and Webb & Sherman, 1985).

Self-direction, intellectual autonomy, and classroom autonomy. The more adept students are at all of these higher-order skills, the more likely they will be to act with responsible self-direction in the classroom (Brophy, 1982; Meyer, 1986; Schlechty, 1985; Sizer, 1985; Tibbettts, 1979; Webb &

Sherman, 1985). Only such students are capable of discriminating what is essential from what is foolish. In teaching, where official requirements are often foolish and continued employment is viewed as depending on seeming compliance, it is essential for practicing teachers to improvise acceptable compromises that permit their students to participate in the life of the mind (Sizer, 1985).

Ignorance as the Vehicle of Social Mobility

As Popkewitz (1985) implies, strong cultural forces seek to restrict the participation of many students in the life of the mind. Among these forces is the role of ignorance as the vehicle of social mobility.

For over 150 years teaching has given millions of citizens a somewhat different status in life than that enjoyed by their parents (Hobsbawm, 1962). Studies have found repeatedly that even today the teaching workforce typically comes from lower-middle-class backgrounds (Lortie, 1975). But the degree of social mobility teaching provides is weak. The status of teachers remains unchanged throughout their careers, and as they age, the rank of their earnings actually declines in comparison to the earnings of similarly educated peers in other professions (Sizer, 1985).

Legitimation and ignorance. The sociological variable which relates most strongly to occupational status and to earnings is years in school (Baird, 1985; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Jencks, Barflett et al., 1979) rather than knowledge (as measured by achievement tests) or ability (as measured by IQ or aptitude tests). This finding is evidence that schools function, perhaps irrationally, as institutions that legitimate the way in which scarce

resources (i.e., desirable jobs and money) are distributed (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Fallows, 1987; Jencks, Bartlett et al., 1979; Popkewitz, 1985).

Meyer (1977) notes that schools perform four types of legitimating functions: (1) legitimating specialized competence, (2) legitimating elite roles and the persons who occupy them, (3) legitimating the unexamined assumptions of collective reality through mass education, and (4) legitimating subordinate and superordinate relationships among citizens and between citizens and the state. The implication of Meyer's work is that schools are sustained not primarily by their effect on the social mobility of individuals but by their institutional effects. Popkewitz (1985) agrees.

By providing specialized courses in the knowledge base of teaching as the route to a career in the classroom, schools of education perform the first two legitimating functions--legitimating specialized knowledge, roles, and persons. Colleges of teacher education, however, have actually valued the scholarship of students very little, by mistaking the completion of approved programs for competence. As Vance and Schlechty (1982) point out, some teacher educators take an anti-intellectual view of the role of teachers' knowledge in nurturing student achievement.

The new competency-based programs of teacher education are a very questionable alternative to the completion of approved programs. Such programs may, in fact, do more harm than good by "vocationalizing" (rather than "professionalizing") teaching (cf. Tibbets, 1979), restriciting the universe of discourse to subsidiary issues, and by promoting unwarranted claims and premature conclusions about teaching (Diorio, 1982; Ervay, 1979; Webb & Sherman, 1985).

In recent years demographic and cultural changes have also reduced both the quantity and academic quality of undergraduate students who seek to become teachers. In 1982, only 4.7 percent of college freshmen said they planned to teach, compared to 21.7 percent in 1966; of all professional groups, "prospective teachers score the lowest on [the] SAT" (Dollar, 1983, p. 14). Schlechty and Vance (1983) report that "not only are teacher training institutions producing higher proportions of low-scoring teachers, but the public schools are hiring them in proportionately greater numbers . well" (p. 98).

Finally, because the tenure of practicing teachers is low (50% leave teaching within 10 years), the net effect of the demographic and cultural changes of the past 20 years has been to cultivate a less able teaching force in the US (Carnegie Commission, 1985; Dollar, 1983; Vance & Schlechty, 1982). According to Sizer (1985) irrational and self-serving acts of public school administrators often compound the problem.

This is a rather dismal picture of the status of the teaching profession, but it is probably accurate (cf. Sizer, 1985). And yet, with respect to teachers and teacher training, the schools fulfill their first two legitimating functions rather well. An examination of the way in which the last two functions operate in teacher education will illustrate the important place of ignorance in the political economy of schooling. In particular, the quality of the role of teacher may have more to do with these remaining institutional effects than with the work of cultivating knowledge and thought among schoolchildren.

Human capital theorists (e.g., Mincer, 1974) interpret students' choices about higher education programs as investments of human capital. This view of the aims of schooling differs substantially from that adopted by this essay, but it represents well the issues of legitimation that concern us here. In the view of human capital theorists, one invests one's life (i.e., "human capital") in the enterprise of schooling in the expectation of receiving an acceptable return. Students are advised to make the best investment they can.

Students with greater human capital (i.e., better preparation for college), like the rich in the investment market, have a greater choice of investment options for their greater human capital. Many undergraduate students pursue their studies solely to gain access to lucrative careers; such student "careerists" do not enjoy their studies, nor are they likely to continue reading or writing after they finish school (Katcahdourian & Boli, 1985).

Less able students enter teaching as a way to maximize their investments of human capital (cf. Vance & Schlechty, 1982). Like the careerists observed by Katchadourian and Boli (1985), they tend to be uninterested in the aims of learning endorsed by this essay. Instead, their aim may be to make an incremental improvement in their class status by becoming teachers instead of clerical or industrial workers. Teacher education programs and the subsequent failure of practicing teachers to exercise autonomy in the classroom serve to legitimate the unexamined assumptions of collective reality and the social hierarchy.

Students and teachers should not, however, be condemned for acting in consonance with the economic structures that shape their professional behavior, however. Practicing teachers and students interested in becoming teachers report again and again that the reason they chose to become teachers is that they enjoyed working with children (e.g., Book, Freeman, & Brousseau, 1985; Clark, 1987). Though half of them become so frustrated with the impediments to such work that they leave the profession within seven years (Carnegie Forum, 1986), there is no reason to doubt the good intentions of most beginning teachers.

Because of the way in which schools perform their legitimating functions, however, most teachers do not have the internal intellectual and practical resources (knowledge, judgment, and the will to action) to cultivate in their classrooms the educational aims endorsed by this essay (cf. Sizer, 1985). As Diorio (1982) notes, "most if not all human knowledge is potentially of use" in the classroom (p. 278); the more, the better. Teaching is hard work, but existing professional preparation is of limited help, due in part to inadequacies in the means by which students are inducted into the profession (Schlechty, 1985).

Our culture provides few endemic supports for the work teachers attempt (Fallows, 1987), and the schools provide almost no explicit support for knowledgeable teachers (Meyer, 1986; Sizer, 1985; Tibbetts, 1979). Sizer, in fact, believes that schools and educational bureaucracies care very little for the scholarship of their teachers. Sizer implies that lack of support for teachers' scholarship reflects the public schools' lack of concern for the scholarship of the children they enroll.

Because many, though not by any means all, teachers are intellectually unprepared to do their jobs well, their lack of responsible self-direction in the classroom serves to legitimate the irrational features of social relations and of the social hierarchy. Children, who can be counted on to be naive, accept the most illogical lessons and lack of good will from inept teachers as the natural order. Such practices prepare them to accept similar treatment in the workplace (Wilcox, 1982). It is no wonder our schools do not teach critical thinking. To criticize is to question unexamined assumptions (Marcuse, 1964; Mitchell, 1979; Webb & Sherman, 1985).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The issue of teachers' autonomy has important political and cultural dimensions that must be reckoned with in plans to cultivate the autonomy of teachers (DeYoung, 1980). The lack of teacher autonomy legitimates unwarranted assumptions about equality and social mobility, and it plays a powerful role in schooling in the US. Unless educators grasp this idea, they will be unable to increase the autonomy of teachers.

Lack of autonomy (as defined by this essay) is a functional feature of US schooling. Our unexamined assumptions about equality, the inherent value of learning, and the utility of knowledge as a route to status are not warranted (Baird, 1985; Hofstadter, 1963; C. Howley, 1987; Jencks, Bartlett, et al., 1979; Popkewitz, 1985; Rumberger, 1984). In a critique of Japanese education, Fallows (1987) rightly cites the Japanese' practical view of equality as the prime mover of the success of schooling in that nation.

According to Pipho (1986) "a higher-quality teaching force" is a major goal that needs to become reality if the reforms outlined in recent legislation are to succeed (p. K8). Unless these reforms are implemented effectively, teachers will not be able to exercise responsible self-direction in the classroom.

So far the emphasis on the reforms has been on minimum standards, an emphasis that tends to compound the problem (Schlechty & Vance, 1983; Vance & Schlechty, 1982); reforms must also include mechanisms for recruiting teachers whose scholarship (devotion to liberal education) is high (Sizer, 1985; Vance & Schlechty, 1982). Little has been done to design such reforms.

Cultivating the autonomy of teachers. Because the problems of such an effort are so deeply-rooted in both the American culture and in the organization of its schools, the effort to cultivate the autonomy of teachers needs to be a long-term project. This essay concludes with suggestions for cultivating the autonomy of teachers.

According to Dollar (1983) the best way to improve teaching is "to attract bright, committed young people to the teaching profession and to sustain them throughout a career in the classroom [italics added]" (p. 15). The following suggestions, however, vary from Dollar's recommendations because the issue of autonomy is understood differently in this essay. Though Vance & Schlechty (1982) note that this goal is expensive, the following proposals--which represent initial efforts--are relatively modest, considering their intended effect.

1. Recruitment of able students representative of all social and ethnic strata.

Because America's schools aim to provide mass education to a heterogeneous population, the goal of recruitment should be to obtain the best-prepared candidates that each group in the heterogeneous population can supply. One standard is not applicable to both blacks and whites, affluent and poor. The equity of selection efforts is a problem that must be addressed in teacher education programs because of the nature of American culture and the condition of mass education (Fallows, 1987). This recommendation implies the need to develop separate norms for the selection of the most able available students from perhaps four or five different populations. The results will necessarily be imperfect, but they will be more equitable than current practice. Scholarship programs for these students should be ample, and the scholarships they provide should be based on financial need. This provision moves beyond the Carnegie Forum's vague propositions about minorities. It will ensure that talented minority students are better represented in the teaching force.

2. Substantive retention programs for nonadvantaged students.

Able nonadvantaged minority students, unlike white middle-class students, need continuous support if they are to complete their undergraduate and graduate studies. Such support programs require the coordination of instructional efforts (expectations, remediation, and tutoring), counseling efforts (academic advisement, personal therapy, and group identity), and financial efforts (scholarships, grants, and loans). Without such provisions, the attrition of minority students can eventually subvert the entire recruitment strategy.

3. Increased attention to liberal education in the preparation of academically able prospective teachers of all levels.

Developing scholarship, not simply enhancing course-taking in the liberal arts, is the goal of this recommendation. While scholarship might be a dubious goal for students with marginal academic skills, no one should doubt its appropriateness for academically able prospective teachers. It cannot, however, be taken for granted because even gifted students exhibit substantial lack of interest in the aims of education endorsed by this essay (A. Howley, 1986; C. Howley, 1987; Howley et al., 1986; Katchadourian & Boli, 1985; Marshall, 1985).

An ideal plan for the academically able prospective teachers recruited in accord with this suggestion would be an honors college in education. Under such an arrangement undergraduate and graduate schools could establish programs that provided extensive instruction in the arts and sciences, combined with an accelerated and rigorous professional education sequence, in accord with demonstrated student achievement and aptitude.

4. Changes in content of professional education courses.

While Diorio (1982) questions the worth of knowledge about teaching, almost no one questions the value of teaching experience. Moreover, the consensus of teacher educators favors greater use of field-placements and a variety of experiences in practice teaching (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Elvay, 1979; Gore, 1985; Schlechty, 1985; Schlechty, Joslin, Leak, & Hanes, 1985).

However, if a liberal education is relevant to teaching, then it is also clear that reading about schooling is <u>not</u> an activity of "highly

questionable worth," as Diorio (1982) claims. To recommend that teachers ignore the educational literature is irresponsible. It is therefore reasonable to require such reading of students, and it is reasonable to require them to analyze, discuss and write about such reading, as well as about their experiences in the classroom. Some courses about schooling are therefore warranted. This observation includes knowledge about the aims, curricula, and the "grab bag" of instructional methods.

Prospective teachers (and their instructors in higher education) who have a good background in the liberal arts--literature, mathematics, sociology, psychology, history, and philosophy--are, however, the only professionals who can make sense of the educational literature. At present, most undergraduate education majors begin their study of education with limited basic knowledge and skill.

Students in an honors program of professional preparation need education courses that have been changed to take these factors (adequate intellectual background and opportunities to practice teaching) into account. Reading, writing, and the coaching of teaching need to be the central activities of such a program. Whether they occur in a four- or five-year program ought to depend on the aptitude of particular students. Students' involvement in the classroom--observating, tutoring, teaching--should not, however, be postponed until after a liberal arts degree is acquired (Monahan, 1986).

5. Meaningful professional support for academically able teachers.

Because schools and state agencies do not care about the scholarship of their teachers, they have not implemented support systems for academically able teachers (Sizer, 1985; Meyer, 1986; Vance & Schlechty, 1985; Schlechty & Vance, 1983; Webb & Sherman, 1985). No recruitment and preparation program will yield effects in the classroom if graduates become discouraged by the conditions of professional work (Tibbetts, 1979). At present, knowledgeable teachers are left to improvise their own compromises to the way schools are organized (Sizer, 1985).

The point of this final suggestion, therefore, is to support teachers who have already shown their commitment to scholarship, to the knowledge upon which their teaching stands or falls, and who have established their ability to function as teachers. The sorts of incentives required by these teachers will cost taxpayers' money, but not in the form of salary increases.

Autonomous teachers need support for their intellectual development as working scholars: sabbaticals for academic study or related professional work (e.g., reading, writing, course development); release time to adapt and develop materials for students; release time and funding to attend scholarly events; opportunity to teach new courses and subjects every several years; and, finally, substantial influence on the development of curriculum and school policies.

Support should not be limited to these measures, however. Autonomous teachers inevitably come into conflict with irrational administrative requirements for accountability (Diorio, 1982; Retsinas, 1982; Sizer, 1985) and sometimes with their peers.

Therefore, knowledgeable teachers need measures that protect their job security. Changes in the role of school and district leadership would be the most direct, but probably the most impractical, route to providing such protection. A more workable alternative might be a certification status that enhances employability, an official status that legitimates the effective scholarship of these teachers. A national teaching certification program might include such a project; a national employment clearinghouse to serve such teachers might provide school districts across the nation with access to such teachers. It is unfortunate that the Carnegie Forum (1986) devoted no discussion to the issue of supporting the scholarship of practicing teachers.

Caveats

This essay addressed the relevance of teachers' autonomy to the improvement of schooling in the US. It defined autonomy as responsible self-directed professional action, with the implication that the source of autonomy resided in the ability of teachers to know, to judge, and to act in ways that promote the learning of students, regardless of the organizational shortcomings of schools. The essay concluded that teachers' lack of autonomy defined in this way is a functional feature of schooling in the US.

The measures suggested to improve the degree to which teachers act autonomously are, however, long-term projects that can only be implemented by the organizations that at present cultivate lack of autonomy among teachers, including local and state educational agencies. An interesting preliminary finding of pilot studies of teachers' autonomy is that centralized systems of education may actually encourage greater autonomy than the pluralistic system of US education.

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