

Teacher - A Professional

Parents are primary educators of their children. Parents serve as teachers primarily through their day-to-day actions, their reactions, and their interaction within the family context. Children absorb, internalize, and personalize experiences with parents. Perhaps the most critical area in which parents serve as teachers is in the development of the child's self-concept, which begins forming in infancy (Heck & Williams, 1984).

In the colonial era people relied primarily on family and apprenticeship to conduct their young from infancy to adulthood. Later the child-rearing practices seemed inappropriate and ineffective. The church took up the responsibility which was later taken over by the secular state governments. The men who taught (most teachers were men) were expected to show themselves in proper and religious conduct. And as a part of their regular duties, teachers were expected to help out around the church (Lortie, 1969). The state school system began to emerge between the Revolution and the Civil War (c. 1917). The Civil War emptied the schools of men, and these schools were later occupied by women.

The professional status of teaching ranks thirty-fifth on a 90-point scale of occupational survey of men and women, conducted in 1947, and teaching ranks first among those occupation largely populated by women (Lortie, 1969; Sykes, 1990). The teachers' salary at the school level is not sufficiently high to maintain men in the profession, whereas teaching offers attractive prestige and money compared to other realistic alternatives for women. Professional status is also dependent on client status. Children have little status in our society (Sykes, 1990) and hence school teachers. The predominantly female composition of the teaching profession and other factors strengthen all of the bureaucratic control in the organization in which they work.

People work in very different settings, and there are a constellation of interacting work place variables - - physical, organizational, sociological, economic, political, cultural, and psychological (Johnson, 1990) that operate at a given time. This paper will consider three organizational models that will elaborate on the roles of teacher.

The labour model

The American Federation of Teachers established the labour model in 1916, and it was later adopted by the National Education Association in the 1960's. The labour model in education emphasizes that teachers are employees and should receive compensation and have working conditions commensurate with their education and the social value of

their work. In a school organization modeled on manufacturing, the teacher would repeat routine, pre-determined tasks rather than adapt to changing student needs. Rowan (1990) describes the “task uncertainty” in the teaching profession. When the properties of inputs (students) are uncertain, imperfectly understood and heterogeneous, the factory model is not appropriate.

As an “employee” the teacher is a salaried worker subject to the authority of the public body which employs her (Lortie, 1969). The rhetoric of “teaching as an art” projects autonomy rather than control. Employee status denotes subordination and teachers are without powers of governance. Effective leadership of the labour movement in public education has led to a feeling of job and financial security among teachers. This movement, however, has been and continues to be primarily interested in formulating policies which are concerned with factors external to the core work of teaching. For example, salaries, the structure of the work-load and fringe benefits gain attention rather than curricular issues. The labour movement has not been concerned with the core work of teaching, that is to say the teaching act (Kerchner & Mitchell, 1988).

Teachers make countless decisions in the classroom about curriculum, instructional technique, classroom management, and standards of discipline (Heck & Williams, 1984; Johnson, 1990). The quality of decisions is often based on the adequacy and accuracy of information available. The effective decision-making process requires basic knowledge of the foundations (Philosophical, Psychological, Sociological), methodology of teaching, knowledge related to the specific classroom setting, and the ability to diagnose the numerous factors that operate simultaneously in the classroom. Teachers should have autonomy in deciding how to teach, how to use time, and how to set rules of discipline. Following the labour model, administrators in the hierarchy often make these decisions (without consulting teachers) that affect teachers’ work and students’ learning, and sometimes those decisions have serious instructional consequences. Johnson (1990) reports that some teachers objected to being distracted from teaching by the demands of the policy implications that will bear upon their work.

Evaluation is an essential part of any enterprise. Evaluation is a much more complex process in a public enterprise like education. The tax-paying public has exerted great pressure for more concrete and reliable evidence of school performance in the light of what is seen as a decline in standards. Popham (1989) contends that Measurement Driven Instruction (MDI), is desirable and that high-quality testing programs are essential to the survival of public schools. But Bracey (1989) argues that the quality and fairness of

tests are suspect and that they will not achieve the purposes of evaluation. The “quality control” concept of the factory model is unrealistic because of the diverse nature of the input. The problem is one of accountability which is pulling schools in conflicting directions (Elmore, 1990).

The semi-professional model

In comparison with professional employees, semi-professionals lack autonomy: they are told what to do and how to do it (Simpson & Simpson, 1969). They are more accountable for their performance; employees must account to their superiors, and the organization must account to an outside authority. Evaluation is being used as a tool of control and a means of compensatory legitimation of right (Weiler, 1990). As a result, the performance of primary tasks (what goes on in classroom) loses prestige among semi-professionals, while supervision and administrative activities concerned with maintaining and representing the organization become the most rewarded ones (Simpson & Simpson, 1969). The public does not grant recognition to be superior knowledge of semi-professionals because they do not approve that they have any legitimate claim for specialized knowledge. Thus, clients or community impose their own judgement in the decision-making, whereby the occupation is classified as less professional (Lortie, 1969).

Teaching is a mass occupation and draws from a lower social stratum than elite professions. Therefore doctor-patient or lawyer-client relationships hardly seem to be an appropriate model for teacher-student relations (Sykes, 1990). When the resources are not sufficiently allocated and controlled by others (interest groups), there is a need for compromise (Sizer, 1984). This is typical of the semi-professional model. In the semi-professional model, evaluation is to assist the teacher in the process. It is a feedback from the system, to guide the process and not a tool of external control. In this model, the teacher alone is not responsible for the outcome, since the decision-making is a negotiating process.

The professional model

In the professional model, the value orientation is one of quality aimed at the development and transmission of expert knowledge. What makes a profession a *profession* is its authentic, demonstrable, transferable, and practical expert knowledge. The ultimate justification for a professional act is that it is, to the best of the professional’s knowledge, the right act (Etzioni, 1969, p.x). In professional terms this is referred to as theoretical knowledge; in organizational terms it is referred to as

professional or organizational technology (Perrow, 1965). The role of evaluation in the professional model is three dimensional; placement, classification, and guidance. The teacher is in full control of the results since the decision-making is not shared; the public approves the claim of specialized knowledge.

Teachers as professionals possess specialized knowledge of various theories of teaching and learning. This knowledge provides the kind of comprehensive information with which valid programmatic decisions are made. Teachers as decision-makers have the ability to see a problem from the students' viewpoints as well as their own, taking into consideration all of the factors that come into focus from both perspectives. Ginott (1972) reports:

"I have come to a frightening conclusion; I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal."

The community involvement and nature of the teaching profession lacks the claim of "professionalism". In the professional model decision-making rests with the teachers. There are several reasons that do not allow teacher to function on a professional model - - diverse objectives of education, occupational status, client status, low salary, predominantly female composition of the profession, and client and community involvement in the decision-making process. Some teachers lose faith and give up hope. Others clamour for reform. The more radical seek to change systems. Meanwhile life in the classroom marches on; there are children to teach, parents to appease, and principals to whom they must account. They all make demands on teachers' time and energy. How to survive with dignity is not a rhetorical question for a teacher.

Whatever be the reason, it is to be noted that there are teachers who are not dedicated to their work. This is very important because of the complex nature of the teaching task. Students characterize teachers into two groups -- the popular teacher and the "who cares" teacher (Bergreen, 1988). The popular teacher is fair, enthusiastic, intelligent, humorous, and creates a learning environment. The "who cares" teacher is moderately intelligent, has no sense of humour, is not too friendly and at times can be mean, lacks enthusiasm and originality, and often seems defensive, insecure, and intimidated.

Conclusion

Theory without practice is empty; practice without theory is blind . . . (Hillesheim & Merrill, 1971; cited in Heck & Williams, 1984). Theory and practice should interact dynamically. The context in which theory is translated into practice needs to include the ecology of the school community -- social, cultural, political, economic and the like.

Gideonse (1990) describes the role of theoretical and practical knowledge in the teaching profession and states that teachers and schools should dedicate themselves to continue diagnosing, designing curriculum, creating materials and experiences and “delivering” them to students until the students achieve success. Ginott (1972) tells us a story of a philosopher and a boat man:

A philosopher was crossing a big river on a small boat. He asked the boatman, “Do you know philosophy?” “I can’t say I do,” answered the man. “You lost one third of your life,” said the philosopher. “Do you know any literature?” He persisted. “I can’t say I do,” answered the man. “You lost two thirds of your life,” proclaimed the philosopher. At that moment the boat hit a rock and started sinking. “Do you know how to swim?” asked the boatman. “No,” replied the philosopher. “Then you lost your whole life,” said the man.

When crucial problems appear, philosophies often disappear. To a man in a sinking boat, theory is irrelevant. Either he knows how to swim, or he drowns. In the midst of classroom crises, all the books in all the libraries are of no help. All the lectures and all the courses are of little value. At the moment of truth, only skill saves (Ginott, 1972). This is restated here not to underestimate the value of theory but to alert the reader of the need for ingenuity in practical situations.

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