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THE PROBLEM OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AMONG ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

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THE PROBLEM OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AMONG
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

A Problem Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Course in
Research Problems 390b

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FOOTNOTES

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem. This study pertains to professional ethics of elementary teachers in their relations with pupils, parents, other teachers (including administrators) and the community as a whole. The purpose of the study is to present what these relations are like at the present time and to determine what are desirable ethical standards. This study is intended to stimulate the writer and other elementary teachers to a greater interest in practicing ethical procedures in their professional and social relationship with people.

Need for the Study. The writer has observed that teachers often remark that another's conduct is unethical; whereas, the situation may simply be the latter person differing in opinion with the former. Teachers who are older in the profession, as well as in years, may not be able to adjust their thinking with that of younger teachers. Each group may term the other group as unethical.

Perhaps teachers have earned for themselves the destructive criticism they get in the form of jokes, sarcasm, and caricatures. A better understanding of educational professional standards by those outside the profession, and improved practice of said standards by those in the profession

could be vastly profitable to all people. Therefore, the writer sees a need for distinguishing between ethical and unethical practices.

In the writer's opinion there is a need for improved relations between elementary teachers and the people with whom they work and live. This improvement would be of benefit to the profession.

Definition of Terms. Webster¹ defines ethics as the science of moral duty; broadly, the science of ideal human character; moral principles, quality or practice.

Professional is defined as of or pertaining to a profession; as professional ethics. A profession is the occupation, if not commercial, mechanical, agricultural, or the like, to which one devotes oneself; a calling, as the profession of arms, of teaching.²

Methods and Procedures. In attempting to write upon the problem of professional ethics among elementary teachers, the writer needs to learn the past, present, and possible future situations of the problem. Libraries furnish much valuable information. Many books written by people working in the field of ethics are helpful, but those books written by people in the field of education prove to be invaluable.

¹Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, G. and C. Merriam Company (Springfield, Mass., 1949), p. 283.

²Ibid., p. 674.

Periodicals furnish the writer with articles by up-to-date educators. A broad view of the opinions of others is considered desirable; hence, the differing of beliefs among the texts of articles is thought by the writer to be well suited to the purpose of the study.

Discussions among people, both teachers and laymen, are a source of gathering data.

The writer analyzed the information collected through reading and discussion and draws conclusions therefrom in an attempt to diagnose the study of professional ethics among elementary teachers.

Limitations. The writer realizes that there is a wide range of opinion as to the ethical standards of present day elementary educators. There are undoubtedly innumerable violations of codes of ethics which probably pass undetected.

In procuring data for this study, the writer finds that most people in education seem to have a fairly clear idea of ethical practices. It is extremely difficult to determine just how well these practices are performed.

The writer further realizes that many factors are involved in distinguishing between ethical and unethical practices.

A question might be raised as to the advisability of trying to recognize a difference between professional and non-professional ethics.

The writer does not attempt to suggest how to carry out desirable ethical standards, but rather to define what they are.

RELATIONSHIPS OF TEACHERS

With Pupils. The teacher's first concern is for the child's educational development, but the teacher is also deeply interested in every aspect of the pupil's welfare.¹ To develop "the whole child" is the obligation of the school. "I don't teach the subject; I teach the child," has been a pet phrase since the late 1920's. No doubt many of those who use it would be embarrassed if pressed to fill in the details of their theory. Perhaps they vaguely realize that their pupils' physical conditions, moods, worries, joys, and hobbies, all play their parts along with his intelligence and study habits in determining how he gets along in school. They probably do not know what part these play, but by acknowledging that they play any part opens the way for an important new trend. Many teachers know now that "Teach the whole child," means to transform the nursery school or kindergarten child into a mature person of adult years.²

Each child is an individual and must be taught according to his needs. The teacher must try to find out his capacities and his abilities in order to help him fulfill his individual needs to the best advantage.³

¹Missouri State Teachers Association, "Professional Relationships of the Teachers," Professional Pointers for Teachers (Columbia, Missouri, 1949), p. 12.

²Harold Rugg, Foundations for American Education (New York: World Book Company, 1947), p. 164.

³Missouri State Teachers Association, loc. cit.

The teacher must see each learner as an individual who has needs and problems not exactly like those of others in his group.¹

Within one class will be found a child with high intellectual ability and another who finds the typical intellectual activity of the normal classroom a slow and often impossible task. There will be those whose genius for self-expression lies in their use of language, and those who paint, use music, or build with wood. Some will have sources of security and affection in family and friends; others will be seeking to satisfy these needs through classmates and teacher. One child will be a leader in group activities; another will tend to follow. There will be those whose pace is slow and deliberate and those who by nature are quick, active, fast moving.

Nor will there be an even development of various areas in any one individual. Rapid increase in height and weight does not correspond to growth in ability to think. Creative ability in one field does not guarantee equal capacity in another. Social maturity does not necessarily mean emotional control. Just as there are differences within the same individual.²

The teacher's relationship with the pupil must be just, firm, and kind. A few specific rules may accomplish much more than many strict rules. The pupils will probably abide by directions given cheerfully with a smile, whereas, they would rebelliously ignore the same directions if given sternly and as an order or a command. The problem of discipline falls in the same pattern. The teacher should smile often

¹Florence B. Stratemeyer, Hamden L. Forkner, Margaret G. McKim and Others, Developing a Curriculum for Modern Living (Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1947), pp. 56-7.

²Ibid., p. 57.

and give the children something to laugh about every day. She should think before making a rule; then enforce it if it is necessary.¹

In handling all discipline cases, teachers should distinguish between the pupil and behavior. The misconduct is wrong, but the pupil needs to be understood. Perhaps too great a premium is put on conforming behavior. A good teacher will recognize that the shy student who "causes no trouble" may be experiencing serious emotional conflicts. She will be a true friend to the youngster and will try to show him that in her eyes he is so important that she wants to know how he feels and what the problem is that he is facing.²

In summary, the teacher's standards of ethical procedures relating to the child appear to be:

1. Although the teacher's first concern is for the child's educational development, he is also deeply interested in every aspect of the pupil's welfare.

2. Each child must be taught according to his individual needs.

3. The teacher's relationship with the child must be just, firm, and kind.

¹E. O. Mann, "Some Principles That Help Make a Happy Successful School," School and Community, XL (September, 1953), 42-3.

²Florence C. Myers, "I Wish Teachers Would...", The Journal of the National Education Association, XL (February, 1951), 99.

4. The good teacher is a true, and understanding friend to the pupils.

With Parents. The professional teacher endeavors to establish friendly and intelligent relations between the home and the school. To establish this relationship, the parents must understand what the school is doing. This understanding may be brought about by individual parent-teacher conferences, group meetings, and parent visitation of schools.¹ The parent comes to confer with the teacher for help, reassurance, or to register a complaint. The teacher may ask for a conference when she feels that the pupil's problem cannot be solved without assistance from the home.²

Dr. McKinney,³ Chairman of the Department of Psychology, University of Missouri, points out that there is another kind of contact between parent and school personnel. It is either an informal one or an outgrowth of a group program. At such gatherings parents may be prompted to talk to teachers that they meet socially and as a part of the conversation discuss students either jocularly or seriously. Dr. McKinney believes that the major purpose of the early part of the conference is

¹Margaret Hill, "Helping the Parent to Help His Child," The Grade Teacher, LXXI (October, 1953), 54.

²Loc. cit.

³Dr. Fred McKinney, "Counseling With Parents," School and Community, XL (October, 1953), 869.

to dispel previous misconceptions of each other and for parent and teacher to come to know each other as they really are.

Teachers may be concerned lest parents turn up who are uninformed, low in standards, dominant, over protective of their child, belligerent, uncooperative, condescending in attitude, disinterested or rigid. Parents may fear similar attitudes in teachers. They may view members of the school personnel as resentful of parental suggestions, as disinterested in individual cases, as spiteful, old-fashioned, or impractical.

The counselor should anticipate what kind of relationship he can expect with the parent. His goal of course is to establish rapport. The more facts he knows about the parent, the parent's attitudes towards the child and the school, the better he can handle the situation. He should accept any relationship that exists, and then work toward a more positive one. This may consist of allowing the parent to ventilate all of her hostility and emotion during the early period of the interview. He can accept and understand these hostilities as existing without necessarily agreeing with the parent in her viewpoints. He accepts the parent's feeling and attitudes as understandable under the conditions.¹

Frederick E. Bolton,² Professor of Education and Dean Emeritus, College of Education, University of Washington, states that a teacher's own life should show that education does ennoble. Parents are entitled to expect the teachers into whose care they entrust their most precious possession, their children, to dignify the teaching profession in every way. The teacher should exercise his full rights as a

¹Loc. cit.

²Frederick E. Bolton and John E. Corbally, Educational Sociology (American Book Company, New York, 1941), p. 121.

citizen, but he should avoid controversies which may tend to decrease his value as a teacher.

As stated before, teachers want parents to be in sympathy with what the teachers are doing and how they are doing it. However, teachers should be aware that it has to be two-way relationship - that parents, too, deserve understanding and sympathy for their concerns and doubts. School people are too often lulled satisfactorily by a few favorable remarks from receptive parents. They need to think about the larger number of parents who stay away from school and mumble or grumble about modern education and its "foolish frills." School personnel must continue to search diligently for effective ways to reach these stay-at-home parents in order to help them gain understanding of modern schools.¹

Relationships of teachers with parents may be summarized as follows:

1. The teacher tries to establish intelligent and friendly cooperation between the home and the school.
2. Teachers should keep the parents informed as to the purposes and accomplishments of the school.
3. Parent and teacher should learn to know each other as they really are.
4. Teachers must find ways to reach all parents and should realize that parents deserve understanding and sympathy for their concerns.

¹Ibid.

With Teachers and Administrators. The relationship among members of the teaching profession should be characterized by mutual respect and loyalty.¹ This would imply that the teacher should deal with other members of the profession in the same manner as he himself wishes to be treated. This standard of cooperation would help teachers in carrying out what is possibly the biggest job facing teachers today - making education a real profession. Professional pride grows out of mutual respect, out of worthwhile service to society, and out of certainty that the role of the profession is indispensable to the democratic social order in which it functions. The profession is obligated to measure up in its own eyes before it can be accepted by others.²

The experienced teacher should help beginning teachers whenever it is possible to do so and should consider it a privilege to render them professional guidance, leadership and encouragement.³

There are a number of obligations of a personal nature that can mean a great deal to the successful orientation of the new teacher. Some may seem trivial and even ludicrous; nevertheless they are important to the success and happiness of the individual. Of these some are the explanation of the personnel policies and practices of the school system; the establishment of practices of fair assignment; the statement of the educational philosophy of the school to which he is assigned.

¹Missouri State Teachers Association, op. cit., p. 13.

²Doris Conway, "Ethics-Individual Integrity," The Oklahoma Teacher, XXXIV (May, 1953), 34.

³Missouri State Teachers Association, op. cit., p. 13.

Many a fine-teacher-in-the-making has been lost to the profession because he has been made the "goat." Why all low sections? Why the least desirable room in the building? Why the hardest task? In a democracy each one must carry his fair share of the load and put up with his part of the less desirable situations.

The individual teacher must grant full, unqualified acceptance to the new teacher. In manner, voice and word, members of the profession are duty bound to indicate that the new teacher is needed and welcome.¹

The teacher should strive to keep up and improve his own efficiency. This can be done by many means including study and travel. Studies may evolve philosophy and new findings pertinent to teaching problems. A truly professional person never stops being informed of and participating in experimentation of new ideas of instruction. In other words, the teacher should never consider his educational preparation completed or the planning of his teaching program finished. He should be concerned with his own personal growth and sound mental health.²

Kilpatrick³ points out that few things cut deeper than unsatisfying personal relations and, on the other hand, few things bring more abiding pleasure than satisfying personal relations. Thus it brings happiness to teachers to maintain a congenial relationship with their fellow-teachers.

¹Lucille Berlin, "Obligations of the Profession to a New Teacher," The Oklahoma Teacher, XXXV (September, 1953), 21.

²Missouri State Teachers Association, loc. cit.

³William Heard Kilpatrick, Philosophy of Education (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), pp. 152-3.

In order to work cordially with others of the profession, a teacher must be able to understand and accept himself, with his good points and weaknesses. He must realize that his self concept can, and may have to, be changed in its less essential particulars to maintain harmony for the good of all concerned. A person should be able to adjust to reasonable situations without losing his individuality or his emotional security.¹

It is imperative that the teacher be an active and informed member of his professional organizations. It is necessary that he accept the professional responsibility to take part in those professional organizations that are devoted to the advancement of the profession. By his participation he is furthering the over-all interests of the teacher and of education.²

The competent teacher considers professional qualifications and attainment as the determining factors in obtaining a teaching appointment and for attaining promotion.³

Doris Conway⁴ sums up the substance of relationships of teachers as follows:

... hard as that may be upon many of us,
to discourage gossip and irresponsible
gripping - to create situations in which those
of all levels counsel together freely and
without suspicion or fear that one will take
reprisal upon the other.

¹Robert J. Havighurst, "Peace of Mine for the Teacher," The Journal of the National Education Association, XLIII (November, 1953), 493.

²Missouri State Teachers Association, loc. cit.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Doris Conway, op. cit., p. 35.

We recognize that ethics is concerned with the right and wrong or the goodness and badness of behavior. One's behavior in school work can be good in the sense that it is precisely legal, or fully sound in all its scientific bearings, or correct in the sense that it is in conformity with social usage. Like education our ethics, too, is changing, and certainly we should not only be conscious of, but as far as understanding can guide us, should contribute to the building and rebuilding of our ethics. As someone has said, "the clothes of a code of ethics of fifty years ago doesn't fit the profession of teachers of today."

Respect and loyalty should dominate the relationship between teachers and administrators. It is common professional courtesy for the teacher to transact professional business with the properly designated authorities. A loyal teacher avoids unfavorable criticism of other teachers or of administrators except that criticism formally presented to a school official for the welfare of the school.¹

A competent teacher is usually willing to follow reasonable instructions or suggestions pertaining to his work when so directed by his administrator. He should think flexibly, as well as critically, thereby avoiding a "set in his ways" attitude.²

Ethical relationships of teachers with other teachers and administrators may be summed up as follows:

1. Mutual respect and loyalty characterize the relationship among members of the profession.

¹Missouri State Teachers Association, loc. cit.

²Floyd T. Goodier and William A. Miller, Administration of Town and Village Schools (St. Louis: Webster Publishing Company, 1938), pp. 128-136.

2. The experienced teacher helps the beginning teacher whenever possible.

3. The teacher tries to maintain and improve his own efficiency.

4. The teacher must cooperate with his administrators and transact professional business through the proper channels.

With the Community. The teacher should be expected by the community to exercise the rights, responsibilities, and duties of citizenship.¹ Such is assumed to be his privilege and he should keep himself informed as to matters pertaining to citizenship.

If a teacher is to render his best service, he must adjust himself to the community. In order to make such an adjustment, the teacher needs to know something of the community standards and customs and be willing to respect them. He must realize the evaluation which the community places upon him. The teacher's work in the community is invaluable. However, many teachers are not properly appreciated nor held in high esteem by the community.² They do not earn as much money as do other professional class workers or workers in the skilled class group. Hence, the American teacher frequently finds himself in an inferior position both socially

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

and professionally. Furthermore, he is surrounded by numerous restrictions in some localities and must accept the situation or look for employment elsewhere.¹ This dark picture is changing, but slowly, because community attitudes are difficult to change.

School personnel recognize the obligation of themselves to inculcate in pupils an appreciation of the principles of American democracy.² Stress has been laid upon the importance of the home, the school, and the community making a combined contribution toward the development of democratic values. Therefore, the community is interested in the school if it is interested in the development of citizens who are able to take responsible places in the world as leaders of the future generation.³

Although the teacher seeks to be objective in controversial matters, he is often called upon to help in community affairs and may do so successfully.⁴

Since pupils and teacher are members of the community in which the teacher works, it is impossible to draw a clear-cut distinction between the teacher's obligations to his pupils and co-workers and his obligations to the community. However, the community looks to its teachers for a certain amount of leadership, especially in the smaller school districts. By

¹Ibid.

²Missouri State Teachers Association, loc. cit.

³Stratemeyer, op. cit., p. 407.

⁴Bolton and Corbally, op. cit., p. 124.

virtue of his training and social contacts, the teacher can assist in a number of worthy community projects. Through these activities the teacher makes the school more meaningful to the community at large and develops a favorable reaction toward education in general. But the teacher should not devote so much time to these outside activities that his classroom work suffers.

A teacher should never accept an appointment to a school in a community in which he feels he will not be happy. The teacher who complains about local mores not only is unfair to the community but is unfair to the teaching profession in general.¹

To be true to himself and his community, the teacher should acquire a broad background of knowledge and experience, bolster within himself a strong emotional control, and enact the highest standards of behavior.²

In summary, the teacher-community relationship should implicate the following:

1. The teacher will keep himself informed and will perform his rights and duties as a citizen.
2. The teacher must adjust himself to the community.
3. The American teacher is obligated to instill within pupils an appreciation of the principles of American democracy.
4. The teacher strives to be objective in presenting controversial matters.

¹Ibid.

²Goodier and Miller, op. cit., p. 140.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The writer feels that the following standards are evident from this study:

In relations with pupils:

1. The teacher's first concern is for the child's educational development, but he is also concerned in every aspect of the pupil's welfare.
2. Each child must be taught according to his individual needs.
3. In his relationship with the child the teacher must be just, firm, and kind.
4. The teacher should be a true and understanding friend to the pupils.

In relations with parents:

1. The teacher tries to establish intelligent and friendly cooperation between the home and the school.
2. Parent and teacher should learn to know each other as they really are.
3. Teachers should keep the parents informed as to the purposes and accomplishments of the school.
4. Ways must be found to reach all parents to give them the understanding and sympathy which they deserve.

In relation with teachers:

1. Mutual respect and loyalty characterize the relationship among members of the profession.

2. The experienced teacher helps the beginning teacher whenever possible.

3. The teacher tries to maintain and improve his own efficiency.

4. The teacher must cooperate with administrators and transact professional business through the proper channels.

In relations with the community:

1. The teacher strives to keep himself informed and should exercise his rights and duties as a citizen.

2. The teacher must adjust himself to the community.

3. The American teacher is obligated to instill within pupils an appreciation of the principles of American democracy.

4. The teacher strives to be objective in presenting controversial matters.

From these, the writer has achieved various conclusions concerning professional ethics among elementary teachers.

The conformity of teachers to high standards of ethical conduct has long been recognized as a professional prerequisite. Teachers have long realized that the type of professional service that they can render is dependent upon the level of ethical standards that they maintain. Also dependent upon these standards is the individual welfare of members of the profession. The profession should stand for

ideals, service, and leadership. Each teacher should do his part toward upholding high ideals. He should serve willingly and uncomplainingly, realizing that his highest obligation is to the boys and girls entrusted to his care. His leadership of them should be to the best of his ability.

A teacher should be an open-minded person who can, upon occasion, confess to his own shortcomings and aspire to rise above them. Teachers must live and work in the world as it is today. Although they need not condone all modern trends, neither should they be biased, or supercilious. Perhaps if more teachers conducted themselves as normal human beings with the same feelings and interests as other people, they would be accepted as such. In act and conversation, teachers should govern themselves so that the public gains confidence in the profession.

Every teacher should be a progressive student of education. He should regard teaching as a profession and as a career. He is obligated to secure full standard professional training and to use such training, along with common sense and profitable experience to the fullest extent of his ability.

Likewise, teachers have an ethical duty to help the beginning teacher to acclimate himself to the profession.

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