

Let's Define What We Mean By "Profession"*

JUNE 24, 1957 was a memorable day. On that day, Arthur Corey, Executive Secretary of the California Teachers Association, challenged the profession at a seminar of association staff members at Trenton, N. J., to accept their role in leadership toward professional maturity. The first step toward maturity, according to Corey, is to define the word "profession." His premise is that "as teaching is basic in the preparation in the intellectual, professional, and technical leadership for our society, we cannot longer be satisfied that a profession cannot be defined." Because teaching must be better and still better as our mechanical and technical processes become more specialized and complex, teachers are faced with the decision now as to what kind of profession will be good enough to meet America's need.

What Must Be Included in Definition

1. Teaching Must Be Fundamentally An Intellectual Activity. Although education certainly deals with the whole child, it should and must remain a calling which demands a relatively high intellectual capacity. Schools cannot create an environment which stimulates high intellectual attainment without creative and intelligent teachers. All other things being equal, the more intelligent person will be the better teacher. Unless this requirement is accepted, professionalization is questionable.

2. The Teaching Profession Must Posses A Defined Body of Knowledge, Skills and Techniques. Again, all other things being equal the teacher who knows something about psychology, child development, pedagogy and educational philosophy is a better teacher than the one who does not. If this thesis be accepted, then society must take steps to guarantee that its teachers possess this working equipment. It also follows that teachers individually and collectively have a responsibility constantly to increase the amount and validity of this accumulated professional knowledge and skill. The importance of this professional subject matter may indicate the wisdom of a general examination for teachers as a culmination to their preparation as a partial basis for their licensing. The examination of recruits and

the accreditation of preparation programs are the two most potent weapons used by other groups in upgrading the competence of their replacements.

3. The Teaching Profession Must Be A Career Occupation. Turnover in many states indicates that teaching is still a transition job. No profession can be built upon transitory service. Recent studies indicate that in some parts of the country, turnover runs as high as twenty to twenty-five per cent. (Seminar members felt that "selective admission, recruitment and screening" should be requisites to a career occupation).

4. The Teaching Profession Must Demand A Long and Continuing Preparation. All other things being equal, the person with the boardest and best educational preparation will be the best teacher. This is another way of saying that good teachers must first be educated people. They must not only know the subject matter they would teach, but know enough about our total culture to assess the significance of their own field. Every teacher needs to have a good liberal education with sufficient depth in some subject matter area to rightfully call himself a specialist. Then on top of all this, he must master the body of specialized professional knowledge which makes him a teacher.

5. Teachers Must Be Aware Of The Significance Of Their Work And Be Dedicated To The Welfare Of Those They Teach. Teaching is social service of the highest sort. The welfare of the pupil must come before personal desire or aggrandizement.

6. The Teaching Profession Must Give Its Members A Relatively High Degree Of Individual Autonomy In Their Every Day Work. Assuming adequate preparation and competence, a teacher should be given freedom to diagnose the educational problems of his pupils and prescribe the treatment best suited to alleviate them. Except in rare instances the teacher's prescription should be final. The legion of supervisors and co-ordinators which descends upon the harried teacher in many of our schools is not conducive to his dignity or professional status.

The professional necessity for heavy emphasis on many aspects of group action, group unity and group discipline makes individual autonomy in meeting daily

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problems an essential compensating factor if individual creativeness and initiative are to be preserved.

7. The Teaching Profession Must Have A Group Solidarity Which Makes Possible An Independent Professional Determination Of Important Educational Issues. This makes some kind of professional organization imperative and implies that the organization must be free of any entangling alliances which would bring extraneous issues into the solution of educational problems. If solidarity is to be achieved and maintained, then broad participation in policy making is necessary. This does not mean that the organized teachers should make the policy for the schools. It merely means that they will be prepared to advise the policy making authorities what policy ought to be. The teaching profession must be ready and able to speak as a group on important issues.

8. The Teaching Profession Must Possess Standards Of Ethical Principle, Personnel Policy And Minimum Competence And Must Enforce Them. From a practical standpoint, this is one of the most formidable barriers in the path of professionalization. It is no easy task to secure general agreement as to what these standards ought to be and even more difficult to enforce them once they are agreed upon.

9. The Teaching Profession Must Be Provided Good Working Conditions And An Economic Status Equivalent To That Generally Afforded The Upper Middle Class In Our Society. Under the present conditions and assuming the kind of preparation which teachers need, this would mean maximum salaries of from ten to twelve thousand dollars with reasonable tenure, sick leave and retirement.