

Ted - After finishing this I realized that it was not what you wanted. I'm doing another one but you may use this if you need it.

David Selden
Assistant to the President, AFT

Dave

Burrowing through the mountains of literature on teacher professionalism, you get the impression that for the past several decades we seem to have been engaging in a verbose, collective contemplation of our teacherly navels.

"Professionalism" has become a mystique which means more to many teachers than the realities of the educational enterprise which confront them every day of their working lives. There are almost as many definitions of the term as there are teachers, yet professionalism has become a Holy Grail which all must pursue as though there were common agreement on its meaning and significance.

To paraphrase a well-known aphorism: professionalism is the opiate of the teachers.

The professionalism mystique has been cultivated and nourished by those who have had strong vested interests in the education establishment: the officials of the NEA and its satellite associations, the mandarins of the teacher training institutions, and, of course, the superintendents and other managers of the educational enterprise. Each of these groups has made its contribution to the mythology of pedagogy.

The NEA has promoted the professionalism mystique through the use of a massive syllogism.

Doctors, lawyers, and dentists make lots of money and hold high status in society;

Doctors, lawyers, and dentists belong to exclusive organizations which are apart from, if not in opposition to, the labor movement;

Doctors, lawyers, and dentists are professionals;

Teachers are professionals;

Teachers should belong to exclusive organizations which are apart from, if not in opposition to, the labor movement;

Therefore, if teachers adhere to non-union organizations, they, too, will make lots of money and hold high status in society.

Probably the most thorough-going critique of the association line is contained in Myron Lieberman's landmark volume, Education As A Profession (Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; 1956). Lieberman exposes the holes in the syllogism. He points out that the NEA, far from being an exclusive "professional" organization is open to anyone who cares to pay the \$10-a-year dues. He contrasts the weakness of the education associations with the strong control of the medical and bar organizations and suggests that the undue influence of superintendents and other administrators in the education groups is one source of this weakness.

But even Lieberman approaches the problem of professionalism from the standpoint of making the association syllogism work. He punctures the mystique but he sees professionalism as primarily a matter of making the teacher an institution buttressed by a strong "professional" organization.

Second to the association propagandists, the chief contributors to building and maintaining the professionalism mystique have been the educationists in our teacher training institutions. With them the concern has been mainly with method; discovering new ways of teaching and supervision. The educationists have sought to develop

a body of efficacious techniques which, when taught at a teacher training institution, would establish the teacher as, per se, a recognized and unassailable expert. The ideal seems to be to put the teacher in the same position as a physician, making prescriptions and performing operations and therapy with virtually unquestioned authority.

The effort to achieve professional status by establish^{ing} the teacher as an authority is constantly being ambushed by unforeseen ironies. First there is the basic fact that one cannot impart knowledge and skill which one does not have. The accent on method has inevitably de-accented teacher intellectuality and scholarship, with the result that the educationists who are generally well-meaning and strongly humanitarian, have frequently fallen prey to the basic education people, who often are reactionary in their outlook. The obvious solution for this dilemma is to extend the teacher training period to at least five and probably six or seven years, so that teachers may be properly educated as well as trained, but in a time of teacher shortage this has thus far proven practically impossible.

Another problem with the "expert authority" road to professionalism has been the disconcerting frequency with which individuals have made a ~~success~~ of teaching without much formal training in teaching methods. Books and magazine articles about "my most unforgettable teacher" almost always talk about the personality of the beloved pedagogue, rather than his scholarly attributes or his mastery of the subject. (There are "natural teachers", of course, but scarcely enough to constitute a profession.)

The final irony of the professionalism-through-expertise approach is that while the people who operate our teacher training insti-

tutions have preached their educationist doctrine they have at the same time attempted to so specialize, routinize, and syllabize teaching that any fool can do it.

The third main group of promoters of the mystique are the proprietors and managers of the educational enterprise.

Education is frequently referred to as a "public" enterprise. This concept automatically puts teachers in a special class, serving "the public" and perhaps all humanity, or at least all America, like George Washington or Betsy Ross.

In fact, teachers work for boards of education, superintendents and principals, and they can get fired or otherwise disciplined if they do not conform to the wishes of these proprietors. The members of the school management cadre may view themselves as guardians of the rights of children, the interests of taxpayers, or as politicians, or as careerists in the educational corporation. Like proprietors and managers everywhere, however, they have placed a strong emphasis on "loyalty" - which in their special lexicon is synonymous with dedication, thus adding another basic element to the professionalism mystique.

To sum up, the professionalism mystique is composed of one part middle-class snobbishness, one part black magic, and one part respect for one's superiors. Mix them all together and you have a heady brew indeed, and anybody in education who would prohibit teachers their "right" to indulge is apt to go down in history along with Andrew Volstead.

Some people who have rebelled against the professionalism mystique have flatly stated that teaching is at best a skilled trade, one which anyone should be proud to master but which has no special significance which sets it apart from dozens of other crafts. For those of

us who are unionists as well as teachers, this approach may seem to offer an easy satisfaction, but it has its practical limitations.

For one thing, how are you going to build a union if you start out by telling the prospective brothers and sisters that they first will have to kick this professionalism stuff to which they have become addicted?

Yet, if we do not indulge in professionalism, what sort of faith can we have to keep us going - or at least pick us up at the end of the day? And here, it seems, teachers are different from others who work for a living - or at least teachers have a chance to be different. For most employees it is enough that someone is willing to pay them to give an honest day's work; never mind if what is done during the day is worth doing so long as it is done well, or at least well enough. Teachers demand more. They demand social approval and personal satisfaction as well as wages and fringe benefits.

Let us, then, deal with the realities of the teacher condition. Teachers are underpaid. Our fringe benefits lag behind those of many other occupational groups. For many of us our personal satisfaction at the end of a day often comes from the uneasy realization that we have survived to "teach" another day. As for social approval, it often seems that this reward is more dependent on not getting out of line than making a significant contribution to social welfare. No amount of "professionalism" can completely blot out these facts of educational life, but what's to be done about it?

We cannot depend on either the old educational establishment or new style-leaders in Washington and in the foundations to make teaching what we want it to be. Our fate lies in our own hands -- and minds.

The teachers who want to be proud of what they are doing must lead the way, and the American Federation of Teachers is the means through which they can make their leadership, energy, and hope effective. You can do more in the AFT.

The times cry out for educational leadership: schools which half educate or hardly at all, defensive and alienated from society; teachers who are frightened or smug or escapist; administrators and school board members whose measure of success is their continuation in office; drift, stopgap, cover-up, and cynicism.

It's not all that way, of course, but it is enough that way that we cannot fulfill our mission as teachers without doing something about it. Can we in the teachers' union provide the leadership that teachers - and society - need? We can try.

Oh yes, one final question: Is unionism for teachers compatible with "professionalism"?

Who cares!

* * *

DS:DB
OPEIU28
afl-cio
11-14-66