

RESTORING PRIDE AND PASSION TO THE PROFESSION OF TEACHING

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I think "sharing the passion" is a great conference theme for our times. It strikes me as setting the upbeat tone that I believe is needed right now nationwide, and perhaps especially in California.

With the renewal of the California Master Plan completed, and with some energy-draining and frustrating years behind the collective "you" in community colleges, it seems time now to get the energy flowing in constructive new directions.

The California Master Plan defines those new directions as unity, equity, quality, and efficiency (Commission for the Review . . . , 1987). Since I personally find it easier to get passionate about equity and quality than about unity and efficiency, I am going to select for my contribution to "sharing the passion" some thoughts that might be labeled "restoring pride and passion to the profession of teaching."

There is a major shift taking place in the 1980s in the locus of action in education. In the 1960s and 70s, most of the planning for major change that was taking place occurred in the offices of administrators and legislators. In the 1980s, the scene of activity is shifting to the faculty and to the college classroom.

The 1960s and 70s will go down in history as the access years in postsecondary education. Community colleges were the primary means of assuring access to previously under-represented populations, and college

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administrators and policy-makers were the principal actors. The task, as it was perceived, was to expand both the size and the options of postsecondary education and to remove all barriers -- financial, educational, and psychological -- that prevented certain groups of people from participating in higher education.

While college faculties were generally supportive of the policies that enabled the building of buildings, the removal of barriers, and the recruitment of students, the expansion of postsecondary education is more the work of legislators and administrative officers than of the teaching faculty. Classroom teachers tried, valiantly in many cases, to accommodate the new populations that were brought into their classrooms, but faculty were not the movers and shakers of the access era. If passion was to be found among classroom teachers, it was usually over the inability to handle the diversity that access brought into their classrooms. Nevertheless, the issue of access engendered a clear sense of mission and a good deal of passion in community colleges in the 1960s. Community colleges knew what they were doing, and they accomplished the goal of access better than any other type of institution.

The 1980s reforms set forth a different agenda -- an agenda that must be accomplished by classroom teachers. The movers and shakers with respect to the reforms called for in the 1980s will be the teaching faculty.

The 1980s reforms were kicked off by the publication of "A Nation At Risk" in 1983, which warned that poor public education was endangering the security and economy of the nation. That report was followed by dozens of others, criticizing the quality of higher education as well as that of the public schools. The evidence marshalled seemed to show that this generation of students is not as well educated as previous generations,

not as well educated as young people in competitive industrialized nations, and in any case, not as well educated as they should be.

The criticism of education today is widespread and shrill. And therein lies another great difference between the 1960s and the 1980s. The access revolution was, for community colleges, a positive passion with a clear sense of direction. The goal of increasing access is clear in its purpose and measurable in its outcomes. We know how to do it, and we can count when we have done it. Resources in the 1960s were equal to the task, and people could take pride in their achievement. Community colleges had a united sense of mission in the 1960s -- so united that we refer to the "community college movement." While I think we all know that the access revolution is not yet completed, it has changed direction. The problem is no longer how to expand the facilities and resources of higher education to accommodate new populations of students, it is how to provide the quality in education that makes access worthwhile.

In contrast to the positive passion of the 1960s, we face some negative passions and frustrations in the 1980s. The air is rife with criticism, and resources are limited. But more important, we are uncertain about what to do to improve the quality of education, and we're equally puzzled about how to measure our accomplishments.

Since some believe that accomplishment in education must be measurable and accountable, assessment seems to be the starting point for action in the 1980s reforms. So far, however, assessment, like access, has been largely the province of legislators and administrators. State governments have been especially active in assessment. Just a few years ago only a handful of states had assessment initiatives. Today, two-thirds do (Boyer, et. al., 1987). Administrators too are making strides toward

assessment. A few years ago, most campuses had no procedures for getting feedback on what their students were learning in college. Today, 79 percent of the administrators polled in the recent ACE survey said they expected some form of assessment to be introduced on their campus within the next few years (El-Khawas, 1987). Conferences and workshops on assessment are consistently oversubscribed, and assessment has become the hottest topic in higher education today.

But, popular and worthwhile as it is, it's hard to develop a passion for assessment, because assessment is only a means to an end. To conduct a first-rate assessment is only to make a start toward the ultimate goal of improving the quality of undergraduate education.

The end goal of quality can become a passion, but it has to be a passion that is widely shared by faculty, students, administrators, and legislators -- a passion that is believed in so strongly that legislators and taxpayers are willing to commit the necessary resources, and students, faculty and administrators are willing to commit the time, effort, and attention that go into creating first-rate education.

While faculty need support from all segments of the far-flung educational establishment, the fact is that it is going to be impossible to do much about the quality of education without the full participation -- and yes, passion -- of teachers in their classrooms. Somehow we must find a way to restore dignity and pride to the profession of teaching.

The professions have had a rough time in recent years. It used to be that doctors, lawyers, ministers, and teachers were the most admired citizens of their communities. They were well-educated, well-known, committed to service, and proud of colleagues in their profession. That image is a far cry from the spectacle of the Watergate lawyers and the

evangelistic preachers who have paraded across our television screens in a long series of scandals that have severely damaged the public trust.

Doctors, while managing to keep their faces off the television screens, have been less than admirable in fulfilling their professional obligations to provide responsible medical care for all citizens. The medical profession has been criticized for inflating the cost of medical care, for bilking third party payers, and for boycotting prepaid medical plans.

Teachers too have lost ground in the public regard for their profession. But the image problems in education are different from those that beset other professions. Teachers, far from being seen as too clever for their own good, are seen as not smart enough to teach our children. While an occasional philandering college president or corrupt financial administrator makes the front pages of the local press for a brief flurry of scandal, I don't think teachers have established any general reputation for being unethical or greedy. Rather, we are perceived as more interested in summers off than in service to students and, rightly or wrongly, teacher's unions are seen as more interested in the industrial model of protecting the worker than in the professional model of protecting the standards of the profession.

While a few mistaken perceptions and well-publicized scandals can be grossly misleading and unfair to the majority of hardworking and highly ethical men and women in any profession, the fact is that teachers themselves have been losing enthusiasm for their profession. The Carnegie Survey of 1984 (reported in Change, September/October 1985) found 39 percent of community college teachers less enthusiastic about their work now than when they began their academic careers, and 29 percent are

sufficiently distressed that they are considering another career. When asked about morale in their departments, 40 percent of all faculty respondents said it was worse today than it was five years ago.

That doesn't sound like a very happy or healthy profession. The question is, how do we turn this around? How do we restore pride and passion to the profession of teaching? In the first place, this has to be a do-it-ourselves project. We can't lobby for pride, and we can't hire a PR image-maker to change our opinions of ourselves. Professionalism, by definition, comes from within.

Without going into the long literature defining the characteristics of a profession, I'd like to take a few minutes to look at a concept that lies at the root of professionalism. That concept has been defined as "trust." The public trusts its professionals to use their expert knowledge and skill in a competent manner and to stay abreast of new developments. And the public trusts its professionals to put the welfare of those they serve above their own material gain (Sykes, 1987).

If we did not have these two forms of trust, the increasingly specialized and advanced knowledge of the professions would place all of us at the mercy of those who have knowledge that even the most intelligent and conscientious layman can never evaluate nor achieve. The fact is that we have become dependent on our professionals, and we have to trust them to be ethical, knowledgeable, and -- well, professional.

That trust amounts to a social contract between professionals and the society they serve. One aspect of that contract that is in the forefront of education right now involves the exchange of obligation for autonomy. "A profession," writes Gary Sykes in the fall issue of Educational Researcher (1987, p. 19) "agrees to develop and enforce standards of good

practice in exchange for the right to practice free of bureaucratic supervision and external regulation."

Although public school teachers are actively threatened with bureaucratic regulation, college teachers are not immune from demands for accountability and documentation of what students are learning in college. That is evident in the hard line governors and legislators have taken with respect to state-mandated assessment programs. That is the down side of current interest in assessment. The up side is that college-level educators have moved very quickly to take on the obligation of self-assessment in exchange for autonomy. The responsibility for assessment is clearly moving now from the statehouse to the campus (Boyer et. al., 1987).

I want to look at this exchange of obligation for autonomy, not only from the collective stance of the profession, but from the individual perspective of the teacher in the classroom. If we are to restore pride to the profession of teaching, then teachers must be willing to take on the obligation of self-monitoring and self-assessment in exchange for autonomy and freedom from bureaucratic control.

I cannot, in either my heart or my mind, conceive of a bureaucracy or set of regulations that could develop an outstanding teacher. I think it might be possible, and wholly desirable, for a bureaucracy to get rid of incompetent teachers, but my particular interest is in the development of teachers who are good, who know they are good, and who bring pride and passion to the profession of teaching.

There are three variables in teaching -- the teacher, the students, and the subject matter. Those are unique and special in each classroom. I don't know the number of permutations and combinations represented by

the possible variation in those three variables, but suffice it to say that there is no formula that can ever be devised to tell a teacher what to do next in his or her classroom. To be professional is to exercise sound judgement, based on skill and the best available knowledge.

Those most directly involved in faculty development efforts recognize the limitations of trying to improve teaching by disseminating generic knowledge about the psychology of learning. Yes, there are some "general laws" of learning, and yes, college teachers of subject matter must become familiar with those. It is unconscionable for graduate schools to continue to turn out teachers who enter a college classroom without any background or knowledge in the skills of their profession.

Having said that -- with some passion -- I must go on to say that knowing pedagogy or the general laws of learning is not enough. A college teacher needs to know how to teach a particular subject matter to the type of students in his or her institution. The goals, the techniques, and the skills needed for teaching history are different from those required for teaching physics. The newest trend in schools of education is to work with teachers in domain-specific or content-oriented teaching.

Indeed, last night I had occasion to reflect on this as I was reading the four-year report of the Educational Technology Center (1987) based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. While the overall goal of this research consortium is to work toward what they call a "pedagogy of understanding," researchers at the Ed Tech Center are biting off very small, digestible pieces on which to chew. In the first place, their research domain is limited to the study of the uses of technology in the teaching of math and science. But they are defining their task even more sharply by studying, in some depth, very specific questions that have been

identified by science teachers as "targets of difficulty" -- for example, how students can be taught the difference between heat and temperature or between density and weight.

Those are learning questions that absolutely require the participation of classroom teachers. For some time now, researchers on teaching and learning have been moving toward greater involvement of classroom teachers in the design and conduct of research. First it was the use of teachers on advisory boards to help determine the questions for research. Then it was "R and D," standing for the involvement of teachers in the implementation of research findings, then it was cooperative research, and most recently collaborative research.

As those of you who heard me speak in San Francisco last month know, I have been proposing a more radical move yet. I believe that teachers in teaching institutions, especially community colleges, should be doing research on teaching and learning in their subject matter specialties. Classrooms make excellent laboratories for the study of learning, and teachers can learn a great deal by systematically observing how their teaching affects students' learning. The end purpose of Classroom Research is to use knowledge about how students learn to affect how teachers teach.

We have been working on the development of Classroom Research as an activity that offers the twin advantages of developing more competent, knowledgeable, classroom teachers who are intellectually challenged by the study of teaching and learning in their discipline, while also adding to our cumulative knowledge of teaching and learning.

Classroom Research is different from, but complimentary to, more traditional forms of educational research. When I was in graduate school,

educational psychology was dominated by B.F. Skinner and the behaviorists. We believed in stimulus-response or S-R theories of learning. The stimulus evoked the response, and we didn't much care -- certainly we thought it "unscientific" to study -- what went on in the mind of the learner. The learning process was represented by the hyphen in S-R theories.

The great contribution of today's cognitive psychologists is that they do care about the learning process. They are finding that one of the major differences between successful and unsuccessful learners is that successful learners monitor and direct their own learning; they are aware of themselves as learners. Researchers call this "metacognition."

Good learners, we know, are active learners -- not just active participants in class, but mentally active as they study. Some examples of metacognitive strategies are these:

- o Rehearsal. Good students are likely to rehearse what they are learning through activities such as repetition and underlining.
- o Elaboration. Active learners often elaborate or extend their learning through summarizing or paraphrasing what they read or hear.
- o Organization. Grouping similar concepts together or using outlining categories are metacognitive strategies that help students remember through establishing relationships.
- o Comprehension-monitoring. Students who study using self-questioning and self-testing are engaging in metacognitive strategies to evaluate their progress as learners (Weinstein and Mayer, 1986).

Most good teachers probably use repetition, paraphrasing, summarizing, grouping, and questioning for comprehension as teaching methods. But we don't often help students to become more efficient learners, and we don't often think about how teaching might make more impact on what and how students learn. We could make our teaching more knowledge-based and professional by defining some learning situations for students and systematically observing how they go about solving problems or addressing ideas.

Classroom Research calls on college teachers to obtain feedback from the students in their classes throughout the semester. This approach has been called "formative evaluation," meaning that the results of the evaluation can be used to form or shape the instruction as it is in progress. The information collected in Classroom Research should be relevant to a given teacher's goals and should be frequent enough and specific enough to enable teachers to know how their teaching is affecting student's learning.

Classroom Research need not be an additional activity piled on top of already heavy teaching loads. In fact, the ideal classroom assessment technique is a teaching strategy as well as an assessment device. If you want to know, for example, if students can think analytically, then the questions that are posed to teach analytic thinking can also be used as measures of whether those goals are being accomplished.

The purpose of Classroom Research is not to grade students nor to evaluate teachers. It is to increase the productive interactions between teaching and learning. If teaching is to become a respected profession, based on skills and knowledge, we must move boldly to ask what teachers can do to cause learning, and we must shift our focus from the detached

study of teaching and learning to the involved study of teaching for learning.

The point is that we should be teaching smarter than we were 50 years ago. We should be accumulating the knowledge that would enable us to move the profession of teaching into the 21st century. Teaching, by and large, still operates on S-R theories. The test question is the stimulus; the answer is the response, and we don't know what goes on in between. The learning process is the hyphen in most classrooms today.

It is not going to be easy to develop the techniques that will turn those hyphens into windows that give us better insights into learning processes. The tools for Classroom Research are necessarily different from the statistical standbys of traditional educational research. Those of us who were trained in the correlational methods of educational research, for example, cannot use correlation to explain why events occur together, and so we speak cautiously of teaching and learning as though they were on parallel tracks that never intersect. Unfortunately that image may be all too accurate in many college classrooms. The teacher who is determined to "cover the material" may be half way down her track before she realizes that most of the students have been left behind on a parallel track.

Another notable difference between the methods of classroom research and those of educational research is that educational researchers are necessarily interested in research skills and techniques that will enable them to generalize their findings from the sample they have studied to the population they wish to affect. Classroom Researchers, however, start with the population they wish to affect; that population consists of the students in their classrooms. The purpose of the research is not to

search for the "general laws" of learning nor to define a "representative sample," but rather to determine the impact of their teaching on the learning of their students. Thus Classroom Researchers have little need for training in sampling theory, tests of significance, and other statistical techniques that enable generalization.

Like any other worthy professional activity, Classroom Research must adhere to standards of quality. Those standards are different from, but just as high as, those for evaluating educational research. The point that must be made is that Classroom Researchers should not be intimidated or put down by traditional educational researchers who sniff that classroom research is anecdotal and therefore useless. Quite the contrary, it is anecdotal and therefore useful. It is a type of research that is highly relevant to the interests of classroom teachers. It is a form of research that has high potential for putting research knowledge to use in the improvement of practice.

While the primary purpose of classroom research is to improve teaching in the classroom rather than to push back the frontiers of knowledge, I am convinced that the cumulative impact of thousands of classroom teachers sharing the knowledge gleaned from their classroom research with others in their discipline will do more to advance the quality of teaching than will almost any major research project that we can devise.

In conclusion, I believe that the missing ingredients in the profession of teaching today are challenge and hope. Most of us probably believe that we could be better teachers if we had more time, or fewer or better students, or more respect.

Perhaps those things would help, but they call on someone else to "fix things," and they assume that we know what to do to improve teaching. I don't think that is the case. We know very little about the impact of teaching on learning, and I believe that passion could be restored to the profession of teaching if we, as classroom teachers, took on the challenge of a lifelong study of our profession with the hope and expectation of finding some of our own answers.

Pride in a profession must be earned. The days are probably gone when advanced degrees will gain public respect. Accountability is here to stay, I think, and individuals as well as institutions, must take on the obligation of self-improvement through knowledge if we are to earn the autonomy that is essential for professional practice.

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