



DIVIDED WE STAND:  
The Internal Organization  
of the  
Education Professoriate  
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Professors of education are a diverse lot, as anyone acquainted with more than a few of them can readily attest. They are diverse, not only in the myriad ways any collection of humans might differ--in their personal attributes, backgrounds and idiosyncratic experiences--but also in their professional, which is to say their *professorial*, orientations and functions. The latter class of differences is particularly intriguing, for it interacts in important ways with the

organizational structure and interpersonal dynamics of our schools and colleges of education.

The recognition of these differences is not new. Others have commented on their consequences for the internal workings of schools and colleges of education. Still others have concentrated on the effect these differences have on the preparation of teachers and other practicing professionals.

For example, in 1924, James Earl Russell, then near the end of his third decade as Dean of Columbia University's Teachers College, wrote an article in the American Association of Teachers College Yearbook in which he mused on the difference between academically-oriented and professionally-oriented professors in teachers colleges.<sup>2</sup> This distinction, as Russell saw it, was more one of attitude than of intellectual discipline or subject matter being taught. For, as he asserted, "Any subject may be given either an academic or a professional turn." The academic professor, then, was one who "asks what the subject will do for the students." His "professional" colleague, in contrast, "asks what the student will do for the subject." Russell saw these differences as chiefly reflecting the "mental set" of the professor, a condition that in his view was established early in the life of each of us, perhaps even before birth. "The fundamental fact," Russell wrote, "was that teachers [by which he meant professors of education] are either academically or professionally minded." "Apparently," he continues, "we are borne either pedagogical blondes or brunettes or, as would be said in England, either little conservatives or little liberals." Then, in an effort to soften this strongly deterministic line, Russell concedes, "Perhaps it would be better to say that each of us is inclined towards one or another of these extremes."

No matter how professors come by these two orientations, their co-existence within a single faculty or school spells trouble, at least for the administrator bent on keeping peace in his academic family. Russell himself must have had his share of difficulty, for he speaks of the "constant friction" between the two groups with the air of a man who has felt the heat himself. He talks of the academics and the professionals constantly combating each other and concludes, rather wistfully, that, "The administrative official is lucky

who can get on without bloodshed." The idea of lasting peace between these two groups seems, at least in Russell's view, to be about as remote in his day as a permanent settlement between the Arabs and the Israelis seems in ours. "When we can get them to call each other friends," Russell concludes, "and even to admire each other for what each gives, then the millennium has almost arrived."

Here, then, is one way of looking at the difference of orientation to be found among professors of education, a view offered by an academic dean who himself had lived among the subjects of his observations for several decades. A second way of slicing the same pie was recently offered by yet another dean or, more accurately, ex-dean of yet another of our major graduate schools of education. Ted Sizer, former Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Education, writing in the Fall 1974 issue of *Daedalus*, laments the sorry state to which our university faculties in education have fallen, staffed with social scientists, on the one hand, and "ex-practitioners" on the other.<sup>3</sup> The trouble with the social scientists, as Sizer sees it, is that they have not had enough sustained contact with educational practice. As a result, Sizer claims, "Education is full of clever professors who lack the finesse which only first-hand experience can give."

In striking contrast to the "social scientists" in education are the "education professors who come to the university from careers wholly in practice." The difficulty with the latter is their avoidance of, and even aversion toward, theorizing about their craft. "The level of critical and self-conscious reflection upon the process of education by its practitioners is lamentably low," Sizer complains, "and such is often exhibited when practitioners become leaders of inquiry and training in universities."

Their disregard of--even antipathy to--theory is overwhelming."

Sizer's view of current conditions is even more gloomy than was Russell's of a half century ago. For, though Sizer does not depict his division of the education professoriate as warring with each other and wasting their energies in internecine battles, he implies that neither group is serving well its student clientele and, thus, the profession. "And so," he concludes, "the profession in the university is paralyzed, staffed by well-meaning but often insensitive and inexperienced social scientists, on the one hand, and by unreflective ex-practitioners, on the other." Sizer's remedy for this sorry state of affairs is to urge more professors of education to follow his example of alternating in their careers between "inquiry and practice"--a remedy whose wisdom or practicality need not detain us here, but to which we shall return further on.

Though Russell and Sizer's distinctions are sufficiently different and far enough separated in time to warrant mentioning both, there are some obvious similarities. Russell's "academics" with their heavy intellectual and subject matter emphasis sound closer to Sizer's "social scientists" than to those he calls "ex-practitioners"; for his "professionals," the reverse is true. Though the match is by no means perfect, it is close enough to lead us to believe that the two sets of observations, though fifty years apart, were focused on similar phenomena. Apparently, there is a real and enduring distinction between professors of education who are "up close" to the day-to-day practice of schooling--call them professionals, ex-practitioners, or whatever--and those whose intellectual interests and teachings are more remote; yet again, it doesn't matter terribly by what label they are designated.

Though the distinctions made by both Russell and Sizer are probably recognizable to us all, I would propose

a third set of categories, containing three divisions rather than two. A trichotomy, I realize, is not much of an improvement over a dichotomy, but it is at least a step in the right direction. More important, however, than the refinement of our categories is our effort to understand what the differences mean and what possible actions might flow from that understanding. Both Russell and Sizer's observations provide some help in this direction, but both, it seems to me, leave their readers with far more questions than answers. Russell, for example, draws a picture of feuding parties, but the issue or issues over which the feud occurs are anything but clear. He talks about the academics pointing "fingers of scorn" at their professional colleagues, calling their works superficial and unscholarly, only to have the epithet's "moss backs," "conservatives," and "antiques" tossed back as counter accusations. But the differences in perspectives, the real roots of the conflict that lie behind the name calling, are not clearly revealed.

Sizer talks of the social scientists who lack practical experience and of the ex-practitioners who lack a theoretical perspective, but he does not go on to consider how these differences, if that is what they are, persist even after they have been repeatedly pointed out by both friendly and not-so-friendly critics. His admonition and his personal example would make it seem that these intellectual handicaps are easily remediable and that their correction is simply a matter of personal decision-making--social scientists in schools and colleges of education should individually and collectively vow to immerse themselves in educational practice; ex-practitioners should resolve to bone up on the theoretical groundwork of their craft--but if that is all it takes, one wonders why more are not doing it. I suspect that both the problem and its solution, if there is one, are much more complex than Sizer's discussion would

lead us to believe.

I, too, shall doubtlessly leave my readers with more questions than answers, for the former are simply much easier to produce than the latter. As has already been said, I shall begin with the assertion that professors of education may be classified on the basis of their professional orientation and function into three distinguishable groups with somewhat blurry boundaries between them. Moreover, these three groups differ, I shall argue, in many respects beyond those that have already been called to our attention by Russell and Sizer. An understanding and an acceptance of these differences is a first step toward alleviating some of the tensions they produce.

A caveat about the perspective from which my topic is addressed. I offer little, if any, hard data. Like Russell's and Sizer's before me, my observations and the conclusions derived from them are based almost exclusively on personal experience as a regular faculty member and, more recently, as an administrator in a private university. Though this is the chief source of my observations, it is not the sole one. Some of what I have to say has been drawn from what I have learned as a visiting professor or guest lecturer in a sampling of our larger state and private universities here and abroad. The reader should be warned, however, that the bulk of my personal experiences has been with graduate programs in education and those who teach in them, rather than with undergraduate programs and staff. Accordingly, I make no claim for the applicability of my remarks to all professors of education irrespective of the institutions in which they work or the programs to which they contribute. Perhaps comparable experiences in smaller, single purpose institutions, or those serving exclusively an undergraduate population would have yielded a quite different set of conclusions from those presented here, though I confess that such an outcome would surprise me.

To the first of the three groups goes the label "disciplinists," for those so designated are professors of education whose academic orientation derives from, feeds upon, and sometimes contributes to one or more of the disciplines within the social sciences (minus, for those who insist upon its status as a discipline, education itself). Among the older, more commonly recurring members of this category would be professors of educational psychology, educational sociology, educational philosophy and historians of education. More recently, and in growing numbers of institutions are professors of education with a discipline base in economics, political science and anthropology. Such relative newcomers would obviously also be included in this group. In its composition, this group is clearly close to those Sizer refers to as "social scientists," and perhaps I should be content with that label. My preference for the term "disciplinists" derives largely from the fact that the intellectual allegiance and professional identification of these professors is not, as Sizer would have it, to some amorphous field called social sciences, but to a particular *discipline* within that field. As individuals, they do not "profess" to be social scientists, but rather to be psychologists or sociologists or historians or whatever. This identification with a single discipline strikes me as one of their chief characteristics, hence my preference for the label "disciplinists," awkward though it may be.

The second group I have dubbed the "generalists," another term which may sound a bit awkward, but, again, one that I am prepared to defend. It refers to those professors whose professional expertise spans a broad range of educational matters, particularly, though not exclusively, those having to do with the *systematic* quality of schooling and its ongoing operation. Included in such a grouping are professors of educational administration, curriculum (broadly conceived), adult

education, higher education and teacher education. This group does not match neatly any of Russell's or Sizer's categories. These are certainly not "social scientists" in the same sense as are those in the first group, but neither are they ex-practitioners, bent on passing along their expertise as classroom teachers. It is true that many, if not most, of the generalists have had some teaching or administrative experience in schools, but then so have many of those we are calling disciplinists. As I see it, it is not their prior experience that distinguishes the generalists as a group so much as does their acceptance of *educational* matters, broadly conceived, as the source of their professional identification. This characteristic probably brings them close to what Russell meant by the term "professionals," but I prefer "generalists," because it emphasizes both the breadth of their scholarly concerns as well as the eclectic quality of their approach to the study of educational issues. These professors are not tied by either training or personal predilection to any single discipline within the social sciences. Rather, they draw heavily upon several of them, as consumers of a sort, in order to enhance their understanding of the educational phenomena in which they are interested. Thus, for example, professors of educational administration might draw upon sociological theory, economics, political science, and even psychology and anthropology in their efforts to come to grips with the complex business of running our schools. Specialists in the area of the curriculum, teacher education, higher education, and adult education likewise must cast broad nets if they are to capture the theories and the data from the social sciences that bear upon their chosen area of expertise.

Sizer's criticism of ex-practitioners' "disregard of--even antipathy to--theory" may be true enough as a description of individual professors and perhaps may fit the vast majority of those in this

second group. But even if true, such a description leaves unexplained the reasons why theory is given such short shrift by these professors. Is it that they are simply not bright enough to grapple with theoretical complexities as applied to educational phenomena? Or do the roots of their antipathy lie elsewhere? Could it be that the deficiencies reside more in the theories themselves than in those professors that appear not to take them seriously?

The third group includes those professors who are chiefly concerned with the transmission of, and improvement upon, pedagogical techniques and materials within conventionally delineated curricular areas. As a label for this group, "pedagogists" is easiest to remember and reasonably appropriate. This group would include professors of science education, mathematics education, music education, physical education and so on. Such professional titles run the gamut of all possible curricular subdivisions, though I suspect it would be difficult to find every such subdivision represented within a single faculty, except perhaps in a few of our larger state universities.

Many professors within this third group likely have rich backgrounds in the academic subjects they address as educators, a fact that might make them seem to resemble the disciplinists; many of whom also have come to the study of education after an intensive preparation in an outside field. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the latter group use their discipline as a tool with which to grapple with educational matters, whereas the former apply educational considerations to the organization and transmission of their subject matter specialities. It is as though the disciplinists were on the outside looking *in* on the field of education, while their pedagogist colleagues were on the inside looking out.

Here, then, in barest outline is a

way of subdividing the education professoriate into broad groups that are easily identifiable in most of the institutions with which I have had contact. This is not to say that professors of education necessarily think of themselves in these terms, nor that they would willingly accept the labels I have given them. Neither is it argued that there are no anomalies that defy easy placement within this scheme. At any given time, some education professors may exhibit features of more than one category.<sup>4</sup> Some professors of education may trace careers which might be described as a movement from one category to another. A few might be so eclectic and vacillating that none of the three categories seems to fit. The system of categories is admittedly crude and, as has already been said, the boundaries are blurry.

The important point to consider is the variety of ways in which the members of these three groups differ from each other. These differences are by no means confined to the observation that the members of one group are somewhat more theoretical or more practical than are those in one of the others. Members of these three do indeed differ in their perspective, in the way they look at educational affairs, but the differences do not stop there. They differ also in their prior training, in their membership in professional organizations, in the books they read, and the magazines to which they subscribe. They differ also in the audiences they address in their own writing and research and in the students with whom they have the closest and most prolonged contact. In sum, though all may be called professors of education, the three groups inhabit three quite different professional worlds.

While focusing on differences between the three groupings, we must not lose sight of both intra-group differences and inter-group similarities. Disciplinists, for example, differ from each other as well as from their colleagues

in the other two categories. The same is true, of course, for the generalists and the pedagogists. Indeed, to put the matter in quasi-statistical terms, the question is whether, considering all the ways in which professors of education might differ from each other, the within-group variance is greater or less than the between-group variance. To raise such a question is to acknowledge that there may be other ways of grouping the entire population of professors that would yield greater homogeneity within each group. All that is claimed for the categories proposed here is that they do account for some of the variance to be found within this very heterogeneous population.

The question of whether all professors of education within a particular institution share anything more than a title, plus common membership in that institution, is also interesting, though the search for an answer lies somewhat outside the scope of these remarks. I suspect that a common core of professional identification could be discerned if we looked carefully for it. It may well be that the articulation of a unifying body of assumptions, beliefs, and concerns would have a salutary effect on us all. I am not optimistic, however, about the emergence of a sense of intellectual community before we come to grips with some of the differences to which I have already made reference.

Now there would seem to be ample room within the field of education for the members of all three groups as they have been described. Surely, we do want people who are well-grounded in the social sciences to apply the methods and concepts of their disciplines to the study of educational matters. Similarly, the systematic study of educational administration, the curriculum, adult education, higher education, and teacher education is easy to justify. Professors who devote their time exclusively to such study would seem to be welcome among us. Finally, the teaching of particular subjects, such as science or mathematics or foreign language, at various levels of schooling, together

with the preparation of materials to accomplish that task, would seem to be sufficiently complex and important to warrant the retention of specialists such as those we have here labeled pedagogists. In sum, the *raison d'être* of each of our three groupings seems abundantly clear.

Yet in practice, at least as I have witnessed it, these three groups form at best an uneasy alliance, often marked by tension, bickering, and petty jealousies. In extreme cases, the conflicts between them lead to what Russell could only describe as "bloodshed." The major trouble, in my experience, arises when members of these three groups seek to arrange themselves hierarchically in some sort of an intellectual class or caste system. From such efforts, the friction starts, and the familiar defensive postures begin to emerge.

Almost inevitably, members of the group we are calling the disciplinists seem to have an upper hand in such a struggle. Indeed, in many institutions this group forms a kind of natural elite whose superior status is acknowledged and goes unchallenged within the education faculty. This is so for several reasons, not the least of which is the disciplinists' membership, by virtue of their training, in a larger community of scholars widely recognized as legitimate throughout the academic world. Thus, educational philosophers, for example, belong, at least as they see it, to that ancient and honorable community of scholars who call themselves philosophers. Educational psychologists are at least kissing cousins of their colleagues in the psychology department. And so on.

Often this intellectual kinship of the disciplinists is made official by membership in professional organizations serving the parent discipline. Thus, many, if not most, of these professors can be found on the membership rolls of the American Psychological Association,

the American Historical Association, the American Sociological Association, and their equivalents in the other disciplines. In brief, the linkage of these professors to the more time-honored academic guilds and societies is one source of their claim to intellectual status.

A somewhat more invidious basis for the same claim is to be found in the greater number of Ph.D.'s, as contrasted with Ed.D.'s, among the disciplinists. This is often a false and unfair distinction, I realize, for there are many distinguished educators who hold the Ed.D., just as there are many holders of the Ph.D. who are very undistinguished, to say the least. Nonetheless, unfair though it might be to particular individuals and though mention of it may be avoided in polite company, the distinction is all too frequently made in a manner that serves to bolster the status claims of the disciplinists. In institutions offering both degrees in education, for example, it is not uncommon to find the Ph.D. programs limited to areas of study sometimes referred to as the "foundations" and taught almost exclusively by disciplinists.

Though the disciplinists may enjoy a favored position among professors of education, their position within the academic community at large is much less favored. In other words, they are the most highly respected members of a group that, as a whole, is not very highly respected in academic circles. This harsh fact, which is somewhat painful to discuss, doubtlessly accounts for some of the pettier forms of jockeying and scrambling for positions with the attendant loss of dignity that such activity entails. Unfortunately, our efforts to gain academic respectability often divert us from more pressing and more important educational concerns.

In an illuminating article on conflicts in schools for the minor professions, Nathan Glaser comments on the temptations created by the status struggles within graduate schools and departments of education. (1) These are: 1) for the

disciplinists to withdraw from their practitioner colleagues and to identify more closely with faculty in the arts and sciences; 2) for the education faculty as a whole to place less emphasis on the training of teachers and to concentrate, instead, on the training of what Glaser calls the "ancillary sub-professions"--school administrators, school psychologists, and the like--who are superior in status; and 3) for the faculty to forget about the problem of the professional degree entirely and to organize itself as a multi-disciplined research enterprise, which, if it has any training goals at all, is designed chiefly to produce graduates who will perform in the same manner as the professors themselves.

Glaser sees each of these tendencies as tension-producing and as potentially damaging to the well-being of the faculty of the professional school. His argument, incidentally, is not limited to schools of education but extends to the training of practitioners in the fields of nursing, social work, divinity, and city planning. Yet, he does not offer solutions to the problems he describes. Rather, Glaser sees these problems as "tensions to be lived with" by the faculties of professional schools.

If Glaser is right about both the universality and the persistence of these problems, as I suspect he is, and as the testimony of both Russell and Sizer would seem to bear out, the question becomes: how can these tensions be eased, even if they cannot be entirely eliminated? That question, I further suspect, cannot be satisfactorily answered in general terms but requires an intimate knowledge of the setting in which the answer is to be effected. It would depend, I would think, on the particular mix of the three groupings with a school or department, the larger institutional context within which the education faculty is located, characteristics of the student body served by the faculty, local traditions and history, and doubtlessly a host of

other institutional variables.

Within a particular university some individuals and perhaps the entire education faculty may yield to one or another of Glaser's temptations, and perhaps they should. If an educational sociologist or historian, for example, is so insecure in his or her status that he or she must buttress it by leaving education and joining colleagues in the department of sociology or history, so be it. If an entire faculty of education decides to turn away from the preparation of teachers and concentrate instead on the scholarly study of educational phenomena, that, too, may be the right option within a particular institutional context. Of course, if all individuals and all institutions made the same choice, the result would be disastrous, but, then, such options are clearly not open to all.

Finally, we return to Sizer's suggestion that ex-practitioners become better acquainted with the theoretical underpinnings of their work, and that social scientists within the field of education take some time off from their theorizing and research in order to immerse themselves for a spell in the real world of educational practice. At first blush, this sounds like good advice, and I suspect it might be so for certain individuals, though I also fear that those who would take it seriously are precisely the ones with the least need to do so. However, as a general solution to the problems we have been discussing, Sizer's admonitions do not promise to take us very far. I doubt, for example, that professors of educational history would find their professional effectiveness improved if they were forced to teach third grade once in a while, just as I doubt that specialists in curricular matters would be well-advised to sharpen their intellectual teeth on the milkbone of sociological theory. I doubt, in short, that each group needs what the other has, though a cursory analysis might lead us to think so.

Rather, I suspect that if we were able to scrutinize concrete examples of

the deficiencies Sizer seeks to correct among professors of education, we would discover that the missing ingredient was neither theory in one group nor practice in the other but, instead, a set of much more old-fashioned virtues having to do with clarity of thought and expression in both. In other words, I believe that when we hear a professor of education of whatever stripe talking nonsense, or when we read an educational book or article that turns out to be drivel, the quality that sets our teeth on edge could not have been averted by an extra dollop of practical experience, on the one hand, or a suspicion of social science, on the other. The deficiency is one of intelligence, not in the narrow sense as measured by IQ tests, but intelligence broadly conceived as the ultimate expression of orderly and tough-minded inquiry.

There are some who would say that professors of education are a dull lot, singularly deficient in the capacity to carry out the kind of inquiry I am talking about. Unfortunately, these critics may have a point, though the situation, I would contend, is not as bad as they would have it; and many themselves live in glass houses. But it is true, I am afraid, that we are sometimes lax in the standards we apply to our own work and to the work of our colleagues and students. Moreover, I doubt that a call for either more theory or more practice is going to correct this situation. The only solution, as I see it, is the very painful one of rubbing our noses in our own faults and then vowing never, never to exhibit the same weakness again. At the level of faculty hiring and retention, this may necessitate our becoming much tougher in our decision-making. Ultimately, we will be called upon to weed out from our own ranks those who are least able.

I realize that such a blatantly elitist policy will not sit well in many quarters these days. I also realize the many problems it poses of both a practical and theoretical sort, problems concerning how standards shall be set and who shall be their guardians. I am fully aware of how difficult it is to put such a policy into practice. Nonetheless, I seriously doubt that we can go forward as a profession by averting our gaze from unpleasant truths and by avoiding actions whose consequences are painful to some of us.

The last question to consider is what would happen if we really raised our sights as a profession. Would a get-tough policy, if adopted, have a differential effect on the three groupings of professors described in this paper? Again, as much as it pains me to say so, I am forced to concede that it would. Given the pattern of recruitment into the various sub-specialties within the field of education, I suspect that genuine talent is indeed rarer among those here referred to as the generalists and the pedagogists than it is among the disciplinists. Thus, any effort to upgrade the education professoriate is bound to have more severe effects (and possibly encounter more severe resistance) within the first two groups.

However, having, as it were, added fuel to the fire of prejudice, three quenching maneuvers must be quickly made. First, it goes almost without saying that there are many able persons within both the generalist and the pedagogist groups. Second, there are many disciplinists who should be encouraged to seek work elsewhere, preferably, I suppose, in the departments housing their own disciplines. Third, the differential effect of any attempt to upgrade the professoriate would be temporary. Its goal would be to equalize as nearly as possible the talent pool within each of the three groupings. With this accomplished, any further winnowing in search of heightened quality would presumably have similar effects on all three groups.

The real question is whether standards of quality can be applied to the work of the generalists and the pedagogists without at the same time forcing them to emulate in both style and content the scholarly productivity of the disciplinists. "The problem," as one pedagogist confided to me, "is that nothing I write will ever get published in the *AERA Journal*." Assuming his prediction to be true, is he, therefore, forever condemned to second class status among his colleagues in education? I think not.

As I see it, the arguments for teaching science in a certain way, for example, can be as tightly organized and as persuasively presented as can any exposition of a sociologist or a historian of education. There is no intrinsic reason why the rationale for a curriculum design or the defense of a set of educational purposes or the analysis of the

problems facing our institutions of higher learning need be one whit less respectable in intellectual terms than the most masterfully executed empirical study or the most ponderous philosophical tome. We must, of course, be cautious in the development of criteria for making such judgments, avoiding at all costs the application of unreasonable standards, but our caution need not require a compromise in our standards of excellence.

An uncompromising search for excellence may, in the long run, turn out to be more unifying than divisive. Though painful at times in its execution, such a policy might, in the final analysis, provide the only safe groundwork for the development of mutual respect of self and others within the education professoriate. Even if such efforts were successful, there would probably remain the groupings described in this paper. But, then, who would care?

#### NOTES

1. Nathan Glaser, "Conflicts in Schools for the Minor Professions," *Harvard Graduate School of Education Association Bulletin*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Spring/Summer, 1974). pp. 18-24
2. James Earl Russell, "A Summary of Some of the Difficulties Connected with the Making of a Teachers College," in *Teacher Education in America: A Documentary History*, ed. Merle L. Borrowman (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965), pp. 208-217.
3. Theodore R. Sizer, "On Myopia: A Complaint From Down Below," *Daedalus*, Fall, 1974, pp. 332-340.
4. There are, for example, professors of education who propose a synthetic field of research sometimes called "foundations of education" or "cross disciplinary studies in education." Without evaluating their proposals, it can be noted that these individuals would probably display varying combinations of characteristics drawn largely from the categories of disciplinist and generalist.