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TEACHER DENIGRATION : SOCIETAL EXPECTATION, OR PAR FOR THE COURSE

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Once the classroom door is closed the teacher is in charge, though reminiscent of power tripping, is a popular assertion fraught with misconceptions of some magnitude. This paper attempts to explore such an assertion in the hope that once the content of the assertion is identified the training and education of the teacher would be more efficient and effective.

It is a truism to say that the teacher is a product of the society in which he teaches. Like all truisms of course the truth is hidden within a web of explanation at times extremely difficult to uncover. The teacher has been continually subjected from birth to information over-load concerning schooling, politics, religion, art etc., and his/her place in the general scheme of things. That this information was in the form of a covert, unplanned and incidental gift from society's authority figures is inconsequential. However, as the child aspiring teacher matures and learns to read, write and compute the influences on him take on a carefully engineered pattern. Not that there is some master mind at work carefully indoctrinating the aspirant, far from it and herein lies one of the difficulties in pinning down the major influences on the aspiring teacher. Even more difficult to separate out, for the purposes of throwing light on the societal inquiries affecting an aspiring teacher are those actual people who know that they are going to be teachers. For the purposes of this paper it is assumed that those who do not become teachers are subjected to much the same influences as those that do and consequently it will be argued that at the time job selection is made, societal attitudes to teaching have been already implanted in the teacher and non-aspirant. These societal attitudes can be examined under the umbrella concept of who has the key role in influencing the aspiring teacher: parents, peers, pushers, police or politicians.

Parents

Parents themselves once went to school. This sole effort, within this context, qualifies them as experts on teachers and teaching. That such a statement can be proven to be demonstrably false is not at issue. The nebulous concept of the average parent can be brought into play at any non-educational gathering to give support to such a statement. The statements typically began with something marginally obnoxious: the sooner the frills are removed and the education system returns to normal the sooner will real education be put back into the schools. However, within a very short period of time the self styled experts range over the whole gambit of educational endeavour. One major premise is necessary in such debates, that being that the good old days, for obvious obstetric reasons are any time usually greater than 25 years, i.e., beyond the realm of experience of the average aspiring teacher. The good old days were those days where recitation and respect were highly valued; respect for basics and recitation of the same. Everyone understood what

the teacher was about. At the end of the basic training at school everyone was ready for work and presumably effective participation in society.

Under this syndrome the few who stayed on at school simply did not figure in the scheme of things. They were the 'crawlers' and 'do-gooders', the ones that went into tertiary education and training and who really did not contribute too much to the work world. The fact that these astute observations are based on a world view 25 years out of date is inconsequential, as if the societal brain were left in neutral, so to speak. The critical issue is that the aspiring child-teacher who sets his sights on such a career must be mindful lest he be labelled as an intelligent, crawling, do-gooder.

Peers

During our 'ideal-type's' (*sic*, and with apologies to Max) formidable years of early schooling, significant others, beyond the parental parameter, begin to intrude. Others begin to play an ever increasing role in shaping his world view of education and the educational enterprise. This shaping is in the Pavlovian domain of reward systems in this case, operational at several levels of sophistication. At the very basic level are these nuances that require brash condemnation of the school whenever the collective peer brain meets. At the apex of the system is the formal competitive examination system in its various disguises. To adopt the concept that to do well in society one must do well in examinations is fraught with difficulty for the peer group denigrates success achieved via academic persistence. One must do well by not studying. The carefully concealed hours of manipulating the examinable known is a by-product of the low level of esteem held for any effort considered intellectual.

The peer influences emerge again during the teacher training year where the trainee tries again to cover up any semblance of intelligent behaviour. This time within the arena of his peers-to-be ignorance is only marginally tolerated. However, the denigration of education is fostered through student-pupil comradeship, a peer association more easily slipped into than teacher - teacher-trainee.

Pushers

Television, textbooks, teachers, trainers and newspapers, the voices of society, continue unceasingly to bombard the prospective teacher from birth. The ignorant, illiterate, and illegitimate are the successful manipulators of the world. The heroes leave school at an early age, the 'unskilled' achieve monetary rewards second only to the lucky. The school becomes the constant scapegoat for the evils of society. As a formal institution it is derided as a giant baby-sitting factory. It becomes the target as one of the most expensive state enterprises, for all sorts of sleight of hand tricks - employers, governments, parents and pupils snipe at the institution. The prospective teacher cannot let this go unnoticed. He is exposed daily to the cynicism and criticism of education by those that have the power and resources to portray the enterprise as they see fit — themselves only having cursory experience with education or what is even more distasteful, an experience with it as it existed when they were within its hallowed halls.

Police

The effects of institutionalisation have been amply documented by the deschooling pushers. Even if the criticisms are only partially true the communicative effects on the aspirant must of necessity be debilitating.

Perhaps conformity is the hallmark of institutional activity. There would be good reasons for this least of all its very survival. Whilst this type of logic is compelling one would wish these institutions, including education and training establishments, to survive only if they were serving their stated purposes. The implicit assumptions within education might be to select and allocate youngsters to factories, forests and ferret systems but the explicit assumptions are the critical considerations that warrant attention, that is the survival of a preferred social order.

The aspiring teacher finds it extremely difficult to extricate the explicit from the entrenched implicit conforming system.

Politician

The constant slashing of funds, the obvious low priority education has compared with military, trade and rural sectors, cannot help but constantly press on to the aspiring teacher the worth of the educational enterprise in comparison with other social agencies. Education has not stopped wars, religious strife, racism, the mysteries of the universe, nor provided mental equipment for a job. It is costly, inefficient, full of frills; it takes money from the state and federal coffers and deprives the Department of Main Roads, Hospitals and Medical care. If the basics in education are taken care of, i.e., reading, so that costs to workers' compensation is reduced, writing, so that invoices can be filled out and mathematics, so that prices can be calculated, education will attract a cost saving, all have a familiar ring.

Conclusion

I have merely touched the surface of this assertion in attempting to identify some of the content contained within the assertion. In this case it is not terribly difficult to glean by implication that the assertion, once the door is shut the teacher is in charge, is false. Already society has assumed to a large extent the decision making parameters that help the teacher decide on the basic issues. If, as teacher educators (already contaminated by societal influences) we were to accept the inevitability of this deterministic approach to teacher training by assimilation then as a collective group we have massive problems. We would be denying the possibility that as a group we can manage change and not let change manage us.

Meanwhile