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Source: *Peabody Journal of Education*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (May, 1959), pp. 348-352
Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1491156
Accessed: 10-07-2016 23:54 UTC

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Difference and Deference Among Schoolmen

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The hostility of the assembled high school staffs oppressed me. Why, I asked myself, *should they feel this way toward me? Was I not a champion of public education?* The answer was swift in coming . . .

The University had recently abolished preparatory courses in English and some other subjects. High school staffs interpreted this action as another attempt by colleges "to determine our curriculum." As a minor bureaucrat of one college, I happened to reap the wrath which the University had sown . . .

This set me to thinking about the relations among the staffs and students of the various schools. Clarification of the issues came from application of the principles of social psychology to the school situation.

Generally speaking, psychological research and practice have yielded the following principles which pertain to the satisfaction each of us may expect to find with his role in life.

1. In the relations between groups, some groups appear more *influential* than others. Membership in an influential group usually yields greater satisfaction than does membership in a *potential* group.
2. Groups vary according to how limited their membership happens to be. They also differ according to the distinctiveness of their members. Members of an influential group find that limited membership and distinctiveness enhance their satisfaction. Members of potential groups discover that limited group size and distinctiveness of group membership increase dissatisfaction.
3. The natural movement in influential groups is toward their leadership. Followership in an influential group permits less satisfac-

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tion. Movement within potential groups is more complex. When membership of the potential group is indistinctive, movement is *away* from leadership toward the group's outskirts. In potential groups which are unrestricted but distinctive, followership is only slightly more preferable than leadership. But potential groups, both restricted *and* distinctive, reflect the inability to leave coupled with the onus of distinctiveness drives members deeper into the arms of leadership.

With these general principles as a background, we can now examine the relations among schoolmen. My colleagues and I have agreed among ourselves about the relative influence, restrictiveness and distinction among the elementary, secondary, higher and professional schools. We have accepted the school staffs as representing leadership and the students, followership. We have also accepted the linear relationship among the schools from the elementary through the professional. Here, then, are our agreed upon definitions of these four schools.

Influence: within the educational community, influence seems to decrease from the professional school to the college to the secondary school and finally to the elementary school. If a division between influential and potential can be made, the line might be drawn between the college and the secondary school.

Restriction: relatively speaking, the professional school is most restrictive, the college also restrictive, and the elementary and secondary schools unrestricted in membership.

Distinction: by means of professional garments, membership in the professional school tends to be rather distinctive. Not by garments so much as by behavior, including language, membership in the secondary school is also somewhat distinctive. In our judgment, the elementary school and the college show less distinctiveness than do the secondary and professional schools.

What behavior may we expect in the relationships among persons from these various schools? How much role-satisfaction exists in these relationships? How much tension exists among schoolmen from different schools? How stable or fluid are the interactions between

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these members? Where may trouble be expected and how might it be avoided among schoolmen?

Elementary-secondary school relations. Interaction between members of these schools reveals two important characteristics: little role-satisfaction, counter-balanced by the absence of tension surrounding one's role. If anything, the teachers are somewhat less satisfied with themselves than are the students. Whatever agitation there might be for improvement of one's role seems to stem from the staffs' putting their heads together. Otherwise, relations between the elementary and secondary schools appear to be in quiet equilibrium.

Secondary school-college relations. The relative aloofness of the college staff stimulates whatever tension exists. College staff conservatism creates a barrier against understanding the high school staff or student. Tension is slightly higher than interaction with the elementary school, but role-satisfaction is also slightly greater.

College-professional school relations. The occupational-centeredness of our current education stems from the professional school, (graduate schools included). Their standards filter down the entire system, determine the college curricula to a great extent, and even affect elementary education. When college and professional school people get together, they share a great deal of role-satisfaction with no greater tension than exists among high school-college staff and students. College students are the least conservative members of this set. And while college students can hardly be called excitable, they are much less inhibited than their staff or professional colleagues.

Elementary school-college relations. Interaction between members of these two schools allows for slight role-satisfaction and also slight tension. What tension does occur develops between the elementary staff and its collegiate counterpart. College teachers find difficulty in accepting the excitement with which elementary staffs approach their task. The college staff is more accustomed to a sedate than an excited manner. In a very real sense, the elementary staff stimulates its students while it falls upon the college students to stimulate their teachers!

Elementary-professional school relations. Professional staff and

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students find little problem in relating themselves to elementary students and great difficulty in relating to the elementary staff. We can understand the apprehension of the elementary staff when members of a professional school descend upon them, perhaps to make a school survey. Professional schoolmen find it difficult to grasp the ebullience of the elementary teacher. Professional schools are conducted in a much more tranquil way. To the professional's thinking, the elementary staff seems utterly oblivious of losing face in front of its students. The high degree of inhibition practiced by members of the professional school is an equal source of wonder on the part of the elementary staff who must be master of many trades in order to capture the imagination of its student personnel.

Secondary-professional school relations. No interaction is so bombastic as this! The secondary school is a modestly fluid institution. Changes occur, if slowly—for excitation has the edge over inhibition. These changes, moreover, may be spearheaded by the staff. Not so in the professional school—staff and student are united against change! College acts as something of a buffer between these diverse systems of education. The conflict is heightened, of course, as secondary school staff find themselves engaged in graduate courses. Here the professional staff has its opportunity to essay upon the errors of secondary education. As a rejoinder to the survey of public education conducted by the graduate school, school "self-surveys" play the dual role of investigation *and* protection from the graduate school's unsympathetic approach.

"I come to learn, not to teach. . . ." That seems to be the approach the college staff member must make to his public school colleagues if he wishes to enjoy his interaction with them. For if our analysis of these relationships among the various schools is correct, if our judgment of their characteristics—influence, restriction, distinction—is accurate, then the professional school staff member or student must regard his hard-won glory as a handicap rather than an advantage when working with elementary or secondary schoolmen. The role of the expert reflects great tension. Vigor throughout the school system, in the sense of exciting stimulation, appears to stem primarily from the elementary staff and the high school students. Otherwise, the schools are more or

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less status quo. Even the college student, whose pranks are common knowledge, acts more from a sense of little inhibition than he does from outright excitability.

When the schools are considered as institutions within which we may play various roles, and each of these roles defines some degree of satisfaction and some degree of tension, it becomes possible to assay both the quality and the intensity of interaction among the staffs and students of the schools. Points of agreement and areas of disagreement stand out in bold relief. These points chart the course which a member of any institution may accept or which he may choose to change, depending upon his interest in his role and his ability to cope with the tension which surrounds his role. Seeds of wrath will be sown into the relationships among schools whenever a hierarchy is perceived such that one school influences another's practices. The crop of wrath will be harvested by schoolmen, however innocent they may be, who interact with one another across the fences erected within Education. Having innocently harvested one such crop, and explained it to myself, I have entered similar conferences less innocently, equipped with a gambit ready to employ which reduces the barriers between my role and those of my colleagues.

"I come prepared to admit *difference*, but to do away with *deference*. . . ."

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