

● A Professor of Education and Reply to

By JAMES W. MERRITT

IN the May, 1959, issue of the PHI DELTA KAPPAN, Bruce McDowell persuasively argues that classroom teachers ought to have certain rights. His proposed bill, patriotically naming ten rights, is followed by his plea for "... intelligent commentary and criticism rather than the snide, sarcastic type of rebuttal so often encountered in [his] readings on issues in education."

I hope my reply meets his standard and that it matches the frank but friendly tone of his criticism. Although I strongly disagree with some of his arguments, I am against calling him or anyone else who complains about schools or teacher education a "misguided critic." The issue is not so much whether he is right or wrong but is, as the editor of the KAPPAN suggests, whether his grievances are representative of the complaints which capable teachers are making. Even if most of McDowell's claims could be refuted, I would hold that he brings into sharp focus the relevance of the classroom teacher's status as subordinate to the professor of education and the administrator.

I shall first argue that, by and large, his grievances *do* represent the feelings of capable teachers. Next, I hope to explain how he might

have legitimately strengthened his case. Finally, I shall defend a position about the role of the education professor which bears on his lament that the wrong kind of content is taught in the teachers college classroom.

I believe that McDowell is justified in claiming that the "right to teach" is being impaired by unwarranted non-teaching duties. The teacher who looks with favor upon the advent of more school clerks may find that the time thus saved is more than lost by an increase in his involvement in staff meetings and committee work. It is not only the actual increase in clock hours which counts, but the more subtle continuing pressure to be both "cooperative" and "creative" with respect to general school problems. "Democratic" administration does become, as McDowell asserts, primarily a device of the superintendent or principal for getting confirmation of what he wants. And I argue that it is used too infrequently for giving the classroom teacher a means of operating as a professional equal among administrators and teachers.

On the teachers college campus it is true that we have had a large amount of extremist thinking in pedagogy. And much of this has given aid and comfort to the educational opportunist and cultist. So much time has been devoted to fads such as "group dynamics," "case studies," "role playing," "action research," and "core curriculum" that it must have been extremely easy for

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EDITOR'S NOTE: In the May, 1959, issue of the PHI DELTA KAPPAN Bruce McDowell, a teacher at the South Side Junior High School, Sheboygan, Wisc., presented a no-holds-barred article titled "A Bill of Rights for Classroom Teachers." The editor felt, and still feels, that Mr. McDowell's point of view is representative of a disturbingly large group of successful teachers.

The reaction was immediate. First to arrive was the manuscript of a California principal who laughed Mr. McDowell out of court. Then mail began coming from professors of education, the eager beavers of the education writing trade. Finally we got the desired manuscript from two practicing teachers.

Unfortunately, there is space here for only two articles. We hope that they are representative and that they put the McDowell diatribe in proper perspective.

P. S. A condensation of the McDowell article appears in the September *Education Digest*.

• Two Classroom Teachers

'A Bill of Rights'

By NANCY GAYER and VIRGINIA BOLLOTTE

THE trouble with Bruce McDowell, whose fighting-mad piece attacked practically everybody without naming anybody, is that he's fighting shadows; he doesn't really know what's bugging him.

We'll be glad to tell him—from the teacher's corner—if he'll only stop swinging long enough.

McDowell thinks that a teacher should be able to decide for himself whether he wants such innovations in the classroom as group dynamics and multi-text lessons. He might want them, and he might not, but he doesn't want to be forced to accept them.

Who should know better than the teacher, asks McDowell, whether a particular method should be used in the classroom? Professors of education are basically nice guys, but their theories don't work in a classroom situation. Administrators are fundamentally good Joes too, he adds, but they abide by the pronouncements of said professors,

while ignoring the recommendations of the teachers themselves.

Is McDowell right? Should teachers alone be the ones to make critical decisions about how they should spend their teaching time? And should each make his own decision for himself?

On the face of it, McDowell has a point (somewhat sharpened by paraphrasing). But McDowell's article is a montage of rationalizations, unsupported statements, and unjustified ridicule. His assault on professors of education and educational administrators follows the same pattern as representative anti-educationist diatribes, in that he uses abusive and emotion-loaded language without any attempt at documentation.¹

We are reminded of what Sidney Hook said in regard to criticism which is "rude and contemptuous":

One is tempted to ignore Mr. or to retort in kind. But he speaks for many who feel and believe as he does, and if we are interested in the truth we must reply to his arguments, not to his abuse. The trouble is that it is difficult to find a coherent argument.²

Stripped of its irresponsible accusations and invective, "A Bill of Rights for Classroom Teach-

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¹ For a description of the style and *modus operandi* of some of the critics of public education, see James Finn, "The Good Guys and the Bad Guys," October, 1958, *Fbi Delta Kappan*.

² Hook, Sidney, "Modern Education and Its Critics," reprinted from the *Seventh Yearbook*, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1954, in Israel Scheffler's *Philosophy and Education*. Boston: Allyn and Baker, 1958, p. 275.

The McDowell Bill of Rights

Article I: THE RIGHT TO TEACH

Article II: FREEDOM FROM 'DEMOCRATIC' ADMINISTRATION OF SCHOOLS

Article III: FREEDOM FROM FRUSTRATION

Article IV: FREEDOM FROM EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNISTS

Article V: THE RIGHT TO QUESTION

Article VI: THE RIGHT TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND DISCIPLINE

Article VII: THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED AND RESPECTED AS MEMBERS OF A PROFESSION

Article VIII: FREEDOM FROM THE 'LET'S-THROW-EVERYTHING-OUT' BOYS

Article IX: THE RIGHT TO DRILL

Article X: THE RIGHT TO RESPECT FOR THE TEACHER'S VIEWPOINT

ers" may be an argument for true self-determination by teachers and for the chance to do creative teaching—to use methods which make one personally able to do the best kind of teaching possible. If this is so, McDowell has taken a devious route to his objectives.

"Let teachers alone. Include us out of planning committees and other such dissipators of teachers' time," he expostulates from one face, while the other face demands, "Ask our opinions and act upon them! Are we not the ones who are 'on top of the situation'?"

Can McDowell have it both ways? If he is unwilling to serve on committees, he can't very well expect to voice his opinions effectively, get his philosophy of education known, accepted, and made into policy. If he wants to do creative teaching, he needs to know what goes on in the educational world.

The Much-Vilified Committee

Despite its being the butt of many jokes, the committee is a means for bringing together viewpoints of various specialists in the educational enterprise, so that a unified approach can be made.

The teacher is needed, for he is currently working with particular children in an actual classroom situation. The administrator brings to the conference table an overview of the entire school or school system. The supervisor lends his familiarity with the ideas and practices of many teachers, and the professors of education play a forward-looking role in that theirs is the realm of research and development. Why not use all members of the team?

More likely than not, the non-classroom members of the educational team have also been teachers and still possess that cognizance of the problems of teaching which McDowell considers unique to the classroom teacher.

But the committee approach is not to McDowell's liking. It's a waste of time, an administrative device. Teachers already know what they want, and what they want is not what the administrators and professors want, he implies. Working together will not bridge the chasm between their interests.

This is McDowell's objection to the committee system: 1. The interests of administrators and teachers are unreconcilable. 2. The administrator, holding the power, uses the committee for his own purpose, forcing the teacher to acquiesce to a committee decision, which in actuality is the administrator's own.

But we maintain that the interests of teachers and administrators are not incompatible; on the

contrary, they are identical. Teachers and administrators work for the welfare of children, ultimately, and specifically they work to upgrade the instructional program. (They may also work to earn a living and to get certain personal satisfactions out of life, but our point is still valid for most school systems.)

The only *raison d'être* of the administrator is to expedite and improve the work of the teacher, to organize the work of the school so that teachers are free to teach, protecting them from unnecessary interruptions, seeing that they have instructional materials, exposing them to influences which will make them more effective in achieving goals held in common by the entire staff.

This philosophy of administration can be documented in many text-books in administration and supervision³ and has been reiterated by the very professors of education McDowell has taken to task because they are "blindly followed" by administrators!

When, however, an administrator acts as if administration is an end in itself, or when he uses democracy as a facade behind which authoritarianism lurks, he engenders the kind of cynicism which breeds little McDowells.

We simply must have a clarification of what democratic administration means. It can't mean that teachers have the option of determining everything that goes on in their classrooms. What they have a right to decide is determined for them by a progression of decisions starting with the people, as represented by the legislature and the governing board, and ending with their principal. Within the purview granted them, they can decide. From school to school the scope of their authority varies tremendously.

Meaning of Democratic Administration

Administrators need not deed away their responsibility to make decisions under the misapprehension that it's the democratic thing to do. Democratic administration involves consulting your staff, getting its point of view, offering your own. It means that you're not arbitrary in your decisions, but considered. It means enlarging the base on which you make your judgment by finding out everything you can, including how people feel who will be affected by the decision.

Mr. McDowell must not forget that self-determination involves responsibility as well as freedom. It takes dedicated people to keep democracy

³ Representative authors sharing this viewpoint are Kyte, Grieder and Rosenstengel, Elsbree and McNally, Reeder and Otto. See also the bibliography listed in a syllabus prepared by Emery Sroops: *Elementary School Administration*, University of Southern Calif., 1956.

vital, moral, and dynamic. If he's going to balk at committee work, or if he tries suggested new methods of instruction without enthusiasm, damning their effectiveness with faint effort, he will get "the glib, all-knowing reception" from administrators about which he complains.

In his stricture against the "let's-throw-everything-out boys" and his plea for the right to question, McDowell is barking up a tree which has already been chopped down.

As teachers who have also spent time on graduate study, we wonder who these boys are. If McDowell is alluding to "super-progressivism," the tree was chopped down in the late thirties.

These unnamed fellows are, according to McDowell, "agin everything in the curriculum and teaching techniques which show the slightest sign of age . . . workbooks, spelling books, examinations, grading systems and, most of all, drill." But the anonymous villains can't pack much of a wallop, for most of these devices seem to be used more and more instead of less and less.

If there are such people, and if they do question these practices, they are merely invoking the same right McDowell is plumping for in Article V, "The Right to Question."

Agreed, we should be able to question and disagree (and McDowell is doing just this via the pages of an influential educational journal), but question what? The concepts he lists—self-contained classrooms, teacher-pupil planning, providing for individual differences in classes of thirty-five—have been, he admits in the next breath, mostly proven worthwhile. His main point seems to be that someone called him a naughty word—"a Conservative." So what!

McDowell is not only affronted by being called a conservative, he wants to be freed from frustration.

Freedom from frustration, indeed! Freedom from living in the twentieth century, he means.

What McDowell really is seeking as a right of teachers is freedom from change, and this, even if it were desirable, no human is in any position to guarantee.

No job, if it's worthwhile, is without frustration. Frustration implies the presence of unsolved problems. No educator affirms that we are without situations that need improvement. School people are among the first to recognize difficulties and to be critical of their own work.

And while we're being frankly immodest, let's point out that educators are a disciplined group. They formulate their standards after much study and discussion; then they evaluate their actions to see if they conform to the standards. After that,

they evaluate their standards to see if these represent what they really think is good and true.

Not many professionals do this as self-consciously and rigorously as teachers. This approach toward improvement is one of the reasons teaching can claim to be a profession. Another is that members do not use divisive tactics or blame others indiscriminately as a substitute for constructive action.

In his Article VII, Mr. McDowell asked for "The Right To Be Treated and Respected as Members of a Profession." He states that teachers are publicly debased and scorned by the members of other professions for their lack of intestinal fortitude. When they reach the point of demanding professional salaries and seeking better working conditions, they are exhorted by members of the clan "to be professional."

We haven't seen any of the public debasements McDowell is talking about, except that which he perpetrated himself in this article, but it would surely appear that the way to become professional is to act as a professional does.

From McDowell's own corner we cheer on any teacher who is concerned with teacher's rights. However, in attacking educational leaders without evidence or corroboration, by using slur and ridicule and exhibiting a cantankerous disillusionment with democratic administration of schools, Mr. McDowell has done little to help either the teachers or the education of children.

"A Bill of Rights for Classroom Teachers" is no true bill. It promotes neither personal status nor professional advancement. It is neither for educational progress nor for organizational democracy. It is only a bitter article striking out for the right to do minimums with honor.

For this we cannot cheer. . . .

To Study 'College-Going' Behavior

► Northwestern University has announced a 2½-year study intended to discover how many qualified high-school graduates who want to go to college do not go and why they do not. It will also examine such questions as whether granting a brilliant student a scholarship automatically means he will go to college and distinguish himself. The 30,390 high-school students who ranked in the top third of the 1958 National Scholarship Qualifying Test results are study subjects. An \$80,000 grant from the U. S. Office of Education makes the project possible. It is headed by Donald L. Thistlethwaite, lecturer in psychology at Northwestern and associate director of research for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

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the average student of education to conclude that even if drill is meaningful it is sort of old hat. (In fairness, I should not derogate the genuine zeal and enthusiasm which my colleagues and I put into these respected movements; as my terminology suggests, I still have mixed feelings about their value.)

Further, the teacher's right to maintain order and discipline has become impaired by the ambitious faith that delinquent inclinations can be cured by a lively curriculum and the teacher's knowledge of individual differences.

Nothing Escapes 'Devastating Analysis'

It appears that there is virtually nothing in the reality of American education which has not been devastatingly analyzed by professors of education. The quality of such analyses varies with the time and facilities they have for accurate and reflective scholarship. It seems too frequently true that the critical student of education who wants to pursue the justice of an unpopular line of thought finds himself throttled by the professor's ego-involvement. Finally, it seems too often the case that teachers' opinions are sought, both in the teachers college classroom and in the public school staff meeting, primarily for the purpose of providing professors and administrators with opportunities to demonstrate their superior insights.

Even if all these claims, and others like them, could be verified empirically, and I argue that they can, this does not mean that relationships among classroom teachers, administrators, and professors aren't essentially good. When criticisms are made of any educational group, no one need doubt the existence of a basic trust in mutual desires for fairness and truth.

Mr. McDowell presents an appealing list of rights for teachers. I can imagine three forms of response from superintendents who are moved by his arguments: (1) "You already have them [the desired rights] and don't know it"; (2) "You ought to have them but this isn't Utopia"; (3) "You deserve them and I'll try to get the board to grant them."

The distinction which McDowell fails to make is between having a right and having the power to invoke a right. He would strengthen his case by proposing reforms which could conceivably lead to a state of affairs in which teachers can invoke rights without fear of reprisal, subtle or otherwise, when irreconcilable conflicts develop. I am referring to conflicts of interest which develop in spite of good will and professional intent

among teachers and administrators. In such a situation the question Mr. McDowell really asks is: Do teachers have the rights of professional equals?

I am inclined to believe that they do not. And I suggest that classroom teachers need to look more closely into the building up of the kind of local professional society which can help them attain the assurance of *being* professional equals when dealing with the administrators. The task of a local professional society is to make the role and rights of the classroom teacher so unambiguously clear and intelligible that any board which would presume to deny them would find itself attracting only sub-standard teachers.

McDowell's idea is that professors of education should teach the right kind of theory—the kind that will be usable, not an impractical kind that non-teaching administrators tend naively to swallow and impose upon teachers. I submit that every education professor would agree with him to the extent of affirming that each student should get "something valuable." It would be as absurd for a teacher-educator to be against giving something valuable for the classroom as for a director of Alcoholics Anonymous to be against abstinence. McDowell speaks of us as "molders" of educational thought. This is better than requiring us to give each teacher a packet of sure-fire recipes for tomorrow's lessons. But still there is something suspect about being a producer or purveyor of molds of thought, because thinking won't stay in molds. We in teacher education often get into trouble when we pretend that it will.

The Education Professor's Primary Duty

The proper service of the professor of education is to *get students to think soundly about educational matters*. This duty should always take precedence over helping the student to succeed as a teacher. The problem of how the student is to apply himself to a practical situation is *not* the direct concern of the professor. It is the direct concern of the teacher himself, and I infer from the tone of Mr. McDowell's article that he has not had too much difficulty in taking care of himself. When faced with tough problems of a practical nature, the teacher-in-training can expect direct help from a laboratory teacher, and the teacher-on-the-job rightly expects direct help from a capable in-service supervisor. If the professor of education tries to give this sort of help he runs the risk of dissipating his energy and sabotaging his disposition for the primary task, which is description and criticism of educational thought. Many pressures in teacher education distract

us from this responsibility, but we cannot go into them here. What I wish to do next is to apply to Mr. McDowell's argument a type of analysis which can be applied generally to educational problems.

In his argument, McDowell employs a variant of a very popular causal model which represents environmental forces as "making people and situations what they are." This model is illustrated when we say that a given person is a stinker (or acts like a stinker) not because he is a stinker by nature but because of something in his earlier or current environment. Mr. McDowell's variation is this: If someone is having trouble it is largely because someone else is doing something wrong. This notion is apparent when we reduce his line of thought to these propositions:

1. Inadequate theory is accepted by administrators, who in turn expect teachers to act as if it is adequate.

2. Not possessing the real right to object, teachers must both endorse the theory and solve their practical problems in a manner which leaves the theory unimpaired.

3. To be a teacher in such a situation means being low on the totem pole.

Although I believe there is a lot of truth in McDowell's explanation, it must be judged as inadequate because it denies the aptness of another causal model which is complementary to the first one. This second model explains undesirable situations in terms of defects in the soul (or character or personality). McDowell shows some awareness of this model when he ascribes the paucity of literature on teachers' viewpoints in part to laziness and fear. Also, he brings it to my mind when he speaks of the desire for fame possessed by cultists and educational extremists. McDowell might further strengthen his case by giving attention to this second model, which I shall call the "inner" model, as well as to his environmental frame of reference.

I do not claim that the "inner" model will necessarily be any better than the environmental model in explaining the educational messes which all of us want to correct. But it will do some things which the standard environmental model won't do. The "inner" model is a different intellectual tool which we can use to explore the paths of causal relationship just as a small European motor-car can maneuver into some narrow but fascinating byways which are inaccessible to the standard (or pre-1960) Detroit product.

The environmental causal model directs our attention to our outward machinery for working harmoniously, e.g., "real rights to object" tend

to increase the happiness and efficiency of the classroom teacher. The "inner" causal model necessarily involves us with the sorts of propositions which our friends in clinical psychology are exploring. Guided by the "inner" model, we look for the causes of teachers' low status by asking what sorts of inner structures would seem to account for that which we wish to explain. Why might administrators, on occasion, be so prone to pass on to teachers theory which they have uncritically accepted? A disproportionate desire for the role of the authoritarian father is a possible cause. Why do education professors sometimes frustrate students who wish to pursue unpopular arguments? We can suggest that the professor has an "unconscious motive" for the role of "being right" or "having the word."

We must, however, guard against expecting to discover *the* cause for any complex situation in education. The best we can hope for is that an appetite for causal knowledge will lead us to appreciate the variety of factors which can explain a situation. If an education professor should fail to produce a climate of healthy intellectual exchange, this event might be partly explained by his defensive attitude towards his scholarship. But an equally plausible cause is that students just do not want to be intellectually responsible. What they might really want is the "latest word" on how to succeed in the classroom. If such dependent tendencies were to be genuinely present, we should have *one* convincing explanation for the frequently dogmatic and didactic behavior of professors and administrators.

If we can all learn to talk more intelligently about "inner" causes, the result may be that we shall become more prone to control our selfish egos, thus helping to free us to concentrate on our respective tasks. The task of the professor of education with respect to the improvement of classroom teachers' rights is, I believe, to set such an example in the analysis of educational thought that each of his students is irresistibly impelled to develop his own intellectual independence and responsibility. And these qualities will serve him well when he is called upon to relate any theory to a practical situation.

► Paris (AP)—Paul Pisot, professor of mathematics at Sorbonne University, threw up his arms and walked out Friday when he saw his crowded classroom.

Thus he disgustedly called off the class, leaving 1,400 students with no place to go. The students were jammed into an amphitheater seating only 378. Another 400 students couldn't even get in.