

PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY IN EDUCATION

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Whenever I am asked to express myself on educational matters I wish I were able to sound more scholarly, more erudite. I always find myself presenting an interpretation that sounds rather elementary and simple. Perhaps this is not all bad. I remember reading of an economics professor who once gave a lecture to a group of farmers on the "Ways and Wherefores of the American Economic System." It took him about forty-five minutes and he felt rather proud at having reduced a complicated subject to such simple language. When he was through the chairman of the meeting got up and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, what our speaker has been telling you is, that if your outgo exceeds your income, then your upkeep will be your downfall." Perhaps my analysis of educational autonomy can be summarized in the same way. We can have freedom if when we get it we are willing to give part of it up to keep it."

We shall interpret the topic before us "Professional Autonomy in Education" to mean freedom for the school to administer its program and to teach those who come to it without fear of interference or dictation.

As school people ours is the most wonderful job in all the world, for we work with that most wonderful creation, the human mind. The universe is full of life, but only man, through the power of his mind has transformed both the world and himself. Freedom—autonomy, if you will—is essential to the continued progress of man and indeed to the retention of what he now has attained. Two dangers threaten that freedom: laziness or self-satisfaction and tyranny. The first danger is from within and is combated through stimulation, encouragement and inspiration. The

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other is from without and the school must arm itself and the learner against it and must watch continually against encroachments; for the mind of man must be free. The history of man in a large measure is the story of the battle for freedom. However, even freedom in itself is not the supreme goal, for freedom to be secured must be limited, must accept responsibilities. It is our task today to try to define the autonomy or freedom which we want to enjoy in our profession as educators and we must include in that definition the limitations of our liberties.

If a profession is to be a profession it must enjoy a high degree of autonomy. The professional worker must be free to use and to develop his particular knowledge and skill. Every profession is beset with problems of moral and intellectual authority, of pressures from sources that claim the right to tell those engaged in it how to carry on their work. These problems are especially acute in education. Somehow everyone considers himself an "authority" when it comes to education and the school. This means that those who are engaged in professional education activities must agree on what their essential work is and in what areas they must have freedom if they are to accomplish their essential purposes. The educationist must maintain his right as an expert in things educational to carry on his problem freely according to agreed-on standards and ideals of the profession.

First of all, in our attempt to define professional autonomy in education and to criticize the pressures exerted against it, we need to remember that freedom is indivisible. Academic freedom is relative. Within the school it is affected by and directly proportional to its vitality within the culture at large. The school is not an island, an ivory tower, insulated from the society in which it is located. Those inside are not always as aware as they should be of encroachments on the freedoms of the larger society. Those outside are not as aware of the larger effects as they should be of limiting the right of those within. In a culture of plural values — and certainly this is the kind of culture we have in the Philippines — each must grant

others the right of freedom or all will suffer loss.

Because educational institutions are created and established by society to prepare the youth for life and service in a particular society their freedom to operate is often limited. Conflicts of definition of autonomy arise because the very nature of the educational process demands certain freedoms and yet the educational institution is planned and supported by the society as its agency. These conflicts are particularly prevalent in new and emerging cultures. Private institutions in the Philippines are often beset by restrictions on their freedom to operate. Two years ago the fourth general conference of the International Association of Universities was held in Tokyo. One of the principal themes of the meeting was "University Autonomy: Its Meaning Today." One of the Philippine delegates was President Sinco of Foundation College, Dumaguete. He bewailed the fact that the Philippine constitutional guarantee was not applicable to private institutions which although they received no aid whatsoever from the state, were subjected to all kinds of regulations and control. Because of this the schools ran the risk of being uniform and stereotyped instead of fulfilling their purposes as institutions training youth for intelligent citizenship in a free land.

Perhaps this is the place for those of us in private higher education to take a larger view of our responsibilities. The term "private" does not remove us from the society and culture of which we are a part. We will continue the particular program for which we originally were organized — to furnish a particular group of young people with opportunities to pursue knowledge and to prepare themselves for a vocation. It is also our responsibility to prepare these young people to participate democratically and intelligently as members of the political, economic and social groups that form our free Philippine society. In addition, through our institutions we must help to improve the activities and programs that make up the community of which we are a part. We must share in the responsibility for public welfare. This is particularly true in the Philippines where most of the college education is carried on in

private institutions under private auspices.

There are a number of areas in which a university or college should have the right to autonomy and substantial independence.

First, whatever the formalities of appointment may be, the university should have the right to select its own staff. I am not quite sure that I can name all the limitations to which we are subject in this regard. In the Philippines family relationships and pressures sometimes make certain demands on school administrators. I do not propose to criticize the Philippine family system with its many values. However, it ought not be permitted to weaken the professional integrity of a school administrator nor should he permit himself to be open to the charge of nepotism. Everyone will lose if he does.

Another point at which a school might be under pressure when it comes to appointments is that from certain political officials who want to use their influence to persuade the school to appoint a particular teacher or staff member and then use this to enhance their own power and prestige. By the same token, a school should not trade on its influence over a particular politician (even if he is an alumnus) to obtain favors from educational or other authorities or entities. The educational profession must be above politics.

The educational profession as such should unite to agree on certain minimum standards for those who are to be employed. The boards which license the teachers should be composed of professional educators. Education is a profession and lay control over it violates the ideal. Let us not identify democracy with the absence of expertness. The fact that the public employs the teacher does not give the public the right to prescribe the qualifications nor to tell the teachers how to carry on their jobs.

Closely related to this problem of selection of staff is the degree of responsibility which the members of the staff might be allowed in administrative actions. There are many opportunities for conflict in the school. There is

conflict between administrators and faculty members; between the board of control or trustees and the administrators and the faculty (usually over the budget); or between school personnel and individuals or groups outside; or with alumni who exert pressures on the board, on the administration, or on the faculty. There is no guarantee that anyone is always right in any of these conflicts. The following are some suggestions for policy-making in a school which will help to insure reasonable professional of academic freedom to the members of the staff. The faculty or its elected representatives should have collective authority over educational policies within the jurisdiction of that faculty and should control its own organization and committees. There should always be full and free discussion of educational programme, appointments, promotion, salary schedules, tenure, leaves of absence, retirements, dismissals, and budget requirements. Effective and democratic self-government can result from centering basic policy decisions in a truly representative and responsible committee of administrative and faculty members who will work together under properly formulated rules.

Professional autonomy also indicates at least minimum formal consultation with the faculty in the selection of the dean or department head. Finally, although it might appear that it is the right and duty of the trustees or the board of control to appoint the president of the school, here again the principle of professional autonomy and wisdom would indicate that the faculty should have some part in the nomination of the persons who are to be considered by the board of control. It would also seem necessary that there be ways by which the faculty and board might communicate with each other aside from communication through the president or head of the school. This could probably be through joint committees. Sometimes a faculty member is elected to the board. In any case, it is exceedingly valuable for the professional staff to feel the intelligent interest and friendship of the board in their work, as long as that interest does not interfere with educational policies that are properly the realm of the professional faculty.

The question of lay participation in the administration of a school is not easy to define. Perhaps it lies best in a recommendation that those who have the right to elect board members take this responsibility very seriously and choose those who are intelligent, conscientious, and competent.

The second point in autonomy is that the university should be responsible for the selection of its students. The school should be permitted to decide what course it will offer and the preparation for entrance to undertake particular courses. It should also have the right to screen out prospective students whose health or whose standards of social and moral behavior might endanger other students. In general, a school should be accessible to all who are fit to make use of the opportunities it offers. The school must have the autonomy to dismiss or deny admission to those who have proved themselves unworthy.

In the third place, the university should be responsible for the formulation of the curriculum for each degree, and for the setting of academic standards. It is at this point where the private colleges of the Philippines do not have autonomy. One problem is that outside bodies set the examination for license to practice. There is therefore always the pressure to bring the curriculum requirements closely into line with the requirements of this external professional examining organization. Some of these boards go so far as to dictate the academic preparation of those who teach the professional courses as, for example, the requirements for registered chemists.

There is very real fear among some college deans that the various professions are exerting influence to limit the numbers of those who will enter their particular profession or at least to delay entry to lessen competition. They point to the fact that due to pressure from the professional organizations, pharmacy and most engineering courses now take five years of college preparation. A lawyer must have a bachelor's degree before he begins his professional legal training. Perhaps this professional pressure is all

to the good and we shall have better-trained professionals as a result. The fact remains, however, that these curriculum changes come as a result of pressure outside the school. The question is — was the autonomy of the school in curriculum-planning violated?

Our schools have the interesting “Spanish problem.” Here we have curriculum-making by legislative fiat. This same phenomenon occurs at intervals in the United States and other countries. It would seem that this is a violation of professional educational autonomy. Any kind of educational prescription of what should be taught is not only violation of professional autonomy but also in practice is often contrary to sound professional judgment. So often these prescriptions have a political basis or are pushed through as a kind of political “horse trading.” Laws prescribing the teaching of certain courses or the use of certain texts are also a violation of professional educational autonomy. As one authority has said: “Determination of curriculum content, including determination of study are professional matters and should not be legislated.”

The theory of public relations is a new element affecting school planning and management because it brings the lay public closer to the school. Are the schools to listen to lay criticism of their work? Are the schools to accept the notion that the parents of their pupils know better than the professionally-trained teacher what the children need to learn and the best ways for learning it? The worst problem here is that the professional educators themselves have taken an unprofessional attitude toward the problem. The doctor does not ask for lay advice on how to remove an appendix. The lawyer does not ask a layman how to defend a lawsuit. Let us be consistent in our attitude toward the profession of teaching. Good public relations need not mean giving up principles. It will depend on doing a good professional job conscientiously, permitting lay participation only in areas in which such participation is sensible.

All this does not mean that the school should adopt an arrogant “know-it-all,” “how stupid the public is” attitude.

The school must listen sympathetically to criticisms and suggestions from sources outside the profession but it should not relinquish control over decisions that are professional in nature.

In the fourth place, consider autonomy in the light of the fact that there are certain controls put on the faculty after they once are hired. Of course, a sectarian school has the right to put certain limitations on its teachers and it certainly would not be ethical for a teacher in a sectarian school to demand the right to teach a doctrine contrary to that of the school; nor to teach against the accepted religion even within the rights of so-called academic freedom. If a particular instructor does not like the religious teaching in the school which employs him, if his particular subject is affected by it, if he cannot get along without showing his adverse attitude, then the only honorable recourse is for him to resign and go elsewhere.

A very serious problem arose a few years ago in the United States with reference to the so-called "loyalty oath" demanded of teachers. Most teachers saw no reason for objecting to the requirement. They were loyal. They assumed that the oaths merely prohibited the teaching of subversive doctrines, and not most teachers approved this on personal and professional grounds. However, the basic problem was that the oaths were not a professional requirement. They constituted a lay determination of professional qualifications and as such violated professional integrity and autonomy. Their danger often lay in the way in which they were worded. Some of them automatically disqualified a person from becoming a teacher even if his membership was in an organization which originally was free from Communist control but had later come under such. A conscientious member may decide to stay in the organization and fight to bring it back under the right influences. This would be justified if it were on an organization of prestige and with resources which ought to be used for right causes. To remain would not be possible according to most loyalty oaths. Fortunately loyalty oaths

have been declared unconstitutional. Justice Frankfurter in the case brought to the Supreme Court of the United States pointed out: "Since affiliation which must be fore-sworn may well have been for reasons or purposes as innocent as membership in a club of one of the political parties, to require such an oath on pain of a teacher's loss of his position in case of refusal to take the oath, penalize a teacher for exercising a right of association peculiarly characteristic of our people."

Another aspect of autonomy approved by the conference in Tokyo was that each university should have the final decision as to the research program carried on within its walls. Perhaps this is not such a vital problem or threat to our autonomy as yet, at least not as critical a problem as it is in Russia, England, or the United States. Interestingly enough, the Soviet government has been forced to grant considerable freedom to its research scientists. Research has not yet developed in our colleges and universities very far, and we still welcome oversight and help from government and industry. We are ready to offer our resources for this. However, I am sure we shall not want to give up our freedom for the privilege of a research subsidy. We should not want either government or industry to determine the major work activity of members of our faculty and staff, nor have prior claim on their talents, time, or production.

One basic problem involved is that government and industry are more ready to support research projects which produce results likely capable of early economic exploitation. Funds for pure research are harder to procure and often these are the projects which a school should support, since their aim is to further human knowledge.

We need to have some sensible way of protecting the autonomy of the school with reference to research projects supported by the government, by industry, and even to projects initiated by government educational bureaus of officials. To do this each school should have a central committee representative of the institution as a whole which would have knowledge and oversight of its total

research undertakings.

A sixth area of possible autonomy would give a university responsibility within wide limits for the allocation among its various activities of the financial resources available, i.e. space and equipment, capital funds, recurrent operating revenue. This freedom to use the material resources for the best educational purposes is an absolute necessity for high morale among faculty and staff. Even a privately owned institution cannot continue long to be successful unless the faculty and staff are ready to dedicate themselves to their work. Part of the inspiration for their dedication will come from the assurance that they share in the planning for the use of funds and equipment.

The growth of the school will depend on carefully considered policies and long-term programs. For these the professional educator is best-qualified to plan. Changes and revisions must be made, adjustments will be necessary. All these need the imaginative leadership of a faculty free to give themselves to this kind of life, knowing that their professional knowledge is being utilized.

Let me try to summarize what I hope I have said around this question; How can the school fulfill its purposes in the face of pressures by government entities, by government bureaus and officials, by sources of financial support, by outside interest groups, and how can each member of the school personnel maintain his personal freedom in a proper balance with the school he serves?

Schools need to realize that they have certain common causes. They need to find ways of working together with firmness and determination to protect the whole tradition of free learning and free teaching so vital to our total free and democratic life.

We are never wholly free. We do not want this. We are a part of the society and culture of our day. People in that culture will have ideas and feelings about the school and what is taught. They will not always approve of what we are doing. There may be forces in our culture that are inimical to freedom. These may be greater or smaller

groups with what they call a "message" or "mission." These may be a manifestation of life as it changes and as civilization develops.

More specifically, the government may want to force all schools into particular pattern to strengthen itself or to enhance the power and prestige of a party or group of persons. Other pressures may come from the constituency of the school, or from sources of financial support. These are difficult to resist for various reasons, particularly if they are paying the bills.

To resist all these and maintain its integrity and to fulfill its essential destiny of leadership in the battle to keep men's minds free, and to "secure the benefits of liberty," each school must first of all define for itself what its basic and fundamental purpose is, what its standards of scholarship will be, the kind of students it wants to serve. The support will come from those who are like-minded. The public will respond to strong and positive leadership. Where the fear is control from financial sources, the remedy might be to obtain support from many sources, so that no one financial interest will control the policies.

Let me say this final word. We educators must say this to one another. Autonomy—freedom, if you will — is not a gift. It is "earned." It must be earned or it has no value or substance. For us this means professional excellence and professional integrity. It means that our personal life and our professional ethics as individuals and as institutions composed of groups of professional educators are above reproach. Let us earn our autonomy then in preparing ourselves as well as we can for our work, constantly studying and growing, dedicating our service to our students and not to our own promotion and well-being, helping our administrators and fellow-teachers in our common task of building a right world through the kind of citizens we help to build.

So I end as I began: We can have freedom if when we get it we are willing to give up part of it to keep it.