

## Re-engineering the Teaching Profession

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Aaron Schutz and Pamela Moss tag more bases than needed in order to address their main concern, namely, how standards should evolve in order to contribute to reform in teaching. There is little of substance that I disagree with or that I find meriting critical commentary. Instead, I intend to complement Schutz and Moss's analysis with sources reflecting a very pragmatic mindset from the world of organizational and business theory. My reason for doing this is twofold. First, I think the more we couch recommendations for reform in the current language of organizational theory and the language of the business world generally, the more likely we are to secure a receptive audience. Second, there is much in the recent work of business theory that successfully grapples with the recommendations of Linda Darling-Hammond, Arthur Wise, and Stephen Klein, that are endorsed by Schutz and Moss.

It is a secret to no one that there has been a "Quality" revolution in business in recent years, and American society throughout has enjoyed the benefits. The concept of "Quality" comes largely from J. Edward Deming and Joseph Juran's work, and it is a technical notion operationally defined in terms of customer satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> Talk of customer satisfaction — especially as definitive of quality — rankles some educators, but others have been quick to jump on board the Quality Revolution seeing in it the promise to restore public confidence.<sup>2</sup> Most educators avoid business notions of Quality and prefer to talk in terms of excellence. To these educators, quality seems like it should mean excellence or the effort to secure optimal responsiveness from students. Unfortunately this purist or Aristotelian concept of excellence is too narrow, a point with which I think both Schutz and Moss would agree. Excellence, or more appropriately, "quality" must be situated in the social context of the community affected. Discussions leading to agreement on the appropriateness of standards of quality aim primarily at securing group consensus or at least optimizing group buy-in. The quest for Demingesque Quality, that is to say providing customers the best buy for the buck, has not only pragmatic value, but is most likely to place teachers in control of discussions about schooling practices and teaching standards. A Quality approach to creating appropriate customer-based standards generates the democratic responsiveness to community needs that so visibly animates Schutz and Moss's essay.

Teachers serve many customers: parents, society, community, the state, the academic disciplines, fellow teachers, and so on. It may even be questionable whether or not students should count as customers at all but rather should be viewed as the human raw material that teachers work with to produce quality products.<sup>3</sup> Each of the other customer bases has its own well-meaning biases regarding product quality and so, as Schutz and Moss point out, securing consensus among such disparate forces is a Herculean task, at both the local and national levels, exceeding

anything Jürgen Habermas ever imagined. Legitimate arguments depend not only on logic but also on the background premises *and* grounding of the participating disputants. With such an evident variety of customers, consensus is just not in the cards.

Just because consensus is beyond anything reasonably to be expected in discussions about teaching standards, this does not mean that the effort to satisfy all duly constituted customers should be neglected. The key to how well consensus is achieved depends heavily on who manages the discussion and how the managers of discussion understand their task. Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Klien importantly note that teachers must be in charge of the discussion, and there is important experience from the business world to underscore why this is so. First, teachers are the front-line contact with each of the customer bases mentioned. Just as in business, senior level management is usually too far removed to know what is expected at the level of each local customer base served, so too in education school administrators and professors of education are too far removed from where the action is to be of much help when creating local standards of quality. And, in the end, only local standards have any potency. If schools are to serve their immediate customers adequately, teachers are the ones most likely to possess the information that will fully frame relevant problems. Peter Senge, in the *Fifth Discipline* explains how important it is for a learning organization to stay in immediate touch with its customer base in order to secure continuous improvement of operation.<sup>4</sup> However, neither Senge nor Deming suggest that customers should be included in the dialogue determining how to solve problems once framed, as Habermas might demand.

Problem solving of any technical sort demands expertise. If teaching genuinely reflects expertise in its practice, then teaching problems should be solved by expert teachers. When Ford Motor Company followed the prescriptions of both Deming and Senge in building the Taurus, never did the company include lay people in the planning teams.<sup>5</sup> It is one thing to listen to customers, it is quite another to expect them to be able to solve your problems for you. Habermas's failure to recognize this distinction and to allow appropriately for the role of expertise ensures that effectual planning, much less consensus, will never be achieved.

In business, organizations often form "Quality Circles" to determine how to create the most effective product *for the price* at a given locale. Customer input is always vital in framing the problem. But, the best solutions demand that those responsible for implementation have control over local operational decisions. The role of management in such contexts is to ensure coordination throughout the organization. Management is not meant to present another competing interest. A business, from the lowest level to the top, should understand that its goal is to make money, and it does that best by satisfying customers. You satisfy customers by showing them that you are giving them the best bang for the buck.

In schools, from the lowest level to the top, it should be equally understood that all customers are best served by delivering the biggest bang for the educational buck. Teachers-on-site are in the best position to know how to do this. It is their consensus that matters most, perhaps singularly, at the level of implementation in order to adopt

flexible and responsive standards appropriate to securing genuine customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction secured at the local level translates into satisfaction at the national level, as long as increasingly higher levels of administrators keep those in their respective customer bases adequately informed about teacher initiatives and successes at respective local levels. The Brown University “Critical Friends Discussion Groups” is a very modest step in organizing teachers into genuine Quality Circles. There is no equivalent effort for re-directing or re-engineering administrators.

Schutz and Moss and the other educational writers they note, all recognize pressures to make standards national. Schutz and Moss further recognize that such pressures limit the democratic responsiveness of teachers in addressing problems on site as they arise. What should be done?

National standards are not without merit if they raise consciousness about what constitutes teaching as a profession. For example, as one of the four historic professions, teaching, like doctoring, lawyering, and preaching, entails a service commitment. Moreover, teachers serve and are especially committed to bringing value into the world. Bringing value into the world is obviously central to teaching since if children had all relevant value in their hearts or minds to start with, there would be no need for schools anywhere. Everything teachers teach, they teach because someone somewhere has determined it to be of some value, good for some purpose.

The values that teachers *should be* principally committed to are more widely agreed upon than is often admitted. For example, nearly everyone agrees that students should be shown how to read, write, do arithmetic, and develop a sense of other-regardingness in both their immediate and larger communities. Herein we find our grounds for nationwide teacher standards and professional commitment. Beyond these obvious values is where national dialogue must restrain itself to allow responsible action by local initiatives. Fleshing out the details of national commitments and going beyond them locally to bring about immediate effective action is the most obvious route for optimizing customer satisfaction at all levels. But, here again, all discussions of even national standards are most effectively instigated by professional teachers at the local level and not by bureaucrats, technocrats, and other “crats and rats” walled away from the customer bases for whom specific teaching services are intended.

The most generally agreed-upon local standards should aggregate fairly obviously into a single and simply articulated set of standards. Determining who should aggregate such standards is nowhere near as difficult as it may initially seem. This is not a matter of identifying educators for Plato’s philosopher-kings. Any set of fair-minded technocrats should be able to sit down and tabulate the results from successively lower levels of review. This task is meant to be fixedly one of aggregating the dozen or so most frequently cited and general principles. It is not meant to be a matter of interpretive review and restatement.

For teachers to be skilled at managing such discussions will require that teachers be re-engineered.<sup>6</sup> This means that teachers must be shown not just how to teach but

how to solve curricular and instructional problems at the local level. Re-engineering should also show teachers that their jobs extend well beyond the confines of the classroom. Re-engineered teachers must get better at soliciting input from parents, community leaders, the academic disciplines, taxpayers, and other professional teachers. Finally, re-engineered teachers must learn how to communicate their intended solutions to all stakeholders, and the reasoning behind those solutions.

Administrators too must be re-engineered. They must learn how to step back and coordinate the efforts of units of teaching professionals. Administrators should no longer be expected to communicate to the local public on behalf of teachers. Rather teachers should manage that activity themselves. (As noted earlier, administrators must still effectively communicate initiatives and successes to their customer bases: people colloquially referred to as the “higher ups.”) Finally, to insure that real problems internal to the profession are appropriately addressed, re-engineered teachers must be given the power to set up genuine Ethics Boards, a benchmark of any professional group, and one too long denied professional teachers.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, it seems there is much from the experience of business organizations that underscores the need for industry-wide visionary standards while demanding that democratic decision-making and protocols for cooperative implementation be left to re-engineered teachers at the local school level. Habermas cries out for an ideal that is not only unachievable, but also inadvisable, as Schutz and Moss and I have noted. One last point, and perhaps the only point at which I knowingly disagree with Schutz and Moss: I do not know exactly what they mean by diversity, but if they mean that teacher professional groups should be organized around race, ethnic, or lifestyle lines, I think that is a mistake. A teacher would not be much of a professional if her view of the world ignored any customer base receiving her professional service. The re-engineered teacher ought to be expert in soliciting input from all interest groups on the outside. But, internal to the local decision-making group of teachers, a sense of service, personal integrity, and shared moral vision with all other teachers (as articulated by profoundly important but general, national standards) are far more important than the general and, often adversarial gestures towards political correctness that inclusionary practices encourage.

The re-engineered teacher will allow no view to be overlooked. The re-engineered teacher will not lose sight of her professional commitment. The re-engineered teacher will work with every element of the public on all matters of relevance in order to serve educational problems on site. Dialogical practice must be situated and kept relevant to locale, expertise, customer input, and local resources.

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1. W. Edward Deming, *Out of Crisis* (Cambridge: MIT, Center for Advanced Engineering Study, 1986) and Joseph Juran, *Juran on Planning for Quality* (New York: Free Press, 1988). See also Rafael Aguayo, *Dr. Deming* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); John Butman, *Juran: A Lifetime of Influence* (New York: John Wiley, 1997); and Kaoru Ishikawa, *Guide to Quality Control* (Tokyo: Asian Productivity Organization, 1983).

2. Alan M. Blackstein, "Applying the Deming Corporate Philosophy to Re-structuring," *Educational Leadership* (1993), 29-32.
3. Paul A. Wagner, "Total Quality Management: A Plan for Optimizing Human Potential," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 16 (1997): 241-58.
4. Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1994).
5. Andrea Gaber, *The Man Who Discovered Quality* (New York: Penguin, 1990).
6. Michael Hammer and John Champy, *Re-engineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for Business Revolution* (New York: Harper, 1994).
7. Paul A. Wagner, *Understanding Professional Ethics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa, 1996).