

Empowering Leadership

by Frances S. Bolin – 1989

Teacher empowerment requires investing in teachers' right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and the right to exercise professional judgment about the content of the curriculum and means of instruction. Implications of this conception and the kind of school leadership it requires are discussed. (Source:ERIC)

Two central questions should arise for anyone who attends to the rhetoric of empowerment that is being used in current discussions of improvement of teaching as a profession: (1) What is teacher empowerment? and (2) Toward what ends are teachers to be empowered? Discussions of teacher empowerment have proceeded as if all of those who use the term were in agreement, when even a cursory review of what has been written on the subject reveals that this is clearly not the case. In the literal sense, to empower is to invest legally or formally with power or authority; to authorize or license. It is also to impart or bestow power to an end or for a purpose. An obsolete definition of empower, reaching back into the history of the word, is to gain power or assume power over.¹

Current discussions of teacher empowerment stretch the definition to its historical limits and creatively imagine or assume what will empower teachers. For example, in some cases, teacher empowerment is seen as teacher involvement in school governance. An illustration of this conception of the term can be found in Dade County, Florida, where management teams of teachers, principals, and in many cases other school personnel and parents are running the public schools.² Along similar lines, the Carnegie Foundation Forum on Education and the Economy proposes to increase teacher autonomy and professionalism through reorganization of the present school structures to replace the traditional hierarchical model of school governance.³

In other instances, empowerment is equated with granting new respect to teachers and improving the conditions in which they work in order to attract and retain more capable teachers. This is the sense in which Maeroff has used the term.⁴ Others use teacher empowerment to mean higher salaries and new professional structures that provide career ladders for teachers. Both the Holmes Group and the Carnegie Foundation Forum on Education and the Economy speak of improvement of conditions of teaching, restructuring the profession, and increasing teacher salaries.

Then there are those who see teacher empowerment as teacher revolution to overcome the existing administrative order and gain control of the profession. This notion is not unlike what Albert Shanker is referring to in his many discussions of revolution in the profession of teaching. Both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers are interested in proposals that will increase teacher autonomy and professionalism because administrators have been reluctant to share power with the public or teachers.⁵ The teacher power movement has become an important element in the politics of education as teacher unions have come to recognize that empowerment of teachers is unlikely without political action—perhaps even revolution within the profession.

In this article, I will argue that teacher empowerment, in a most fundamental sense that underwrites all of the above conceptions, requires investing in teachers the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and the right to exercise professional judgment about the content of the curriculum and means of instruction. This should not be at the expense of administrative empowerment, however. The article will focus on what this conception of teacher empowerment implies and the kind of school leadership it requires. It will be as much about administration as about teaching.

My basic assumption is that teachers should be empowered because teaching is a moral activity. Moral agents, to be responsible for their acts, must be free to act according to their best judgment. The teacher at her or his best is one who engages in reflective action, praxis, building a bridge between knowledge and the needs' and interests of students and of the community; one who has a social and moral investment in the student's education.⁶ To do this responsibly, teachers need to have both professional expertise that uniquely qualifies them to engage in praxis and the professional authority to participate meaningfully in decisions about the context in which they will perform as professionals.

Unfortunately, in the United States the teacher has come to be instrumental to the curriculum rather than being a person with power to engage in praxis.⁷ Teachers, more often than not, are expected to implement the ideals and vision of other people in ways that have been determined by experts far removed from the schools. Furthermore, the burgeoning bureaucratic structures of schooling have become more-influential than professional skill, education, or experience in determining what teachers will do.⁸ In order to influence school policy, the teacher has had to leave the classroom for supervision or administration. The cumulative effect of these trends has been to disempower

teachers.

THE DISEMPowering OF TEACHERS

If we look at the history of teaching in the United States we are reminded that gaining any professional voice has been a hard-won struggle for teachers.⁹ Recently, victories of the past have been challenged by government programs with their accompanying conceptions of accountability, separation of curriculum decision making from instruction, and negative attention accruing to the profession from national reports. In addition to these, public political quarreling over issues that range from textbook selection and secular humanism in the schools to reading and mathematics test scores has undermined teacher morale. Loss of professional authority and low morale have had an eroding effect on teachers' maintenance of professional skill, have contributed to an exodus of talented teachers from the profession, and have increased teacher burnout.¹⁰ It remains a curious fact, as Lortie pointed out over a decade ago, that the structure of the profession probably suits best those who give it less than their full commitment.¹¹

Moreover, teachers are subjected to infantilization. Almost anyone can tell the teacher what he or she ought to be doing. As a teacher who has served for twenty years in one of the most highly professional districts in the nation recently put it:

No matter how good you get there is always somebody who can come in and say, "That's line, but the angle of your window blinds is all wrong," or "The lesson is well and good as far as it goes, but are you really motivating these young people?" It's as if I knew nothing about and had no interest in what I've been doing all these years!¹²

New teachers are particularly vulnerable, often finding little respect for their expertise. Not atypical is a beginning teacher who reports that her third-grade students are reading on a pre-primer/primer level. Even as a novice, she knows how to create an appropriate program for them, yet she has been told that the children are to be instructed with third-grade basal readers and she is to follow the teacher's manual. Lest she be tempted to subvert the curriculum, the children are tested by an outside resource teacher at the end of each month, using third-grade tests that accompany the basal series.¹³

Intrusions on teacher power and authority, Apple suggests, will lead to a gradual deskilling of teachers and a loss of caring about their work.¹⁴ It is hard to imagine that capable graduates will want to stay in a profession that defines teaching as a narrow set of decisions about instruction that have nothing to do with curriculum knowledge and the unique individuals who make up each classroom. To be empowered to become more responsible educators, teachers must be respected, valued, and supported. Yet, despite the national attention given to education, schools, and teaching in this decade, teachers widely believe that school administrators fail to provide leadership and a working environment that places value on their work and supports them.¹⁵

While any individual ought to be entitled to respect and dignity in the workplace, teacher empowerment must comprise far more than adding respect to the profession or making it more attractive to bright college students, as Maeroff¹⁶ and others suggest. When their workplace is in the schools of a democratic society, teachers should be concerned about equipping young people with skills, knowledge, values, and habits that will enable them to find meaningful work, imaginatively engage with life, and fully participate in a democracy. Hence, whatever else it may imply, teacher empowerment ought to be toward the end that teachers are better able to educate young people along these lines. It should enable them to be good teachers. Good teachers cultivate and support human relationships in the classroom. They foster a transcendent view and inspire confidence in their students. They unconditionally accept the worth of every student and that student's cultural heritage. They embed their decisions in caring. They are the teachers that Glickman describes as having high commitment and high ability.¹⁷

Administrators may not fear allowing good teachers to exercise professional judgment, but what of all the others—those whose commitment and ability are low, the highly committed but unskilled, and those suffering from burnout? The administrator is unlikely to consider relinquishing responsibility to these teachers, particularly when accountability will rest on the administrator's shoulders. Furthermore, what of administrator empowerment? School administrators have more occasion than any other school personnel to feel the tension between encroaching demands of a bureaucracy that seems to be out of control and what they would like the school to become. As moral agents, administrators too must have the freedom to be responsible. Empowerment is not a concept that ought to be reserved for one group at the expense of another.

The issue of administrative empowerment raises numerous questions, among them: How are teachers, students, and their parents to be brought more fully into the life of the school—what of student and community empowerment? The issue of teacher empowerment raises additional questions. Are teachers ready to be fully responsible for decisions related to their work? Should every teacher be empowered? Advocating teacher empowerment is not simply a matter of feeling empathy for the plight of teachers; it is a complex and perplexing issue.

TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF ADMINISTRATOR-TEACHER ROLES

The school is an institution that is organized on the authority principle. Power is delegated from the school board to the superintendent and to each member of the organization. Willard Waller describes the school as a despotism in a state of perilous equilibrium, threatened within and regulated from without.¹⁸ Prestige and stability are fragile at best. Running a school is like an act of conquest. The administrator must take over and establish (or continue) a stable social order. In most cases this can be done in a kindly manner, but to get a school or a school system to work, the administrator has to exert the authority principle.

The school must constantly be defended against intrusions. Threats from without and within must be dealt with through tactics like divide and conquer—principals organize by department or grade level, for example, reward through provision of material resources to those who are doing what is desired, and rally school and community around slogans such as “One year’s growth for one year’s instruction.” Relationships with teachers and the community are often characterized by negotiations and trade-offs.

Teachers are in an ambiguous relationship with administrators. Structures of administrative authority have historically been tied to accountability for classroom outcomes. The principal teacher emerged when county superintendents of instruction were unable to sufficiently oversee classroom instruction. Later, the principal was given the authority to oversee and evaluate instruction and protect teachers from managerial aspects of the school. This has placed teachers in an ambiguous position since they look to the principal for help while also knowing that it is the principal who evaluates their performance. Even though they would like to be free to make classroom decisions related to management, curriculum, and instruction, teachers also want the principal to intervene in ways that protect them in the classroom. They want the backing of the principal and the security of consistent school policies. “In return for these services, the teachers are willing to cooperate with the principal’s initiatives.”¹⁹ This give-and-take persists despite collective bargaining agreements that specify teachers’ and principals’ rights and responsibilities.

Being an administrator requires exceptional human relations skill in order to tactfully maintain order in the midst of ambiguity. Ruffled feelings are soothed or issues raised as the occasion demands. This must always be done with tact and finesse. Dale Mann notes:

Leaders frequently come to a reluctant estimate of the sorry condition of their organizations and still maintain public postures that are relentlessly cheerful and optimistic. There can be a necessary hypocrisy to leadership. What is important is that rhetoric not be confused with reality and that action be based on the latter.²⁰

To be an effective administrator one must diplomatically deal with conflict and manipulate forces in and outside the school in order to protect programs and ensure the smooth operation of the organization.

Without a strong, clear sense of where the school is going it is hard to predict the kind of results that are expected by the public. Even though the superintendent might wish to leave curriculum decisions at the local level and the building principal might prefer to give teachers more latitude in curriculum matters, these inclinations must often be resisted in order to achieve system goals. When test scores in reading and mathematics are published in the local papers and schools are ranked, no administrator wants to appear at the bottom of the list. Though administrators may not agree with the accountability measures utilized in achievement testing, they will probably agree that some evaluation of effectiveness is in order.²¹ Therefore, it often becomes necessary for the administrator to set aside goals of parents, students, and teachers if these do not directly lead to system goals and achievement of better test scores. Cultural norms and expectations within the school and community may otherwise limit the school’s effectiveness.

Mann supposes that educational improvement is too dependent on “soft strategies” and ought to be augmented with approaches that are more assertive. “Leading schools takes both strokes and pokes. Adding, balancing, alternating the two, will enhance the outcomes of public schooling.”²²

Strategies of conquest, divide and rule, manipulation through human relations techniques, and cultural invasion are not uncommon in administrative practice. They are problematic in a democratic society, however, because they are based on an oppressive leadership model.²³

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

There is an alternative model that contrasts sharply with the oppressive model: empowering leadership. Its traditions reach back to the beginning of the modern school movement and it is referred to by terms such as cooperative leadership, democratic leadership, and dialogical action.²⁴ Empowering leadership is based on dialogue and cooperative, democratic leadership principles. Its theoretical underpinnings are to be found in discussions of democracy, social psychology, group process, and conflict management.²⁵ It assumes that empowerment of teachers will not be at the expense of students, community, principal, or other school staff. It assumes that educators have the right to develop goals and exercise judgment about the means of achieving these goals with respect to the needs and interests of the unique communities they serve.

Freire contrasts dimensions of antidialogical or oppressive leadership with dialogical leadership. Dialogical leadership begins with the present, existential, concrete situation and reflects the aspirations of all those involved. The notion of empowering leadership, as it is used in this article, draws on Freire’s theory, but recognizes both the strengths

and limitations of dialogue. In Freire's view there is no room for experts who teach or assume roles of power. Instead there is dialogue. What he fails to make clear is that authentic dialogue requires that all participants contribute their own best thinking to discussion, which will include their expertise and experience. To hold back one's contribution is to be less than authentic.²⁶

The posture of authority is radically different in authentic dialogue, however. It employs expert authority as well as the authority of rules and norms, but it cannot be reduced to either of these forms of leadership.²⁷ It recognizes that any item brought to dialogue, including the expertise and experience of members and leaders alike, is subject to reshaping and change. To enter into dialogue is to open oneself to being transformed by the process. Freire is right to recognize that the alternative to oppressive leadership is dependent on dialogue and discussion at every phase and that domination by authority is antidialogical in nature. To Freire, dialogical leadership requires cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis. These, too, are essential elements of an empowering leadership model.

COOPERATION

Authority in empowering leadership is not achieved by conquest, but through cooperation, which creates a new kind of authority. The school administrator is a co-equal with all other school personnel—not equal in function, education, or responsibility, but equal in status and worth. A democratic, cooperative environment can begin with the attitude of an administrator who recognizes that he is dependent on school personnel—and students to exercise his vocation. This realization in itself promotes the respect and appreciation of shared humanity that are essential attitudes in empowering leadership.

Cooperation requires continuous efforts to involve teachers and school personnel in making decisions that relate to their work. It requires openness about policy decisions and flexibility in approaching problems. All of these actions involve dialogue and discussion. In the context of empowering leadership, cooperation presupposes that the source of authority for decision making rests with those who are most concerned with the mission and operation of the school. Decisions are not judged to be right solely on grounds that they measure up to some objective criteria of absolute rightness, but because appropriate, inclusive methods of decision making have been employed.²⁸

UNITY

Instead of using tactics such as divide and rule to defend the school from constant siege, the administrator works with educators for unity. Common goals are negotiated, goals to which all are committed. This requires effort to understand diversity and search for areas of interdependence that respect and enhance that diversity. It supposes that the opinions and experiences of all school members are valuable to the school community and are to be heard respectfully. Slogans and myths about teaching and learning are identified and exposed as myth. Roles and responsibilities are identified and understood by all members of the school organization.

Unity requires that members of a group identify and work through areas of conflict. McNeil points out that “reforms that make schools educational will require not adversarial relations between administrators and teachers, but the best collective efforts of all who work in and for our schools.”²⁹ This necessitates cooperation, which in turn depends on trust between and among group members and leaders. One of the key ways to build unity is to engage a group in experiences of valuing together.³⁰ Trust is established as group members share experiences that do not place them in the position of having to defend their differing perspectives.

ORGANIZATION

Oppressive leadership is manipulative, using human relations and motivational theory for purposes of control. Empowering leadership achieves order through organizing. An organizational ethos that sets the expectation for excellence or failure must be created by individuals in the school, rather than by bureaucratic edict. Schools will not change as long as teachers clock in and out of the school without thought of what it is they are trying to accomplish. Teachers who aspire to excellence in teaching and expect excellence from students are concerned about their craft.³¹ Hence, while empowering leadership may bring teachers into school governance, it must primarily focus on the professional authority of teachers in curriculum and instruction. Linda Darling-Hammond argues:

Ultimately, professionalism requires collective control by teachers over the technical decisions that define teaching work and collective responsibility for the appropriate treatment of students. This means not only peer review of practice, but also peer involvement in the prevention of malpractice. It also means a reconception of administration as a support function for teaching rather than a mechanism for the control of teaching.³²

Teachers need to be able to exercise their craft within an organization that they have helped to shape.

Freire suggests that consistency, faith in individuals, dialogue, courage, and willingness to take risks are necessary for organization.³³ Though these may be prerequisite attitudes, attitudes must often be accompanied by the hard work of educating a faculty and staff into new roles and relationships that are not based on patterns of

superiority/subordination and dominance/dependence. Unless school administrators are willing to cultivate these attitudes themselves, however, re-education of the faculty will be a meaningless exercise.

CULTURAL SYNTHESIS

Oppressive leadership, whether paternalistic or domineering, allows for one perspective on school goals, teaching and learning, supervision and evaluation: that from the central office, or the dominant ideology. Instead of invading the culture of the school and community, empowering leadership recognizes the uniqueness of each school and respects its culture, even when there are needed improvements. The culture of a school represents its perceptions of reality, what is seen as valuable, its goals and the means that seem appropriate to reach these goals. The first task of the empowering leader is to understand the culture of the school and to become a participant in reshaping it as perceptions are enlarged and new goals negotiated.

Empowering leadership recognizes various models of teaching and learning and seeks to be inclusive. Mutually agreed on goals may be achieved through a variety of approaches. Building principals and teachers exercise professional judgment. They work collaboratively to develop appropriate supervisory support for teachers and evaluation measures that enhance accountability in ways that are clear, open, and fair. This enables all members of the organization to function as morally responsible persons and, at the same time, to preserve their self-respect.³⁴

Cultural synthesis does not mean loss of cultural heritage and identity. This is possible when opposing views or ways of being are placed in the kind of dialectical relation that prompts problem solving and searching for new, more comprehensive structures that will encompass diversity. In such a context, conflict is healthy and lively, leading to growth and new understanding.

In order to achieve cultural synthesis, leaders and members of an organization must come to share hope in democracy. They must be skilled in the methods of democratic, cooperative decision making or be willing to acquire them; They need to be skilled in techniques of conflict resolution. Most importantly, they need to believe that schools should reflect the diverse values of a pluralistic society.

BARRIERS TO EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

Perhaps the most significant barrier to empowering leadership is the fact that many administrators and teachers carry emotional baggage that predisposes them to assume that their strength is dependent on someone else's weakness. They imagine that their status is dependent on someone else's lack of status. These expectations create a mind set that can lead to self-fulfilling prophecy. Taking time to identify myths that contribute to misunderstanding of democratic roles and relationships in order to develop group unity is critically important for this reason.

Another barrier to empowering leadership is the experiences that educators have had in malfunctioning groups. Groups that cannot decide on leadership, that talk endlessly without arriving at decisions; that allow some members to dominate, that assume equality of members means every member has to participate equally in every group activity, are ineffective as well as inefficient. All group members cannot make a direct contribution to every decision made in an organization.³⁵ Instead, there must be the presumption that as morally responsible persons, group members will make a point to know about group decisions. As decisions are made and duties assigned to various members, there must be complete openness about the reason for choices or assignments and communication about procedures and progress.

Because many educators have participated in groups without training in group process, they may not only have negative feelings about groups, but are likely to have little understanding of the procedural commitments that are necessary for a group to work. The administrator should never make the mistake of putting teachers together in groups to work out solutions to a problem without taking time to develop appropriate group process skills. A faculty, left alone, will not automatically function in a democratic, cooperative manner. In fact, left alone, it is more likely to become chaotic or divide into factions led by various autocratic members. Without democratic group leadership and membership, the tendency of groups is to descend to the level of the lowest member.³⁶ Effective, democratic groups depend on members and leader assuming complementary roles that include adherence to procedures of group discussion.³⁷

Group members must be educated about their roles and responsibilities. Education requires practice and time. It also presupposes a willingness to learn—in reality, many teachers do not know that they need training in group membership and process skills. This presents another barrier to empowering leadership. One can postpone action indefinitely, seeking commitment to the process before beginning. In reality, the administrator needs to begin where the faculty is, even though there may not be solid commitment to the process. Paradoxically, cooperation is learned by cooperating. Therefore the administrator who wishes to build cooperation among faculty must involve them in democratic, cooperative activity that is rewarding and increases the desire to cooperate.³⁸ Borrowing from the teacher's reading circle of past decades, administrators could ask faculty to read and discuss a classic on group process, such as Matthew B. Miles's *Learning to Work in Groups*, or the more recent *Improving Discussion*

Leadership by Ronald T. Hyman.³⁹ Techniques useful in faculty group membership will also be helpful to teachers who would like to work more effectively with groups in the classroom—they may, in fact, be more willing to begin such a study from this perspective.

Still another barrier to empowering leadership is the fact that administrators recognize that many teachers are incapable of adequately fulfilling their classroom responsibilities, let alone sharing in school governance. It seems reasonable to suppose that a weak teacher needs to focus on development of basic teaching skills rather than out-of-classroom activities. Furthermore, administrators and teachers may fear the amount of time group activities take when there are already so many constraints on teachers' instructional time. Both of these are serious concerns.

Unless time is provided for group work it is unlikely to be effective. Since empowering leadership is dependent on effective groups, administrators need to work with teachers to develop schedules that permit groups to work. This may require altering the school day.

Teacher involvement in governance of the school may not appear to be connected to teacher instructional competence and it will not replace the need for direct, in-class supervision that is supportive in nature. Empowered teachers who take the work of the school seriously, however, will become increasingly concerned about instructional issues and will take action to improve practice. The influence of groups on members is so powerful that when a group decides to take a particular action, members will usually go along with the decision despite personal inclinations. While it is difficult to change the ideology or cultural habits of an individual, groups working together can modify the behavior of members.⁴⁰ Ideological differences are dealt with as group members learn how to search for common ground in order to reach decisions on which all can agree.

Through group involvement, a teacher who is unskilled is likely to identify with other teachers and, through repeated interaction, begin to internalize their values. He or she will feel more competent when provided with opportunities to exercise professional judgment and share growing expertise with colleagues. This is far more likely to bring about instructional change than outward compliance with authority, which administrators too often confuse with commitment. A teacher who is disillusioned or suffering from burnout is more likely to have interest in teaching rekindled if his or her opinions and experience are respected, and it is clear that administrators place value on his or her teaching work.

Perhaps the most serious barrier to empowering leadership is the fact that administrators realize, whether or not they are predisposed to sharing leadership, that they are not free of the authority and responsibility invested in them by the school organization. Accountability is not a barrier, however, if one understands the power and authority characteristic of empowering leadership. Empowering leadership is disciplined, strong leadership that controls chaos through appropriate exercise of authority in order to "safeguard freedom in thought and expression."⁴¹ Through effective, empowering leadership a group control system is developed, maintained, and modified. Accountability is inherent in the process. Members of the school organization are led toward self-motivation rather than relying on the motivation of bureaucratic control. Bureaucratic structures have their place, but when they become ends in themselves they can seriously undermine the real work of teachers.⁴² That work and its outcomes are enhanced in situations in which teachers accept responsibility for their professional decisions. Leadership that involves teachers in democratic, cooperative decision making about the school contributes to an organization that has the capability of being self-defining and self-improving. The alternative is to relinquish democracy to authoritarian rule, which depends on power exercised by the leader over those who are led rather than on controls established through mutually accepted authority.⁴³

Empowering leadership is neither dogmatic nor casual. Rather, it is appropriate to the situation—sometimes directive, sometimes task-oriented, sometimes nondirective. It is motivated by other purposes and assumptions about people than authoritarian or laissez-faire leadership.⁴⁴ Accountability for school outcomes is heightened rather than diminished in such a process because members of the school organization have an interest in the whole school rather than merely their own individual classrooms or responsibilities. Success is their achievement, failure their challenge.

The question remains, however, whether schools, using principles of cooperative leadership, should be allowed to develop programs that are what Popkewitz and his colleagues describe as illusory.⁴⁵ Can we tolerate schools in a democratic society in which totalitarian social control is the end? What if communities desire and demand authoritarian teachers who emphasize memorization and drill, absolute obedience to authority, and punitive discipline, and, after careful consideration, teachers and principal agree to such goals? Cooperative action can be devoted to any number of ends. For this reason it is crucial to emphasize the democratic nature of leadership that extends the concept of empowerment to the student. In a democratic society, we cannot afford to allow our schools to instill in students the values of a totalitarian social order. Empowerment as it has been used in this article implies a deliberative, constructivist approach to education with a great deal of latitude in choosing methods to achieve mutually agreed on goals appropriate to schools in a democratic society.⁴⁶

DEVELOPING EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

School administrators (both superintendents and principals) need to assess their leadership skills and understanding of group process. To empower teachers, the administrator must be skillful at interaction with individuals and groups, recognizing that different dynamics are at work with each. Reeducating a faculty from either authoritarian or

laissez-faire leadership requires strong, powerful leadership behavior and a keen understanding of group dynamics and conflict management. If these are weak or missing, training should be sought. The empowering leader must teach members of the school organization through playing a role that exemplifies fair, responsible attitudes toward the organization and sensitivity to the opinions and feelings of others.

Teachers have their own work to do. They are not so interested in taking on the work of administrators as in having a part in the decisions that affect them and being acknowledged for their own areas of expertise. They want to be treated with respect and to see their needs and opinions reflected in school policy.

Administrators who fear that teacher empowerment means teachers will band together to protect teacher incompetence have no more to fear than teachers do when administrators band together to protect incompetent leadership. Administrators can ill afford to hide behind this argument as an excuse for authoritarian management. There is no reason why teachers should not participate actively in running their profession and in running the schools in which they practice it. Darling-Hammond notes that "at the core of the definition of a profession is the notion that its members must define and enforce their own standards of practice."⁴⁷ As teaching matures as a profession and teachers have more opportunities to become involved in the improvement of schooling, they will be more likely to recognize that their status and success are diminished by harboring incompetent colleagues.

The fact is that many administrators—whether superintendents or principals—like the position of autocratic leader. They worked hard to achieve their current status, and have no intention of relinquishing power and control. History suggests that oppressive leaders do not voluntarily give freedom to those they oppress. Teachers have to be willing to wait for such leaders to retire, risking their replacement by other oppressive administrators, or seize leadership for themselves. Before a new order can be established in schools led by genuinely oppressive leaders, a revolution may be necessary.

For administrators who have unwittingly utilized oppressive tactics and are genuinely interested in improvement of the profession, developing the skills necessary for empowering leadership offers an alternative. Otherwise, we can expect that "administrators and teachers' unions will continue to compete for power over the educational system. Their battle will take place against a background of community attempts to participate in the control of school systems."⁴⁸

An important caveat remains: It is unlikely that the climate for empowering leadership will be right until new modes of accountability that take the idea of moral responsibility into account are more widely accepted by the educational community and the public. The current dependence of American schools on narrow forms of assessment as the sole form of accountability reinforces and perpetuates alienation and oppression. Test scores become ends in themselves rather than an uncertain indicator of ends. Teachers, administrators, and parents who take empowerment seriously will need to work together to develop and publicly advocate new forms of accountability that are appropriate for their schools and communities.⁴⁹

In a democratic society, we might hope that the schools, a key organization in the education and socialization of young people, would model a new kind of moral leadership that is based on democratic participation in a community. At present, too many of our public schools teach a limited if not distorted vision of democracy and offer students mixed messages about authority.⁵⁰

This argument aside, there are compelling reasons for considering new patterns of school leadership if we are to improve the quality of education in this country. The wise administrator will insist on teacher empowerment before teachers demand it. Not only will such action help to avoid a leadership crisis, but it will provide administrators with capable assistance in making decisions about educational reform. It will also provide students a living example of the kind of intellectual skills and moral qualities necessary to be full participants in a democratic society.

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