

Acceptance of Parent Volunteers and Teacher Professionalism

Sr. M. Gerarda, O.S.B.
St. Francis Xavier University

Robert R. O'Reilly
University of Ottawa

Cette étude a pour objet la relation entre l'orientation du rôle professionnel des enseignants à l'élémentaire et leurs attitudes vis-à-vis de l'utilisation de parents volontaires dans la classe. On a dégagé des attitudes plus positives envers le volontariat parental chez l'enseignant qui prend à coeur sa profession. On a mesuré la compétence, l'attitude de l'enseignant envers la profession par des réponses à une échelle relative à l'orientation de son rôle professionnel. Cette échelle a été conçue pour cette étude. L'échantillon était constitué de 327 enseignants de l'élémentaire ayant de l'expérience, engagés par l'un des conseils scolaires suburbains de l'Ontario. Les résultats ont indiqué que généralement, la plupart des enseignants avaient des attitudes positives envers l'acceptation de parents volontaires.

A long term struggle of the teaching profession has been to attain recognition as a profession. In part, this has meant that in order to become a recognized member of the profession, one had to achieve a certain level of academic and professional competence, which today generally means a university degree and a professional teaching certificate. These credentials attest to the fact that a teacher possesses a body of abstract knowledge and has attained a standard of technical competence which are the trademarks of a profession (Wilensky, 1964). In order to maintain the acceptance of current credentials as proof of professional competence, teachers, their organizations, and the government agencies which issue those credentials take steps to ensure that any person who does not possess the credentials shall not teach. Thus another characteristic of the profession is its exclusiveness. The sense of exclusiveness is reinforced structurally by the fact that teaching has traditionally been a one-person task. The classroom teacher has been a solo practitioner behind a closed classroom door, who, in solitary fashion, teaches, disciplines, performs routine administrative chores, and if time and energy permit, administers to the normal and routine needs of children to be heard, to be accepted, and to be encouraged. Although teachers do admit that they could use assistance in the performance of these tasks, the norms of teacher groups which aspire to professional status render the status of a non-teacher adult in the classroom somewhat ambiguous.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the reaction of teachers toward the employment of parent volunteers in classrooms, particularly with reference to the extent to which teachers hold professional attitudes.

In order to cope with these emerging demands on the teacher, and to some extent in order to slow down the rate of increase in the educational budget, various writers and practitioners have turned to the paraprofessional, or teacher aide, or volunteer. For instance, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF), has stated: "There is a common agreement among teachers if they were relieved of the non-instructional tasks . . . they could do a better job of teaching students, and that they could give students more individual attention" (OSSTF, Note 1).

Research studies seem to support the OSSTF position. For example, Hedges (Note 2) reports that "with volunteer help elementary school teachers transfer about 21 per cent of their time from lowest to highest level functions and that pupils are given over three times the normal amount of attention" (p. 334).

However, in spite of the advantages, there are sources of resistance to the use of the volunteer. Some of these relate to possible threats to the teacher as a wielder of professional and bureaucratic authority (Lortie, 1975, p. 177; Natzki, Note 3, pp. 189-191; Hedges, Note 2). Hedges (Note 2) also states that teachers fear that volunteers may not be competent, may cause more work for teachers, or may be used as an excuse by their employers to alter the pupil-teacher ratio (p. 143).

Aside from the above reasons, there are some concerns more closely related to the profession of teaching, and these are the concern of this paper.

The first problem is the nature of the teaching task itself. The British sociologist, Wilson (1962), discusses the technology of teaching in such diffuse terms as the "living process in which the establishment of rapport, the impacts of personality, are necessary to the stirring of the imagination and the awakening of enthusiasm involved in the learning process" (p. 25).

The description highlights what Lortie (1969) refers to as "the relative indivisibility of the teacher's task" (p. 203). It is difficult to separate out a professional from a non-professional responsibility, or an instructional task from a non-instructional task. Lortie (1972) describes how teachers in his sample assumed goals for teaching which go beyond those of formal instruction, and which are achieved in all aspects of school life: at recess, during extra-curricular activities, and while teaching.

Attempts have been made to describe teaching more specifically. For instance, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) refers to the activities of diagnosis, prescription, instruction, and evaluation. It states that these are professional responsibilities of teachers and that non-certificated personnel should not be permitted to perform any of the above activities (Balderson & Nixon, 1976).

The absence of any clear operational definition of what is a professional

teaching act and what can be done by a lay assistant causes some difficulty when it comes to legitimating a role for volunteers in the classroom, for they do participate in many of the teaching functions.

It is apparent, however, that if volunteers and other non-professional assistants are to work in the classroom, the teacher must become competent in certain teacher-managerial functions (Brookover & Erickson, 1975, p. 189). This means that teachers must be sufficiently well-grounded in the theory and practice of teaching to organize and supervise the work of assistants. Since one purpose of the volunteer is to free the teacher of the routine and mundane aspects of teaching in order to focus his or her attention on so-called higher levels of the teaching function, then the teacher must be able to identify those functions and must possess the skills to work effectively at those levels.

Finally, although teachers may resent the intrusion of other adults into their classroom, research has shown that children do benefit from the increased attention they receive in the classroom. Since another mark of the professional is the norm of service to a client, the more professional educator should be more inclined to accept the assistance of parental volunteers in the classroom. Thus the hypothesis of this paper is that those teachers who are more professional, in terms of possessing positive attitudes towards high standards of professional knowledge and skill for teachers, and who are committed to an ideology of service towards children will be more accepting of parental volunteers than will less professional teachers.

INSTRUMENTS

The research instrument selected to measure teachers' professionalism was Massé's (Note 4) professional role orientation scale. The scale was selected for purposes of this study because it measured the two dimensions of a professional teacher which seemed logically related to a predisposition for positive attitudes towards the use of parental volunteers in the classroom, namely a teacher's orientation to the knowledge and service dimensions of teaching.

Massé's scale was derived from Hrynyk's Professional Role Orientation Scale (PROS) (Hrynyk, Note 5). Massé's scale consists of 16 items, 10 measuring attitudes to service and 6 measuring attitudes to knowledge. To obtain his scale, he conducted a factor analysis of the Hrynyk data to identify three factors, each of which had almost equal eigenvalues. He found that 16 items with a loading of 0.300 or greater in the first factor were related to the knowledge and service dimension. In the second and third factors, all items with loadings of 0.300 or greater were related to teacher attitudes to core organization and to authority. The common factor variance (h^2) of the individual items on the professionalism scale varied from 0.12 to 0.31.

Since Massé had identified early in his study that knowledge and service

dimensions are the two basic dimensions of professionalism, and since these two dimensions of service and knowledge were taken care of by the same factor, Massé felt justified in using the 16 items as his scale of professionalism. The reliability of the professionalism scale, measured by the Kuder-Richardson (Formula 20), yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.74.

Since a suitable instrument was not available to measure teachers' attitudes towards the use of parental volunteers in the classroom, it was necessary to construct an appropriate questionnaire. Likert's (1932) criteria for the construction of attitude statements were used as a guide. Following a comprehensive survey of the literature, 42 statements were selected from three main sources: (a) Hedges' (1974; Note 2) assumptions on volunteers, specifically the 10 major concerns of teachers with respect to using parental volunteers in the classroom; (b) Thompson's (Note 6) questionnaire on paraprofessionals; and (c) the Administrative Handbook for School Volunteer Programs from Denver, Colorado (Denver Public Schools, Note 7). A preparatory face validation was conducted, after which procedure the list yielded 45 relevant items of teachers' attitudes towards the use of parental volunteers in the classroom. The list was administered to a sample of 112 teachers (grades kindergarten through 8, with one year teaching experience). A return of 101 was obtained. To determine the homogeneity of the test, an item analysis was performed on the data. In the item-total correlation, all items correlated above 0.20. The obtained correlation of 0.20 was tested by means of a *t* test and was found to be significant at the 0.05 level. All items discriminated between the top and bottom third of the sample except for one item which was later dropped. Then using an item-item correlation, one item of each pair with a correlation greater than 0.60 was deleted. As a result only 37 items remained in the questionnaire. To check the construct validity of the attitude scale, the mean scores of the top and bottom thirds of the pilot sample were compared. Total scores based on the 37 items were used. A *t* test for independence was performed and the two groups were found to differ significantly at the 0.05 level.

After an interval of 5 weeks, a re-test was administered to 54 members of the original group of respondents. The resultant test re-test correlation coefficient was 0.85. Split-half correlation was 0.85 and when corrected with the Spearman-Brown Formula for an odd-even estimate of reliability, the correlation was 0.92. Internal consistency was assured and the scale was judged to be acceptable for use in the final data sample.

PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

The sample of 360 teachers was selected from the elementary schools of one suburban school district in Eastern Ontario. The district did not have an extensive parent volunteer program and few teachers had had direct experience with volunteers. The sample of subjects consisted of all full-time elementary teachers of both sexes who had at least one full year of teaching

experience. A total of 327 or 90.83% of the sample responded to all items of the questionnaire. Twenty-nine of the 37 items on the attitude scale were scored by assigning a value of 5 points to A, and decreasing this value until E was assigned 1 point. The remainder of the items were scored in the opposite direction. The attitude score for a teacher was obtained by summing the numerical values of the responses to the attitude scale. The highest possible score was 185 and the lowest possible was 37.

The 16 items on the professional role orientation scale were scored by assigning a value of 5 points to A, and decreasing this value until E was assigned 1 point. The professionalism score for a teacher was obtained by summing the numerical values of the responses to the professional role orientation scale. The highest possible score was 80 and the lowest possible was 16.

The hypothesis, stated in a directional manner because the theory seemed to indicate a directional statement, was tested by a one-way analysis of variance.

RESULTS

For the 327 teachers' attitude scores used in the study, there is a range of 103. The maximum score is 173 and the minimum is 71. The mean and standard deviation are 128.62 and 14.10 respectively. Only 11% of the scores fall below the theoretical mean of 111. The distribution of the scores indicates that teachers' attitudes are positive towards parental volunteers. The majority of the teachers' attitude scores fall on or just above the theoretical mean.

An examination of the mean score for each item indicates that teachers give strong positive responses to three categories of items related to parental volunteers, namely, (a) those enabling teachers to devote more time to teaching, (b) those providing more individualized attention for students, and (c) those tapping human resources of the community to enrich the school program.

Teachers do not seem to be concerned about students relating to another adult in the classroom. Eighty-four per cent rejected the statement "It would be detrimental to the teachers if some students were able to relate better to the parental volunteer." However, two categories of items received a negative response; namely, those pertaining to confidentiality with respect to student progress, and those pertaining to exclusiveness of professional status.

The data also revealed that a fair number of elementary teachers are undecided about three issues which are typified as teacher concerns; namely, that volunteers will attempt to take over the decisions of teaching, will negatively alter the teacher-student ratio, and will cause extra work for the teacher. Other issues that teachers seemed undecided about were: parental volunteers boosting the morale of teachers, putting the personal touch on

book learning, being an inspiration to teachers to carry out further research projects within the classroom, and helping to increase children's motivation for learning.

The results of the distribution of attitude scores suggest that the elementary teachers in this study are somewhat positive, albeit ambivalent, in their attitudes towards the use of parental volunteers in the classrooms.

In order to test the hypothesis of this study, those with high and low professional attitudes were identified. Quartile points were identified. The cut-off point for the upper quarter was the score of 49, and for the lower quarter the score of 38. Since several teachers shared the cut-off scores, the high and low professional groups contained 86 subjects each.

The mean score of the high professional role oriented group (131.0) is significantly higher than that of the lower professional role oriented group (126.7). A one-way analysis of variance test yields an $F = 3.91$ ($p < .05$). Thus teachers with more professional attitudes are more accepting of parent volunteers in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study in regard to the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards the use of parental volunteers in the classroom and professional role orientation indicate that teachers with high professional role orientation scores have significantly higher attitude scores towards the use of parental volunteers in the classroom than teachers with low professional role orientation scores. This finding is consistent with related studies. Robinson (Note 8) reports that there is a significant relationship between teacher professionalism and the kind and extent of professional preparation. Teachers with high professional role orientation tend to be trained in the academic content of their subject area as well as in knowledge and techniques of teaching. They are better prepared for intellectually applying an esoteric body of knowledge and skills towards the achievement of educational goals for their students and are more able to involve parental volunteers in the teaching-learning process. Further, they find it easier to organize for individual learning and to differentiate between tasks that are and are not of professional consequence. These teachers define their teaching roles more intensively and explicitly and tend to map out instruction into a number of separate and relatively distinct areas, each with its own population of differently prepared and differently active staff (MacDonald, 1968). Parental volunteers could be an important component of this differentially active staff.

One of the complementary components of high professional role orientation is the orientation of service to client needs. Elementary teachers who are high in professional role orientation tend to be concerned with diagnosing students' needs, providing remediation, designing and preparing curricula, evaluation instruments, and any materials or aids that would

stimulate and excite learners. The support and assistance of parental volunteers would be sought and cultivated for these purposes.

On the other hand, it seems that elementary teachers who are low in professional role orientation may be less proficient in the techniques of management. They may tend to be concerned with covering the content, maintaining good order and discipline (Lortie, 1975), and preserving teacher leadership in classroom affairs. Teachers with low professionalism scores tend to be concerned about the presence of other adults in the classroom (Hedges, Note 2) and feel that parental volunteers intrude on the teachers' prerogative to control parents' access to the school (Lortie, 1975). Parental volunteers are thus viewed only as distant assistants.

In the present study, it was assumed that professional role orientation is a cognitive determinant of behavior. This cognitive set appears to be related to a teacher's willingness to accept parent volunteers in the classroom. The teacher's acceptance of volunteers appears to be related to the desire to provide additional resources to students and to the teacher's ability to organize learning experiences effectively.

Although generalizations from this study should be made with caution until the results are replicated, it appears that as teachers become more competent in the theoretical knowledge base of their profession and achieve high standards of accomplishment in its practice, they become more willing to use lay assistants in the classroom and become more adept at utilizing this educational resource. Moreover, the more teachers are devoted to the professional norm of rendering service to their charges, again the more willing they are to welcome parent volunteers in the classroom.

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Sr. M. Gerarda, O.S.B., is assistant professor in the Department of Education, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, B2G 1C0.

Robert R. O'Reilly is associate professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5.