

One

Introduction

This book examines the phenomenon of expertise, especially as it relates to the understanding of the teaching craft. Many publications have either decried or celebrated the emergence of the expert as it applies to specific fields such as politics and medicine and as it applies to social affairs generally. Here we treat expertise as the basis for examining the practice of teaching. We look at two central questions. How appropriate is the concept of the teacher as an expert? What advantages or disadvantages does expertise present for teachers and the public they serve?

At the outset, an important distinction needs to be made with regard to the meaning of the word "expertise." In this work, expertise is conceived primarily as a sociological phenomenon rather than simply as a technical or scientific accomplishment. This means that expertise concerns human relations and moral and civic responsibilities as much as it does the accumulation of technical knowledge and skill. This has implications for our consideration of the expert as a central and indispensable figure in Western culture. An expert is more than a person who knows, he has become a focus of power and authority in our interactions with one another.

Ultimately and unavoidably, these understandings have had great bearing on how people have come to understand the field of education. As in other occupations, educators have continually asserted their particular competence in a specialized area of knowledge. They have repeatedly debated the technical skills required by the teacher's craft. Even more crucially, they have been concerned with the moral and social responsibilities of the teacher in the modern age. The question of whether regular classroom teachers should assert themselves as educational experts has rarely been faced directly until very recently.¹

Nonetheless, as we shall see by examining the thought of a variety of educational leaders, the issues of expertise have been consistently raised. This work will argue that despite its many obvious advantages, the idea of the teacher as expert has certain limitations. It can be asserted only at some damage to a more public, inclusive, and moral understanding of a teacher's practice.

Toward an Understanding of Expertise

Before examining the connection between expertise and education, it is first important to come to a fuller understanding of the place of experts in contemporary life. While many have considered expertise in their examination of technology, Daniel Bell has perhaps provided the most exhaustive and direct analysis of expertise in his dispassionate description of the "postindustrial" society.² In searching for a starting point by which to judge the character of modern knowledge, Bell arbitrarily suggests the year 1788.

In that year the third edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* was published. For the first time, the editors of the work found it necessary to rely on specialists for information rather than on one or two men who took the "whole of human knowledge for their province."³ It became more evident from that point, notes Bell, that knowledge had become fragmented and that no one would be able to master all the relevant information that one needed. In a famous dictum, Francis Bacon once asserted that knowledge is power. Bell adds that in the postindustrial age, it has also become a type of property.⁴ As the economy shifts from the production of products to the production of services, more and more people rely on knowledge to make their living. Knowledge becomes part of the "social overhead investment of society."⁵

Most people think about the prominence of expertise in far less abstract and apocalyptic terms. It arises simply and naturally out of common experience, and out of the need to make sense of an evermore complex technical world. We will be concerned with a particular type of expert, the professional educator, yet experts abound in all areas of contemporary life. The reliance on them seems part of the very fabric of modern existence. The mechanic, the electrician, the small appliance repair person, and even the person who might style our hair or train our dog, can be considered experts.

John Kenneth Galbraith points out that in this general sense, experts are not extraordinary.⁶ They are neither necessarily malicious nor beneficent. They are not geniuses, nor are they myopic specialists

who have sacrificed common sense for a narrow view of the world. They are simply very useful people who have acquired a special knowledge that is not widely shared and that has allowed them to provide a service. It is this special knowledge that governs the patterns of dependence that mark our dealings with experts. Typically, we find ourselves deferring to experts because they know and we do not. Just as typically, we may be hard pressed to provide good and substantial reasons upon which to base our trust. As Thomas Haskell has understood the matter, we pride ourselves on our reasonableness and our independence and yet defer to experts, at times with as little grounds as the believer who defers to the Biblical account of creation.⁷

This does not mean, in any sense, that the modern reliance on experts lacks all rational explanation. It's just that in the rush of current events, few have the time or the training to check on expert decisions. Bell asserts that the very tenor of life has changed in the modern age, that lives have become more complex, and that common sense and common knowledge cannot solve all our problems. The economy is marked by an unprecedented division of labor, and technical knowledge has exploded fantastically. Theodore Caplow traces such an explosion through the number of specializations that have grown in the academic disciplines and in the labor force overall.⁸ Bell notes the growth in library acquisitions and the vast increase in the number of publications that serve such specialties.⁹ Others have noted the exponential increase in information, particularly in the sciences. In any case, such growth indicates on the larger scale a greater breadth of human knowledge. On the individual level, it indicates a narrowing of perspective and the need to depend on those who have confined their vision to a particular area of concern.

All of this might be more understandable and less overwhelming if the nature of social relations weren't so affected. For example, it seems impossible not to recognize the ironic obscurity and mystery that has attended the increase in scientific and technical knowledge and the growth in specialization.¹⁰ Jobs have become so specifically defined that it is difficult for people to tell others exactly what they do.¹¹ It is more difficult for workers to understand or take responsibility for a larger product, and it is more difficult for people to see themselves affecting the huge bureaucracies that mark modern life. Finally, and perhaps most symbolically, most people seem to have little understanding of the most basic scientific principles, and they have only the most cursory understanding of the technical innovations and conveniences that they use each day. In one poll, not one person in ten could describe anything about how telephones work, and fewer still under-

stood the operation of televisions.¹² In another recent study, only about one in twenty American adults could answer such basic questions as whether the earth revolves around the sun, whether antibiotics kill viruses, and whether astrology is scientific.¹³

This very incomprehensibility, of course, gives experts their reason for service and provides them with a livelihood. Yet the long understood values of independence and self-reliance are affected as well. Expertise helps make self-sufficiency something of an archaic virtue. Paul Goodman once described the modern dependence on technology by pointing to the helplessness of most people in matters of simple repair. Technology that adds such depth of understanding to our existence, that allows us to see into farthest space and into the microscopic depths of organic life can also carry with it a form of incipient blindness. The dependence on expert services gives access to care that is beyond personal ability. Yet a certain disability is always implied. As C. S. Lewis once put it, "If I pay you to carry me, I am not therefore a strong man."¹⁴

The Ambiguous Limits of Expertise

It may be too easy to criticize technological dependence and too easy to blame the expert. As will become evident throughout this study, these matters are never easy to decide. Many times dependence is justified. Some philosophers have noted that expertise has drastically changed the very nature of intelligence.¹⁵ If intelligence formerly meant the ability of people to call on personal resources, experience, imagination, and ingenuity to deal with the unexpected, it now includes the judgment necessary to know when to consult the appropriate experts. The matter has moral repercussions. The person who attempts to repair a television without adequate knowledge is simply being foolish. The person who attempts to minister to the health of a vulnerable patient without adequate knowledge is being morally irresponsible.¹⁶

Nonetheless many have begun to question whether relations built around expertise are always appropriate or kept within reasonable limits. The dependency on experts hints at a lack of participation on the part of the wider public, as well as a passivity that might be as much a result of public indolence and apathy as the result of the widespread intrusions of professional care. When the matter calls for active public involvement or when the credentials of the expert become a mask for special privilege, then expertise appears to be more of a problem than a solution. An expertise that relies on technical explanation may over-

look the moral and public nature of problems, substituting a technical strategy in the place of political or communal intervention.

This has caused more controversy in some fields than others. Politics has been one area in particular where the reliance on experts has received widespread attention. Frank Fischer, Ralph Lapp, Langdon Winner, and others have explored the idea of a "new class" of technicians and intellectuals.¹⁷ Here the predominance of experts is commonly regarded as a threat to the democratic idea of public accountability. To depend more on an elite class of specialists is to trust less in the ability of the public to make governmental decisions. Others respond with a more hopeful conception. In Zbigniew Brzezinski's description of an expert-guided "technetronic society," the experts take over the management of social and political affairs.¹⁸ The wider populace meanwhile is afforded the opportunity to cultivate more leisurely, cultural pursuits. Brzezinski's description follows the familiar historic pattern of technocratic thinking. The basic concepts underlying the technocratic conceptions of government we owe primarily to the French philosophers, St. Simon and his disciple Auguste Comte. Yet it is in the United States that technocratic conceptions of government have received a wide public hearing.¹⁹ This reflects the ambivalent attitude of Americans toward technology and toward the control and efficiency it promises in all aspects of human affairs.

Medicine has been another area in which the phenomenon of expertise has raised perplexing problems. Medical knowledge is commonly crowned as the ultimate glory of technical expertise. Yet it is easy to forget how recent have been most of the technical innovations that have served to promote medicine as the prototype of all professions. Now that place of preeminence is being questioned.²⁰ Ivan Illich points out that many of the benefits of modern existence—increased life expectancy and elimination of many life-threatening illnesses—have come less as the result of medical intervention than as the result of modern sewage and water treatment techniques and a higher standard of living.²¹ Issues surrounding the monopoly of the medical profession have arisen, particularly as it affects the ability of nontraditional healers to practice and the ability of patients to assume a more active role in their own treatment.

Again, these issues are never easy to decide in general. If there is one case in which patients have sacrificed their autonomy for a dubious cure, there are other cases in which a willful individualism has stood in the way of competent treatment. In *Anatomy of an Illness*, for example, Norman Cousins celebrates medical partnerships as a way to break down the authoritarian relationships that sometimes exist between

expert doctors and passive patients. It was a partnership with a sensitive and caring doctor that allowed Cousins to find a personal cure for his debilitating illness.²² He criticizes the docility of patients who want to be "fixed up like a car." Yet what of those illnesses that need the technique of the doctor and require their disinterested care? A few years later, Susan Sontag described her battle with cancer.²³ She was an unusually enterprising and intellectually gifted patient, yet she found herself contemplating her guilt over being afflicted with the disease. Her will had been sapped by a kind of self-blame growing out of the idea that cancer was a moral and spiritual judgment on her character. She found that taking personal responsibility for her illness only prevented her from seeking adequate help. Her subsequent book laments the public disposition to turn all medical ailments into types of moral judgments, thereby denying the afflicted the will to seek competent technical care.

Even malpractice suits, which indicate the general disposition of the public to question the heightened pretensions of professional competence, seem to carry a dual message. Some observers have understood malpractice suits to be another aspect of an increased public mistrust of the expert that began in the 1960s with student demonstrations in the colleges and with greater consumer activism.²⁴ Yet a closer look at the malpractice crisis, particularly as it affected the medical profession, reveals that most suits occur in precisely those areas in which technical knowledge is the most recent and therefore the most tentative.²⁵ Still the public demands treatment. All malpractice suits, whether merited or not, point out that people continue to rely on experts. They provide prima facie evidence that responsibility and blame are located elsewhere. Far from indicating a revived sense of public self-reliance, the great increase in malpractice claims may indicate a greater expectation being placed on experts and the increased disposition of the public to have its burgeoning need for comfort and satisfaction indulged.

Expertise and Education

These matters do not become easier to resolve within the field of education, although they may be more crucial. Expertise and education are integrally connected. Universalized schooling has been seen as instrumental in providing the common person a more secure sense of his own competence. Schooling indicates, on the one hand, an abiding faith in education as the means to equality of opportunity and as a means to

weaken and even destroy the practice of privilege. On the other hand, schools act as sorting agencies in selecting those destined for different occupations and for those elite professions that have gained great status in modern life. In this latter sense, schools are the breeding grounds of the expert, the places in which specialists gain that rarified knowledge that sets them apart from the common layperson and that provides them with social wealth and power. In this way, schools may serve less to destroy classes of professional elites than to create them.

Schools themselves have increasingly become the locus of expertise. This book will center on the practice and status of the ordinary classroom teacher, but it is important to note that as schools have become more centralized, there has been a corresponding growth in specialization. Much of that growth has occurred in administration and administrative staff. According to the *Digest of Educational Statistics*, in 1920 there was one supervisor for every thirty-one teachers. By 1930, that number had increased to a supervisor for every twenty-two teachers, and by 1974 the number had increased to one for every sixteen teachers.²⁶ In 1985, there was one administrative staff person, including building principals and assistant principals, for every eleven teachers.²⁷ Joel Spring points that this expansion reflects not only the growth in the field of administration as a profession, but also the growth in the number of people to whom the teacher must answer.²⁸ Expertise, in this sense, indicates not only particular competence but a sense of authority, power, and control.

Recent evidence suggests that teachers also are increasingly opting for specialization. The original specialties in teaching occurred as schools became segregated by age and grade and as junior high and high school teachers became responsible for a specific subject matter. But the modern growth in specialty is more narrow and seemingly more connected to the search for professional status.²⁹ The major development has occurred in the area of special education—teaching of the mentally retarded, the physically handicapped, the emotionally disturbed, and the learning disabled. Specialties have also arisen in reading and math as schools have moved to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners through remedial instruction. Early childhood education and bilingual education claim two other groups of specialists, and a smaller number of teachers have been working especially with the gifted. Stephen Kerr notes that in the sixteen-year period preceding 1980, the number of students opting for specialties rather than regular classroom teaching increased 1,000 percent.³⁰ Even as the number of employed teachers grew very little, if at all, between 1980 and 1985, the number of special education teachers grew 17 percent.³¹ Compared

to the number of classroom teachers, the number of teaching specialists is still small, but the drastic increase indicates that a movement is afoot that cannot be explained simply by the entitlement programs that encouraged the growth of specializations over that timeframe.³²

The movement suggests that teachers have begun in earnest to follow the path that has led to the growth of professionalism in other occupations. The process involves the claim by a body of specialists to competence and exclusive jurisdiction over a certain field. The growth in specialties is one way individuals within an occupation can begin to assert their restricted right to practice and begin to claim for themselves the appropriate economic and social rewards befitting an exclusive profession. Kerr points to statistics that indicate that already the average salary for educational specialists exceeds that of the regular classroom teacher. He points also to more disturbing evidence that indicates that generalists are concerned with the encroachment of specialists upon their territory and fear the specialists' power to determine where a child should be placed or what education is appropriate.³³

While these latter issues may be significant, they are not our direct concern. I believe that more significant questions are raised by the effect of specialty on how the practice of teaching is conceived. These concerns arise out of the limits of expertise discussed above. For if specialization wins for teachers the public regard and economic standing they have historically lacked, it may do so at the risk of falling into the same traps of technological dependency and public apathy that have been associated with expert relations in other fields. Teaching also could come to be seen in a more technical light rather than as a field particularly dependent on decisions made about the social ends of education. Especially in the United States, where faith in a publicly controlled education resembles a national church, the questions of whether the professions are self-serving, whether social problems can be solved through technical means, and whether public participation can be nurtured and preserved gain more importance.

Expertise and the Reform Movement

These kinds of questions now appear timely. They have recently received added emphasis from the widespread public criticism that has surrounded education. Despite the public outcry, it is not clear that the general adult community feels a more urgent need to take part in the educational process. The burdens of two-income and one-parent families stand in the way of such an eventuality. In addition, the current

criticism surrounding schools appears likely to reinforce the belief in specialists and schools as agents especially capable of assuming educational responsibility. Professional educators have taken the urgent and apocalyptic tone of many of the reports criticizing schools and used it as a catalyst for reform in the profession. In this way, educational criticism might be seen as symbolically akin to the rationale for all expert intervention. "We are a nation at risk," began the report of the National Commission for Excellence in Education. "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."³⁴ One reasonable and typically modern way to deal with such a massive and overwhelming threat is to rely on more expert assistance.

Increasingly the teacher has become the center of the reform movement. Many reports have pointed out that it will take a more elite teacher corps to solve the problems of the school systems. The two most influential of the reports have been *Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group*, published in April, 1986, and *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, published the following month.³⁵ The reports included different participants. *Tomorrow's Teachers* was the work of a group of deans of education colleges who adopted the name of the Holmes Group in honor of Henry W. Holmes, an early reformer in education. *A Nation Prepared* was sponsored by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and included leaders of the major teachers' unions as well as a variety of professional and business leaders. Neither group included classroom teachers in their working group, though their major recommendations center on the position of the teacher in the academic community.

Basically, the recommendations of the two reports are similar and are justified in similar ways. Both reports wish to increase the prestige and the autonomy of the classroom teacher by making it a more exclusive profession. Each would abolish undergraduate education programs in favor of graduate teacher training, and each would apply more stringent and uniform standards for entering the profession. The Carnegie report urges the development of a professional standards board, while the Holmes Group emphasizes the creation and implementation of a series of tests for prospective teachers. Both groups recommend that teaching become more specialized through the adoption of a more differentiated ranking within the corps of teachers. In the Holmes Group's more elaborate recommendation, the teaching corps would be formed by a hierarchical structure that would include the career professional, the professional teacher, and the instructor. Each position would have its separate responsibilities and be charged by a

particular type of license that would give the higher levels of the occupation more professional responsibility and power.³⁶

These reports do not simply recommend changes without putting into place the mechanisms needed to realize reform. The Holmes Group has increased its original membership to nearly 100 different institutions preparing teachers. Many universities have already increased requirements, and many others, even while facing insitutional roadblocks, are presently putting into place postbaccalaureate teacher preparation programs.³⁷ The Carnegie Corporation has funded the development of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which includes sixty-four members and which hopes that the national board exam will soon be in place.³⁸ This multifaceted test will certify that teachers possess the esoteric, specialized knowledge and skill required of the expert practitioner. The direction and intention of this reform effort is clear. Teachers need to be more professional, they need to be better trained, they need to be equipped with the latest tactics that have been proven to be effective in the schools, and they need to be empowered with the responsibility to employ what they know. In this pursuit after more technical power, more autonomy, and more public respect and social status, teachers will follow the path of other elite professions. As many see it, teachers will become more like doctors.³⁹ They will assert their control of a well-defined knowledge base that will not only demonstrate their technical abilities, but will pluck for them the same rose of economic benefit that doctors plucked out of the nettle of social criticism that engulfed the medical profession at the turn of the century.

Again, this line of thinking raises many questions pertinent to our investigation. The implicit assumption in the reform reports is that teaching is to be founded on a more scientific, more expert basis. The beguiling promise of expertise is that the same standardized and calculated methods that worked to harness natural forces can be used to mold and direct human potential, including the human potential of both teachers and students.⁴⁰ A prime question raised by the very concept of the teacher as expert is whether there exists in the immense research on teaching anything resembling a science or giving evidence to the idea that there is one best way to practice. The question ultimately reflects on whether teachers can or should be considered full professionals in the exclusive and technical sense of the term—people whose vocation is more formed by their competence than their character, more dependent on legal jurisdiction than human relation.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the issue of the moral nature of a teacher's practice is raised. This issue has particularly

affected historical thinking about the role of teachers and thus will also be a particular issue here. Within this question, the appropriateness of conceiving of the teacher as an expert gains a more practical context. It is not altogether clear that the transition of teachers to the role of expert, "specialist in charge of education," can be as smooth as the transition doctors have made to the role of expert, "specialists in charge of health." First, there is the obvious need for parents to be integrally involved in the education of their children. Second, it is not clear that teachers can ever be like doctors in the social responsibilities of their role. Both doctors and teachers have strong historical connections to religion and to the priesthood. This connection served to imbue the two roles with certain moral constraints which indicated that character and moral bearing were as important to being a doctor or a teacher as was technical skill. For many reasons, doctors now have difficulty holding moral concerns at the forefront of their practice. (Indeed, it might be said that for the more technical medical specialties, it is possible to consider quality of service without giving much thought to any moral considerations whatsoever.⁴¹) We expect of the surgeon more a steady hand than a kind heart; it has become questionable whether a good doctor necessarily has to be a good person. The matter appears more problematic when considering the character of the teacher. It is hoped that the theoretical and historical investigation of this issue might yield additional insight.

Nature of the Study

We can now elaborate more clearly on the particulars of this examination of expertise and teaching. Immediately we should note the huge nature of this issue. We could easily pursue a much fuller exposition by examining more carefully the place of the expert in the modern world, the technical intrusion of expertise in such matters as testing and programmed learning, and the historical record of the schools in adopting technocratic solutions to political and moral problems. Raymond Callahan, Randall Collins, and David Tyack have already done some of that work.⁴²

This work takes a more personal and more eclectic approach. As briefly noted above, we are generally seeking insights about the effects of educational expertise through an analysis of the thoughts and writings of some of our most prominent educational thinkers. This search is not a simple matter, because few educational theorists have viewed expertise as a direct concern. Nonetheless, the issues of expertise—the

political and public nature of schooling, the monopoly of education, and the professionalization of teaching—are where we seek to be enlightened.

Chapter Two begins the examination with an analysis of expertise as conceived in the progressive era. David Tyack has noted that the progressive education movement contained different strands, and Chapter Two will attempt to review two of the strands in the thought of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley and George S. Counts. Cubberley led a group of educators whom Tyack refers to as administrative progressives. Counts was a leading social reconstructionist. Both thinkers had different ideas about the practice of teaching, particularly with regard to the place of technical knowledge and social obligation in informing a teacher's duties. This raised questions about who should have power and control over the schools. In the conflict between the views of Cubberley and Counts and in a concluding examination of the ideas of Jane Addams we face for the first time the limitations of reserving educational decisions to the province of a special group.

Chapter Three examines expertise as an aspect of professionalism. Two of the most prominent sociological studies of teaching, written by Willard Waller and Daniel Lortie, will be analyzed in this chapter. Lortie, worried about the development of a technical subculture, advocates a more exclusive profession. Waller, worried about the restriction of a teacher's role in a highly structured institution, advocates a more open concept of a teacher's practice. In many ways it is possible to see Lortie as a proponent of the teacher-expert and Waller as an opponent. Questions are raised about each of their views.

Chapter Four examines the origins and thinking of many of the leaders of the "romantic" movement in education. Focusing on the thought of several of the modern romantics, particularly Ivan Illich, the idea of the teacher as expert is directly confronted, particularly because it has seemed so diametrically opposed to the romantic view of the teaching practice. Nonetheless, as the examination of Illich hopes to make clear, the romantic idea of individualism is in many ways consistent with the idea of individualism that underlies expertise. This suggests that theoretically the positions of those approving or disapproving of a more scientific and exclusive teaching profession may not be that far apart.

The final two chapters bring the discussion into the modern era with a brief review of some of the current debate about the liberal and the technical in the practice of teachers. The recent work of Philip Jackson and Alan Tom will be reviewed, and the thought of Maxine Greene and Henry Giroux will be analyzed. These thinkers have begun

to question the concept of expertise most directly. They have seen in expertise an abandonment of moral and social responsibility for the patriarchal language of technical competence. Greene and Giroux especially have seen the professionalization project as another aspect of hegemony, the project of the powerful to determine cultural legitimacy and the language of dominance. Despite the harshness of this criticism, it is clear that such ideas have a history and follow in many ways the thought of theorists previously examined. Yet they attempt to move beyond the past, to understand the practice of teaching in a more cooperative, interactive, and interdependent manner. Their ideas suggest ways to overcome the excessively technical and dominant concept of the teacher as expert.