

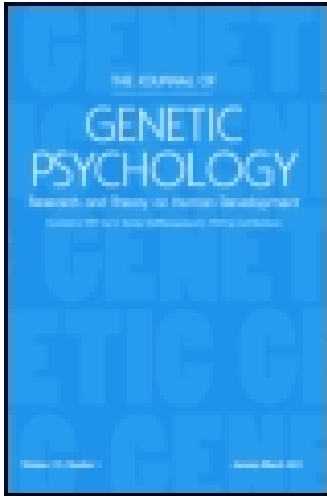
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On: 31 December 2014, At: 04:43

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## The Pedagogical Seminary

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vzps20>

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Published online: 30 Aug 2012.

To cite this article: Charles E. McCorkle (1919) The High Professional Standards of Present Day City Superintendents, The Pedagogical Seminary, 26:3, 298-302, DOI: [10.1080/08919402.1919.10532642](https://doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1919.10532642)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1919.10532642>

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## THE HIGH PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF PRESENT DAY CITY SUPERINTENDENTS

By CHARLES E. McCORKLE, Superintendent of City Schools, Ironton, Ohio

Most educators of the present day agree that education is a science. Not many years ago when Dr. Strayer made the statement and attempted to prove it, great discussions arose everywhere not only in education but in other fields. The idea of claiming education to be scientific was preposterous, especially with those people who were engaged in the so-called scientific fields.

The medical profession is an old and recognized profession. Many years ago medical men formed themselves into a highly professional group with a high professional code of morals which each man in the profession had to follow or be classed as an outlaw professionally. Very few doctors who practice medicine violate the now rather highly standardized code of ethics. This professionalism has become disseminated so widely that it is very poor business for any man to treat it lightly. Yet the practice of medicine is little if any older than the practice of teaching.

If any individual twenty-five years ago had said that as high a standard of professionalism existed in education as in medicine, he would have been called the biggest optimistic liar in existence. No doubt the individual would have been a perverter of truth, a dreamer of dreams, or else a prophet of the good days to come. Not many years ago, a goodly number of those who were engaged in the teaching profession could have been called outlaws, bandits, and other similar terms. Almost every person was after the job of any other person who had a better job than he had. Politics, friends, "pull," and even diabolical contrivances were concocted by some to eliminate others from the jobs which they cherished. This sort of procedure was common. But the spirit of professionalism has grown to such an extent within the last few years that unprofessionalism is as uncommon as it formerly was common.

During the last five years, the writer has noted greater advances of professionalism in the teaching profession than in any other profession. From the data that have been collected,

it is safe to say that no profession now has a higher, truer, more sincere, and self-sacrificing code of professional ethics than the teaching profession. However, the data to be discussed in this particular study have to do only with City Superintendents. Furthermore, at the time the data were collected, the writer firmly maintained that no such thing as a professional code of ethics existed among superintendents. It was held that if superintendents did have any professionalism, it only had to do with those things that do not pertain to holding jobs. If information was desired that would reflect upon their work, or give somebody else an opportunity to get the job which they held, it was thought that professionalism would vanish. Facts prove the opposite.

In 1914, while the writer was at Clark University, information was requested from 257 city superintendents regarding what America's attitude should be towards the World War and what place the War should have in the Public Schools of America. "Answers were received from one hundred and nine city superintendents, from the United States Commissioner of Education, and from twelve state commissioners of education. In these answers, thirty-nine different states are represented. The total population of all the cities from which replies were received is 18,138,965, in which the total number of teachers employed is approximately 60,000." (Published in *Pedagogical Seminary*, March, 1915, Vol. XXII, pp. 1-26.)

The writer, in commenting upon the 148 superintendents who did not reply and who were far from being as busy as they are now, stated: "There is no question that they feel they cannot run the risk of losing votes or becoming unpopular by speaking for or against this as their pedagogic training and ability demands. In a matter of such importance and far-reaching influence as this, surely the 'political game' must play an important rôle since it prevents a decided expression by a man in such an important position." (*Pedagogical Seminary*, same as above.)

In regard to the superintendents' replies to the above data, there was not a single unprofessional reply. However, from the above criticizing quotation, it is easy to see that the conception of the professionalism of City Superintendents was quite vague in the mind of the writer. And there is little doubt that he had a sufficient amount of experience to warrant him in making the statement. But his judgment, like the judgment of too many educators and supposed experts, was based upon personal experience and a limited observation, much of which might have been the exception rather than the rule.

During the spring of 1915, the writer became interested in the great possibilities of Current Events Teaching in the public schools. (See *Pedagogical Seminary*, 1915: "How to Teach Current Events.") In this extensive study, every superintendent replied in a purely professional manner.

While at Harvard University in 1916, the writer made an extensive and comprehensive "Study of Superintendents' Reports." (This study is almost completed and will soon be in press). The object of this study is to show "What a City Superintendent's Report should Contain and How to Write It." More than ninety per cent of the Superintendents replied, and not a single unprofessional reply was received.

In 1917, while superintendent of City Schools at Ironton, Ohio, the writer made another small study which had to do with the salary schedules of forty-five cities in Ohio. Over ninety-five per cent of the superintendents responded. Because the study had to do with salary schedules, some pessimists might intimate that, naturally, questions about salaries would bring replies. Some folks might add that courteous as well as professional replies would be received when the subject of salaries is discussed. Whatever the cause was, every reply was strictly professional.

Some few weeks ago while looking through the data of the above investigations, the writer decided that a true professional spirit really prompted the superintendents to make painstaking replies. But it was also decided that these data would prove beneficial to the giver when collected, and that selfish motives could have prompted the replies. Therefore some other form of a test should be given to a representative number of superintendents in order that sufficient data might be had for determining the professional standards. Everybody will agree that courtesy, ethics, and almost everything else will be tested when the livelihood, job, and money phase of life are being questioned. Will professionalism in Education stand this test?

The following letter was sent to a goodly number of city superintendents in large and small cities just prior to their reelection,—

"Dear Supt. (————):—

"I am informed that you are going to retire from the Superintendency of your City Schools at the close of the present school-year. Through courtesy to you, and because of the high standards of our profession, I am writing to you for information. If the above information is correct, will you please send me the names of the members of your Board of Education by mail?

"Thanking you in advance for any information that you may give to me, and wishing you the best, I am

"Fraternally yours,"

The above letter was impertinent, but the replies that were received were, indeed, surprising. There was no indication in any of the replies that a study was being made, but every superintendent responded in the spirit of giving the proper information. Answers were received from more than ninety per cent of the superintendents, and practically all of the replies were made by return mail. Representative replies are as follows,—

"I am not expecting to resign my position as Superintendent of the \_\_\_\_\_ schools for the coming year. Of course, if the Board of Education should so decide, I may have to resign, but as matters are now I can see no reason for resigning.

"Thanking you for your professional courtesies in this matter, I am"

.....

"In reply to your letter received a few days ago, let me say that I was unanimously reelected \_\_\_\_\_ for a term of four years at an increase of \$1000 per annum.

"With kind regards, I am"

.....

"In reply to your letter \_\_\_\_\_, I desire to say that I have had no intention of leaving the \_\_\_\_\_ at the present time. The person who gave you the information must have had the wires crossed. With kind regards,"

.....

Between five and ten per cent of the superintendents had been displaced by a designing high school principal or an assistant superintendent. In some cases the change might have been made in a professional manner. However, not one single complaint was made by these big-hearted professional men. Representative letters of this nature are as follows,—

"\_\_\_\_\_ our high school principal was elected last night at a salary of \$4000. He had the inside from the first."

.....

"\_\_\_\_\_ Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ was elected and I am hunting a position. Good luck to you."

.....

It is hoped that these newly made superintendents will soon catch the high professional code of honor that exists among our city superintendents. And the writer hopes just a little further, and that is, through the concerted action of city superintendents, not only unprofessional superintendents but unprofessional subordinates, i. e. assistant superintendents, principals, supervisors, and teachers be eliminated from the teaching profession just as rapidly as possible. It is perfectly all right for persons in subordinate positions to rise in the profession, but let that rising be in an honorable manner.

From the representative letters quoted above, it is evident that there were three groups of superintendents, those who expected to remain in their present position, those who had just been reelected, and those retiring from their present position through resignation or displacement. The replies that were received from each group were courteous and highly professional. Professionalism among city superintendents has a very bright future and a very high standard. This is indicated by the following letter,—

“Replying to your letter of the \_\_\_\_\_ would say that you were wrongly informed relative to my retirement \_\_\_\_\_. On Tuesday last I was unanimously reelected with a substantial increase in salary.

“I wish to thank you for the courteous manner in which you approach the situation. I am working on a committee to draft a code of professional ethics for our state, and it is a satisfaction to receive the wholesome impression that your letter of inquiry gave me. This is particularly true in the light of not a few illustrations of an opposite type that are falling into the hands of our committee.

“Wishing you continued success wherever your lot may be,—”

From all of the data that have been received during a period of over five years as designated in the previously mentioned studies, the facts show conclusively that there is a professionalism among City Superintendents that cannot be surpassed by any other profession. In fact, the writer challenges any profession to demonstrate by the claims of extensive data and facts a higher, a more sincere and self-sacrificing code of professional ethics than the present day City Superintendent maintains.