

Having worked in education for almost my entire adult life, I am very familiar with the joys, challenges, and, yes, laments, of my field. I listen as educators shake their heads at certain realities which we or they view as interfering with their ability to do their jobs as professionals. Many of these are perennial; Socrates, the private tutors of the children of medieval nobility, the prairie schoolmarm, and today's practitioner of the most modern educational methods all voice similar complaints. They are functionally eternal.

One of these is the feeling by some educators that they are not treated like other professionals, like people who have studied and now practice in a field of specialized knowledge and skills. It is tough for 'civilians' to fairly and adequately evaluate a lawyer or engineer or physician because they simply don't have the background or the information or the skills to really know whether or not what that professional is doing is appropriate or not. Such professionals live in a different world.

Educators do not and, as a result, are often not given such latitude. And if this lament is a reasonable complaint among teachers and principals, I would argue that the best explanation for it is that almost everyone had a 'schooling experience' and so feels sufficiently knowledgeable to provide an informed opinion on educational practitioners in their and their children's lives. They *have* lived in that world.

Does this mean the complaint is a valid one? In truth, sometimes yes and sometimes no. Such a lament can accurately describe a situation in which a person is woefully unqualified to judge an educator but it can also mis-prescribe a situation in which a person uses their own background to provide them with a real insight into a specific educator or educational practice. We are all, in fact, prisoners but also beneficiaries of our own experiences.

Recently, *The Daily Republic* reported on the demise of the Mitchell High School student newspaper, *The Kernel*. Eighteen months before, MHS decided to discontinue offering the newspaper as a course and an activity simply because insufficient numbers of students were expressing an interest in participating in it. *The Daily Republic*, out of professional interest and philanthropic regard, took it upon itself to provide *The Kernel* as a student activity sans class during the 2016-17 school year and the student paper remained viable, issuing a number of editions last year.

But, alas, it was running on fumes, those students who had participated in the past but not managing to bring into the fold new students with an interest in blacking their fingertips. This fall, a paper with a grand tradition going back at least 109 years (though not always with the same name on the masthead; it was *The Crocus* for decades) could muster no more editions.

I come at this reality from at least two backgrounds: the school student and the school administrator. I attended elementary and secondary school in Sioux Falls, specifically Cleveland, Whittier, and Lincoln. At Whittier Junior High school, I worked on the school newspaper for two years, 8th and 9th grade. At Lincoln, I worked on *The Statesman* for over two years. I served as editor for both papers. Now, if at this point you are thinking I am bragging and that being the editor for your student newspaper is hardly much to cluck about in one's middle age, I

understand your point of view. But I also want you to know that I am still quite proud of my involvement on those student publications. In fact, if I had to identify the most important non-personal activity I involved myself in at Lincoln High School, it would be, hands down, *The Statesman*. Our advisor, Mrs. Joanne Johnson, was an extraordinary educator who taught me how to write (to the extent I can), how to pay attention to detail, how to work with others in a cooperative enterprise, and even how to respond to, sometimes withering, criticism.

In my experience, Lincoln High School gave me a good education. Mrs. Johnson and *The Statesman* gave me a great one.

Thus, I was disheartened to preside, at some level, over the funerary rites of *The Kernel*. That is one of my backgrounds speaking. My other background—as a school administrator—sees it a bit differently, however. Schools provide extracurricular activities to students as extra learning experiences and ones which highlight practice and application over study and knowledge. But unlike the courses that schools simply make mandatory—English, mathematics, etc.—the extracurricular only exists to the extent students want it to exist. If nobody goes out for rugby, we don't have a rugby team. For some reason—tied I strongly suspect to the people's evolving sense of journalism and media—students no longer see a student newspaper as something that will serve them well into the future. Obviously, the need for communication has not ended but rather, in their view, the vehicle for that communication has changed or is changing. Students have voted with their feet and the message of those feet is 'stop the presses.'

Like the rest of us, students are not infallible, of course. Thus, perhaps sometime in the near future, *The Kernel* will re-emerge as a vital and going concern among a new generation of students and the newspaper's archives now lovingly stored in the MHS library will be reinvigorated to inform a new staff of hard-hitting print journalists.

My student background hopes so. My educator wonders.