Reprinted from JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, *Summer 1967, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 211-224*

Journalism Quarterly

Devoted to Research in Journalism and Mass Communication

By George Gerbner

Newsmen and Schoolmen: the State and Problems of Education Reporting

The "school beat" still remains a thinly covered assignment of the U.S. daily newspaper, this survey discloses. In it, education reporters discuss problems of handling schoolmen contacts, issues in the news.

► Specialized coverage of education news began with the advent of *Time* magazine in 1923. *Newsweek*'s education department followed 15 years later. The New York *Times* hired Benjamin Fine as school reporter in 1937, and elevated him to education editor in 1941. Newsmen recall when reporters regarded education a "woman's field." But through the postwar rise in concern, attention, and controversy, education emerged as more than only a local service feature. School news was found to affect not only the quality of learning but also community power and the allocation of resources. It took on some of the visibility and significance of business and politics.

The Education Writers Association, composed of working newsmen, was organized in 1947. Old-timers consider the late forties and the early fifties as the time of "professionalization" of education reporting, at least on larger papers. Sputnik I was launched in October 1957. The same month the New York *Herald Tribune*, giving special Sunday coverage to education since 1943, boosted its coverage to six days a week, and made its education editor responsible for school news coming in from all sources. A few other metropolitan dailies followed suit. The Associated Press appointed a full-time education writer the following January.

If Sputnik put the American education reporter into orbit, it was *Time* which first tracked his path. On February 29, 1960, *Time* discovered the "Boom on the School Beat." With characteristic deftness and gloss, *Time* sketched the rise of the school reporter:

► Dr. Gerbner is dean of the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania. This study was part of a larger investigation conducted for the U.S. Office of Education.

> It used to be that the journalist assigned to education ranked somewhere below the real estate editor and above the chief copy boy . . .
>
> A pent-up postwar demand for new schools and new teachers generated a new public interest in public education — and forced newspapers to re-examine a neglected corner of the local scene. Inevitably, the hack writers began to disappear, and today's education reporter bears little resemblance to his predecessor . . . At an educators' conference several years ago, when one speaker tried to fob off some phony statistics on teacher-student ratios, the assembled reporters not only challenged them but were able to show where he was wrong.

There were dissenting voices, too. "If you depend on your local newspaper for information on education," wrote veteran school publicists Gloria Dapper and Barbara Carter in the March 17, 1962, *Saturday Review*, "chances are you have virtually no information or perspective on the major national issues in education and only the most fragamentary view of even the local school's picture."

University of New Mexico President Tom L. Popejoy told the 1963 meeting of state university presidents in Chicago that "I doubt if many of you have realized that the image of your university has for the most part been formed by the news media in your community and in your state on the basis of controversies, contests, contentions, and conflicts . . ."

Not too long before he lost his post upon the heels of front-page charges of graft and corruption, New York City Superintendent of Schools John J. Thoebald told the Eighth Annual Seminar of the National School Public Relations Association: "I must say to you that this was very cleverly planned. This was a period in which we couldn't get a line in the newspapers. Anything we said or reported was on a back page or smothered."

► Was there really a "boom on the school beat?" Was it the boom of big guns shooting at cross purposes, if not, indeed, at each other? How do newsmen and schoolmen view the state and problems of education reporting, and their relationships to each other?

Empirical studies such as those by Roy E. Carter[1], Richard F. Carter[2] and Carter and Sutthoff[3], illuminated some problem areas of communication between schoolmen, newsmen and the community. Richard Carter's 1960 studies found that school financial elections were more likely to be successful when voter turnout was low; but the role of the press was not analyzed. The most directly relevant study, *The Schools and the Press* by Neal Gross[4], conducted "before Sputnik," and limited to New England, found that nearly two-fifths of the press and almost half of the superintendents felt that there was a basic conflict between the public service reporting functions of the press and the fact that it is a business. The most recent survey of "The 'Education Beat' on 52 Major Newspapers" by Charles T. Duncan[5] found evidence of a postwar "boom" at least on major dailies, but did not touch upon questions of critical relevance to the views and issues which animate newsmen and schoolmen.

We began an informal inquiry into these questions by sending letters asking for the views of "education editors" of 119 daily newspapers with circulations over 100,000 in 1961, and requesting follow-up interviews. Instead of presenting a formal questionnaire, the letters invited newsmen to express in their own words what they thought and

[1] Roy E. Carter Jr., "The Press and Public School Superintendents in California," JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 31:175-85 (Spring 1954).

[2] Richard F. Carter, *Voters and Their Schools* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1960).

[3] Richard F. Carter and John Sutthoff, *Communities and Their Schools* (Stanford, Calif.: Institute for Communication Research, Stanford University, 1960).

[4] Neal Gross, *The Schools and the Press* (Cambridge, Mass.: New England School Development Council, 1956).

[5] JOURNALISM QUARTERLY, 43:336-38 (Summer 1966).

TABLE 1

Trends in Some Editorial Assignments on U.S. Daily Newspapers[A]

Year	Number of persons holding departmental editorial assignment				Total no. of columns devoted to listing all departmental editors
	Education	Science	Stamps	Society	
1950	213	120	143	–	173
1952	199	113	141	–	168
1954	–	218	–	–	194
1955	373	186	181	–	276
1957	356	199	189	962	284
1959	408	219	216	1,080	303
1961	356	185	168	881	284
1963	431	233	206	988	354

[A]Compiled from *The Working Press of the Nation,* published biennially by the National Research Bureau, Inc., Chicago. Figures before and after 1955 are not necessarily comparable because the directory changed management.

how they felt about their jobs and relations with schoolmen.

Despite this rather ambitious request, 32 of the replies contained substantial and often detailed comment. They came from every part of the country except the deep South. Personal follow-up interviews were arranged with 15 informants. Additional comments were received from six education reporters on Gannett newspapers[6].

Similar letters were written to the directors of public information in all school systems and some colleges and universities in areas served by the newspapers queried. Many replies were received and follow-up interviews were held also with educational public relations personnel. Their observations will be noted or summarized when relevant to the views of newsmen. The findings of other studies will also be cited when necessary to add a more systematic and quantitative dimension to what was essentially designed as an informal exploration in depth of education reporters' views about their own field and work.[7]

State of the Field

The prevalent view is that the rise in the visibility and significance of education reporting paralleled an increase in the number of reporters and editors specializing in education news. Figures compiled by *The Working Press of the Nation,* a directory published by the National Research Bureau of Chicago, indicate that the number of such assignments has indeed risen. But there is no evidence that the *proportion* of education assignments has increased in relation to all editorial assignments reported.

Available figures on daily newspaper editorial employees holding education, science, stamp-collecting and society assignments, and the amount of space devoted to listing all editorial assignments in the directory, can be seen on Table 1. From these figures it appears that while the number of education assignments reported more than doubled from 1950 through 1963, so has the space devoted to listing all editorial assignments.

Reader interest in stamp-collecting

[6] Thanks go to Joseph N. Freudenberger, Director of Special Publications of the Gannett Newspapers, for his assistance in circulating our query, and for making available two special issues of the *Gannetteer* devoted to "Campus and Newspaper" and to a symposium by education reporters. Thanks for assistance and cooperation go also to the busy editors and reporters for their time and trouble answering our queries, both in writing and in person. Our agreement with informant precludes mention of names and newspapers.

[7] The study was part of a larger investigation reported in the author's "Mass Communications and Popular Conceptions of Education," Cooperative Research Project 876 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1964).

has attracted about half the number of special editorial assignments given to education. Science reporters outnumbered stamp editors slightly after 1955. Society editors were more than twice as numerous as school reporters or as science and stamp editors combined. The general pattern of assignments remained fairly stable.

Although *The Working Press of the Nation* directory never listed more than one in every four dailies assigning a part or full-time reporter to education news, such assignments are much more frequent, and have been increasing, on the larger newspapers. One in every three larger New England dailies, and one in every seven small dailies, assigned a reporter to education news in the mid-fifties[8]. Nearly half of 52 major metropolitan dailies across the country reported an education or school beat assignment in 1955. Ten years later, nine out of ten of the same group of papers reported such assignment.[9]

Although more than half of the metropolitan dailies answering Duncan's query claimed to have created a full-time editorial post devoted to education, nearly half of these provided no staff or other assistance for their education "editors."[10] In fact, most newsmen who cover education for the American daily press are general assignment reporters or work a "school beat" under the direction of the City Desk.

"Were I really an education 'editor,'" a big city staffer wrote us, "I probably would have answered your letter before this, for I would have had a secretary to do the typing. As it is, with no assistance and a big beat to cover, I neglect my correspondence."

"You flatter me with the education editor title," reflected a Texas newsman. "I have been called many things in connection with school reporting, but never 'editor.' There is no such animal on our paper. Coverage of the public school system here is on a beat assignment basis. I have the beat and I like it."

"Any title sounds pretty silly in my case," said a young woman reporter for a large midwestern daily. "I spend part of my working day writing obituaries, taking office notes, rewriting police items. Our city staff is short-handed and younger members and women are assigned to what we refer to as 'the junk.'"

Much of the time actually spent on school and education news is also devoted to "the junk" — education style. Any reporter whose name appears on one of several lists of specialized newspaper personnel receives hundreds of releases, publications, personal and organizational publicity items from national, state and local sources. "Too much of what I do is to open envelopes and process news releases," said one school reporter, echoing the sentiments of many. "If I had an assistant," commented another, "or at least a filing cabinet to keep all this mail until I have a chance to open it, I could cover some news myself. But the newspapers don't seem to be organized that way."

"Status" in the news room appears to increase with the length of time the position has been in existence and the tenure of the reporter holding the position. There were, however, relatively few old-timers. The average tenure on the job was about 2½ years, but appeared to be increasing. Half of all education reporters responding in 1961 had been in their position one year or less. Only one-fourth of those responding five years later had held their jobs one year or less.[11]

Although the steps of the status hierarchy in educational reporting are ill-defined, there is little doubt that at the top sits the prestigious education editor of long tenure at an authoritative metropolitan daily paper such as the New York *Times*. He has a small staff, a private cubicle, regularly assigned space in the paper, and a role in policy-

[8] Gross, *op. cit.*
[9] Duncan, *op. cit.*
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*

making. He confers with the City Desk in making daily assignments to cover local school news. He considers his own basic task to be the interpretation of major ideas, trends and developments in education.

Hard News, Local Angle

The "hard news, local angle" formula used on most American papers tends to emphasize community and reader interest and service. This makes the reporting of national developments highly sporadic and selective, unless some local "tie-in" can be found:

> We pursue what I would call a 'hard local news' policy on educational subjects. This means first of all that we cover . . . all committee meetings and full board meetings . . . We try to maintain some surveillance of the school boards of suburban communities and common school districts in the metropolitan area, and give them highlight coverage. We give cordial treatment to story suggestions volunteered by the schools, colleges and universities — expansion programs, new techniques, features on faculty and students, etc. — but we do not cultivate the field regularly to develop such material. In the realm of 'pure' education — papers, studies, new books, 'foreign' convention discussions and actions on the philosophy, technology and other generalities of education — we cover only to the extent that such developments get themselves into the wire service file (unless there is some local application).
>
> While I keep track of national developments in education, I rarely report on them unless there is a local angle. The exception to this rule is found in our special 'News and Views' section of the Sunday paper. Here I do pontificate on occasion.
>
> * * *
>
> This local-application kick may seem terribly parochial at first blush, but after looking at it a second or third time — or living with it as I have — it begins to make sense in the context of a metropolitan newspaper with a snug newshole and all the world to tell about.

"A snug newshole and all the world to tell about" puts the emphasis on selection. Quick choices have to be made from a multitude of competing and often conflicting voices, interests, appeals and pressures. Kay Maxwell of the Hartford (Conn.) *Times* wrote in the 1963 *Gannetteer* symposium[12] that the education reporter

> talks to an audience ranging from engineering executive fathers studying for advanced degrees to poverty-stricken Negro mothers deeply concerned about their children's opportunities . . .
>
> Private colleges, the National Education Association, manufacturers of audio-visual equipment, the Council for Basic Education and the Carnegie Corporation deluge the reporter's desk with mail.
>
> Somebody says, 'We ought to have a story on the new community college out in Brightville.' And somebody else says, 'How about investigating correspondence school?'
>
> Walking down the street the reporter meets an acquaintance, who calls his attention to the large number of Africans studying at Hillsdale Secretarial School. At an educational television meeting, he is urged to take a look at the low state of training for sewing machine operators.
>
> The teachers union wants him to expose the dastardly doings of the teachers association and the association asks him to tell the public about the 'nonprofessional' attitude of the union. The high school complains because a report on the last assembly at his school didn't get into the paper.
>
> Always, the education reporter faces the problem, 'How in this melange of differing needs, demands and desires, do you decide upon priorities?'

Miss Maxwell did not answer the question she raised. But studies of content and of newspaper work suggest, and our interviews confirm, that within the broad outlines of journalistic convention and management policy the reporter responds to the social structure and pressures of the newsroom.[13] The

[12] *Gannetteer*, November 1963, Education reporters' symposium.

[13] cf. Walter Gieber, "Two Communicators of the News: A Study of the Roles of Sources and Reporters," *Social Forces*, 39:76-83 (October 1960).

newsroom, with its own code of conduct, cultivates the proverbial "nose for news," an intangible but real order of priorities. Knowledge of that order of priorities, and skill in applying the patterns of selection inherent in them, are among the chief qualifications of the reporter. He is warned not to get "too close to news sources" lest he adopt a system of priorities more in conformity with that of the news source than of the newspaper.

Most newsmen feel that teaching experience or professional work in education is not a necessary qualification. They would agree with the reporter who wrote us that "The non-teacher is likely to appproach the subject much more objectively."

The main dissenters are those who have themselves had some teaching or other professional experience in education. Such reporters numbered less than one-third of those responding to our inquiry, and a probably much smaller proportion of all who work as education "specialists" on daily newspapers. Even some of these feel that "too much" experience in education would, as one of them put it, "give a man the classroom teachers' point of view so completely that he could never recover the average citizen's outlook."

Implicit in these views is the assumption that the reporter's job is to emulate and cultivate the outlook of the average "citizen and taxpayer" whose "right to know" he guards. His main qualifications include the ability to do that simply, compellingly, and within the pattern of news value priorities enforced by the ethos of the newsroom.

Newsmen and Schoolmen

Generations of educational administrators have been trained to fit into the scheme of community power of which the press is both an organ and an interpreter. But the fit has never been snug. School public relations has developed in response to the need of the schools to adjust to the requirements of the press, to ease the friction and tension built into the machinery of organized contacts between the two institutions, and to develop alternative ways of reaching the public.

School public relations became a visible part of the educational scene in the twenties. The School Public Relations Association was formed in 1935. The movement came to full flowering after World War II.

The *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* listed four studies under "Public Relations" in 1941. By 1950, six pages were devoted to such studies. In the same year, the National Education Association granted departmental status to the School Public Relations Association.

Most school and college public relations services and information programs were first set up for tax elections, bond votes and building fund campaigns, or as the consequence of their failures. As school districts consolidated and educational institutions grew larger, their need for public information (and their ability to provide it as a specialized service) became more continuous and diversified. Educational public relations became a recognized specialty in the field of institutional publicity and fund-raising.

Most education reporters find school public information services indispensable to their work—at least the routine part. Although all complain about the volume of press releases and "junk" pouring into editorial offices, they find the stream of information from schools and colleges helpful to their coverage. "Professional public relations people in education have a sense of news value," commented a Seattle reporter. "Professional educators," he added, "often don't recognize news when they see it."

One area of potential tension is that of school board coverage. Most board members feel that they have the right to arrive at policies and present them

to the community as they see fit. This usually means a minimum of public controversy or open disagreement among board members. They feel that little serious business can be done in public meetings; that controversies split community support and endanger the all-important tax election, bond issue or legislative appropriation. Except when a dissident minority wants to mobilize public support for its cause, board members prefer to settle their disagreement in private and present a united front at open meetings.

Newsmen, on the other hand, jealously guard the public's "right to know" —what the press wants it to know. They are usually willing to cooperate, but on their own terms. These terms include full knowledge of board deliberations, and the right to decide what is "responsible reporting" in the "public interest."

"If the school administration is not open, the newspaper won't have the background knowledge to be responsible even if it wants to," wrote a pioneer education editor and crusader for opening school board deliberations to full press scrutiny. "Besides," she added, "the schools have no alternative except to cooperate with the press. Putting it baldly, the press can hurt the schools but the schools have no effective club over the press."

None except "secrecy"—which often backfires in a barrage of adverse publicity. An education reporter for a big city daily described it this way:

> Although my own relations with the publicists employed by the Board of Education are good, the board itself operates in ways that destroy public confidence. Its monthly public meetings are a joke. Everything is neatly arranged in advance. The board meets privately to decide what it will do in public. It then goes through its paces like seals in a circus act. Its public meetings are a complete waste of time. There is never an exchange of ideas about important educational issues, local, or state or national. The board's budget-making procedures are equally undemocratic. It prepares a budget, decides exactly how each dollar will be spent and then, at the last minute, holds a public hearing at which all citizens are invited to speak. The board sits back patiently listening to the taxpayers. Then, after everyone has had his 'say,' the board goes ahead and adopts its budget as originally prepared, totally ignoring the recommendations of the citizenry. The board has never made public a long-range building program. The first the public hears of a proposed new building is when the deal is all set and virtually unstoppable.

Rules and customs of board meeting press coverage, and board-press relationships in general, vary widely across the country. The following responses indicate the range of views on the subject:

> Our school district follows the policy of advance notification and background information for any major story. I am frequently invited to attend committee meetings of the school board to hear reports of staff committees and report on them as I see fit.
>
> * * *
>
> Concerning relations generally between the press and the board, I believe there is much suspicion and distrust of newspapers on the part of educators. This is not all misplaced by any means. There has been irresponsible and reckless reporting of school news. A couple of years ago there were rumors of a $300,000 shortage in the school board budget. The business manager was hospitalized and unable to explain. A newspaper got one of the school board members to say that the reported shortage would be investigated. This gave the paper an eight-column headline about suspected skulduggery. It could have checked out the report and found it baseless but that would have taken patience—and there would have been no story. The episode hurt press-school relations.
>
> * * *
>
> Thanks to former education reporters, all school board meetings are open to the press except those in which prospective new superintendents are discussed or interviewed. We cover all board meetings, of course; we also sit in when the board has executive ses-

sions on such things as whether to give a high school principal a year's leave of absence to head an army school in Europe. Sometimes board members become irked at our reporting some of these proceedings; but tension has been minor, and relations on the whole are excellent and on a first name basis.

The Gross survey[14] found 43% of superintendents inviting the press, at least occasionally, to board meetings closed to the public. But the study also found that nearly all large and most small school boards do hold closed meetings, and that there is considerable disagreement between newsmen and schoolmen about the kind of business, if any, that should be considered in "executive session." The basic issue is rooted in the nature of the relationship between private and public institutions. It is a question of which set of institutional purposes should determine the selection, timing and treatment of information the public has "a right to know." This basic issue also underlies most problems in personal professional relations between newsmen and schoolmen.

Professional Contacts: Some Problem Areas

Newsmen were asked what they considered to be major problem areas in their personal contacts with schoolmen. One education reporter, writing from the Southwest, listed nearly all of them:

> 1) Overcoming the fears of certain school administrators that newspapers can't be trusted to report accurately news of education. 2) Dealing with the 'ivory tower boys' who haven't come down to earth since they began their professional education work. These are in a minority, but they are hard to deal with. They either don't make sense or they can't express themselves so anyone outside the profession (and few within it) can understand them. 3) The tendency of entrenched school leaders to think of their school systems as their own little countries. Too many superintendents want to play God. Sometimes they need a little jolt to remind them they are paid out of public funds and have a responsibility to the public. 4) Lack of news sense on the part of many school administrators. They flood the paper with junk news and ignore really interesting copy. 5) A tendency in some districts to withhold information to which the public has a right.

Others mentioned similar complaints. Most of these charges can be grouped into three problem areas: 1) newsmen's feeling of secretiveness, lack of confidence on the part of schoolmen; 2) problems of occupational jargon, obscure or abstract language; and 3) different conceptions of "news value."

Secretiveness, lack of confidence. Most newsmen level charges of secretiveness, timidity, cowardice at schoolmen. "Generally," wrote one respondent, "reporters take the side of teachers, but the timidity you meet is discouraging. It is easy to develop the attitude that 'If they don't care about themselves, their profession, their schools, why should I?'" But, he added, "this is an attitude you have to fight with the realization of 'would I speak up?' And, in all honesty, you don't know."

Secretiveness is often attributed to fear and lack of confidence. "The problem," said one reporter, "is with the teacher and administrator who has no understanding of the newspaper business and is afraid that even a sneeze will be misconstrued." "Educators seem to have a reluctance to work closely with the press," remarked another. "I don't want to be anyone's public relations agency but neither do I want to be a 'hatchet man.' There ought to be a middle ground."

The middle ground is hard to find when the boundaries keep shifting and the rules of the game are not too clearly or equitably defined. One of the most valuable assets of school public relations is the cultivation of good personal relationships with reporters. "The

14 Gross, *op. cit.*

school system has a publicity man," wrote one respondent, "who feeds us tips on activities that seem interesting." Press-conscious administrators were reported to let newsmen in on potentially controversial information, if on the whole, they had a sympathetic press.

Educational jargon. Only one complaint is more widespread than that educators do not like to give straightforward answers to straightforward questions. That is the charge that they are *unable* to do so. "Teachers as a class are amazingly inarticulate," wrote the education writer for a large East Coast daily. "Few can discuss curriculum, teaching methods, etc., at least with the press, in concrete terms. They soon drift into generalities they learned at teacher's college."

Another reporter explained:

> Reporters are not educators. The purpose of the press and of the schools is not always the same. One major disagreement is language. We cannot report educational developments in the educators' language. It will mean nothing to anyone but an educator. We need the type of educator who will be willing to paraphrase, to explain to the press what he is doing without worrying about words like 'core' and 'education of the whole child.'

The battle of words may be symptomatic of deeper irritations. In the responses of education reporters, complaints about "jargon" revealed a variety of underlying assumptions: generalities learned at teachers' colleges inhibit articulate discussion of teaching on "concrete terms"; educational jargon is subterfuge, another instance of professional "secretiveness"; the talk of teachers is a ritual which hides all thought; jargon conceals ideas which are obscure, controversial, expensive, or all of these; and, finally, the opaqueness of educators indicates indifference or even contempt for the press and the public.

There may be some truth in any folklore about a profession. The lingo of the newsroom could be as incomprehensible to teachers as the jargon of the educationist seems even to reporters "specializing" in education. Professional "educationese" may well be uncommonly vacuous and pompous double-talk, although the ceremonial, administrative, philosophical or technical prose of other fields has not yet been subjected to comparative analysis, or—unlike that of education—to popular vote.

News values. School publicity people "flood the paper with junk news and ignore really interesting copy," wrote one respondent. "The biggest problem," said another, "has been to develop an awareness among school people of news and feature values. I have noticed also that they are sometimes at sea in knowing how to handle controversial matters to the best of their advantage."

The two types of complaints about "news values" again reflect a divergence of institutional goals. Successful school administration requires visibility without controversy. "Good news copy" gives high visibility to controversy or to other elements which may lead to a conflict of values between school and press.

Reporters' complaints about "junk news" may seem trivial, but they reflect a widespread and vexing problem. Other types of news value conflict, not so easily resolved, are rooted in deeper differences of interest and standpoint between the two institutions. They usually revolve around the newswriter's need for social and occupational typing (or "stereotyping"), and the newspaper's vs. the school's conception of "balanced coverage."

Social typing is, of course, a shortcut to meaning, even if not always to understanding. An occupational, racial or professional tag next to a name in a news item is the simplest and most common form of social typing. The more incongruous or provocative the combination, the more "news value" it

has. A man charged with vagrancy is a common item on the police blotter. Human reproduction is the subject of many books. But "Teacher Picked up on Skid Row" or "Sex Books in School Library" are almost irresistible headline possibilities.

An education reporter recalled this incident at a girls' vocational high school:

> A neighbor called to report a 'race fight' in front of the school. Had the principal refused to talk with us, we would have had to talk with students, with those who lived across from the school and with other witnesses to check the story. But the principal did talk with us, telling us of the background of the situation and the reason the two girls had started a fight, a reason which had nothing to do with race. What might have ended up as a page one story, ended up as two or three paragraphs on an inside page with no mention of race.

The story was told to illustrate the importance of schoolmen confiding in newsmen. But it also indicates something about news values. Social typing alone, in the absence of other information about motivation, can give a story of conflict special significance. Any brawl can become a front-page "race riot" if the participants are not all white. Lacking social typing possibilities, the story loses much of its news value. But the school principal might wonder why such a fight should be news at all.

A related type of news value conflict between newsmen and schoolmen results from different conceptions of "balanced coverage." The reporter's view was expressed by the education writer of a metropolitan daily who said:

> The school system employs a director of public information, who assists us greatly. Of course, there is a danger here. A lazy or hurried reporter may rely on the material spoon-fed to him by the director instead of digging up his own stories. In this case, the reporter turns into a propagandist for the school district instead of a guardian of the public's right to know what goes on in the vital area of educating children. One thing is sure—no director of public information is going to tell a newspaper something bad about the school district which employs him.

Something "good" is usually routine news; something "bad" may well be hot copy. A little of the latter spices the bland flow of announcements, awards, speeches. But schoolmen object.

> The main problem in dealing with schoolmen [wrote another education writer] is the complaint: 'your paper never gives us any publicity about the worthwhile things we do, but jumps on every little controversy and blows it up into a big deal.' This is generally an unenlightened view. The people who make it are invited, as a rule, to come and look at our clipping file and see for themselves how much space in the paper went to news they would call 'positive' and how much to 'negative.' I don't think anyone has ever taken us up on the invitation.

Those involved in the making of news as subjects and as reporters often have different conceptions of "balance." What may appear to newsmen the proper balance may seem to schoolmen just what keeps them off-balance in the community. Gross found that overemphasis on "bad" or "sensational" news was the educators' major grievance against the press.

Organizational News: Local vs. National

The American newspaper's basic constituency is its market area. Local organizational and public affairs publicity is given as a matter of area service. Relatively few organizations and agencies command the attention of national wire services; only a fraction of these find a place in the columns of the local paper. National attention is, therefore, highly selective.

"I doubt that the name of any educator in the nation is known to more than 2 or 3% of all Americans," one education writer observed. "Few people

can see beyond their local school board and the local property tax," commented another. "There is some dim awareness of state school officials, even less of the U. S. Office of Education."

Public awareness is, of course, a matter of cultivation. Many of our respondents described differences in treatment between local and national education news, and commented not only on the amount but also on the kind of attention professional education organizations receive from the press.

Local associations were more likely to maintain personal contacts with education reporters in their community. "Since these organizations are trying to sell themselves to the public and since they are often run by dynamic teachers, we find little difficulty in communicating with them," wrote the education writer of a New York state daily. "We are, of course, interested in local teachers' organizations," she noted. However, the national organization, she wrote,

> is not an organization financed by taxpayers. It is a group trying to sell the needs of teachers. It is a lobbying organization. It is not local. Some of its reports are news. Some are just one side of a story.

Most reporters used such terms as "propaganda," "lobby" or "pressure group" in talking about the National Education Association. The institutional vantage point and "taxpayer" outlook of the average daily newspaper appears to sensitize reporters to the financial control issue involved in national organizational news in education. The following comments were typical:

> NEA news releases make good statistical stories, but that's about all. Much of their stuff is propaganda for higher teacher pay. The NEA is a lobby as I see it.
>
> * * *
>
> There is a dearth of educational statistics and NEA makes its own available. . . . The education reporter must realize NEA or other teachers' organizations will be propagandizing for whatever they want. NEA's outpourings on federal aid get on my nerves sometimes.

Issues

Over and above the routine, if sensitive, aspects of organized contacts between newsmen and schoolmen, a few deep-seated issues have dominated headlines in the school news field.

Newsmen's perceptions of headline issues in education reporting reveal a rising tempo of community conflict over basic problems or resource allocation. These headline issues are the rightwing attacks on education, the movement toward integration and the problem of violence.

The rightwing attacks followed in the wake of postwar planning for long-delayed solutions to the financial crisis in education. The controversies were—and still are— usually couched in terms of textbooks, curriculum and "subversion." Their most telling effect, however, has been the reversal, prevention or slowing down of structural and financial reform school leaders sought in order to improve, or at least maintain, the quality of education. One education reporter responding to our inquiry gave the following account of events in his city:

> One major school story over the past few years has been concerned with the reform of the public school curriculum. Perhaps it has been the most influential story of all in affecting the public image of the school teacher so far as that is created by mass media.
>
> A number of elements—the post Sputnik criticism of American schools, the Council for Basic Education Agitation, and the persistent sniping of a group of business conservatives chiefly interested in the tax rate, among them—brought about a request from the city's board of education for a university survey of the school system . . . The image presented in our competitor was of a doughty little band of fearless teachers and citizens, led by brilliant and public-spirited university celebrities, assailing the 'educationalists,' administrators who were allegedly thwarting the efforts of pure-spirited but cowed pub-

lic-school faculties to give our children the education they need to face the problems of the modern world.

It is dangerous to attempt to describe, as if objectively, the image one's own news coverage projects. But as I saw the situation myself and as I tried to describe it, it was a rather emotional attack by a group of professors who were, I believe, and certainly must hope, unaware that they were allied with all the oppositionists, panacea-lovers and tax-rate-guided hatchetmen . . .

Another education reporter expressed the views of the majority when he said:

> The major problem since 1955 has been integration. Most of the Negro and integrated schools are in culturally deprived areas. The paper has been hesitant to take an editorial policy. The suburban development played an important role in this picture.

Another reporter commented:

> Nearly half of our pupils are colored. We have trouble with that. Often we have to play down pictures of colored children or have to be careful to pick a school which is not too integrated.
>
> The other day I had such trouble in a kindergarten class. I had the photographer taking a picture in the class and the teacher said to me, 'Don't you think you have too many chocolate drops in this picture?'
>
> The slums and the slum schools are in the heart of the city. Many people are moving out of the suburbs, mostly whites. We have come to favor the more exclusive residential areas. They demand and get publicity. In the process we neglect the schools of the inner city.

One of our informants claimed that he resigned from a Texas newspaper after the publisher decided to suppress advance news of school integration in order to assure a more orderly transition. The "Case for News Suppression" was publicly argued in the Fall 1963 issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review* and in other journals. But the movement for integration (and, beyond integration, for social justice) has become the No. 1 domestic news story in the American press. It transcends the scope of education news and reporting, and is, in fact, rarely examined from the point of view of educational implications.

Newsmen's approach to national issues in education, and, in fact, the general climate of press-school relations, can be best understood in the perspective of studies of long-range developments and of the dynamics of national coverage itself.[15] The post-World War II rise in attention came at a time when mounting enrollments and soaring costs confronted many communities with unprecedented problems. Schools were forced time and again to go to state legislatures and the voting public to be able to hold their own. Tax and bond elections provided opportunities for new attacks on already weakened and vulnerable school districts. Most communities were, by and large, unable or unwilling either to accept local solutions adequate to the needs or to share the burden—and possibly control over resource-allocation—with the federal government. The percentage of gross national income devoted to education declined. Only four states devoted as large a percentage of income to education in 1949-50 as they had in 1937-38.

The critical years of 1948-53 saw the gathering and clashing of forces that were to shape American education, and perhaps national development itself, for decades ahead. The mass media played an ambivalent role. First of all, the proportion of newspaper and magazine space devoted to education declined, at least temporarily, in the early fifties. Secondly, some media became the primary vehicles for the counter-attacking forces, and some others either abetted or were intimidated by the onslaught.

The progressive education movement,

[15] George Gerbner, "Education About Education: Trends in Mass Media Attention," *The Educational Forum*, November 1966; and "The Coverage of the 1961 National Education Association Convention in American Daily Newspapers" in "Mass Communications and Popular Conceptions of Education," *op. cit.*

which had most consistently called attention to problems erupting into racial and class conflict and violence, was dead. It could not withstand the coalition of political, industrial, business and military forces which came to dominate the ideological climate.

The "era" of the early fifties appears to have made national issues in education controversial subjects, and changed the tone and complexion of their coverage. The again increasing volume of largely critical discussion in the mid-fifties, featuring educators themselves in ever increasing numbers, prepared the ground for the bitter orgy of pedagogical soul-searching following the launching of the first Sputnik in 1957. But Sputnik seems to have signaled the culmination rather than the origin of a period of searching and intense public attention focused on national issues in American education.

If "business as usual" returned to the school news reporting scene, it is certainly on a higher level of awareness and concern than ever before. But it still operates, by-and-large, in the context of institutional pressures and imperatives inherent in the local control of both schools, and most newspapers.

The school system is the largest public enterprise in most communities. It is a principal user of local taxes, goods and services. The quality and quantity of its services are closely related to the income level of the neighborhood and to the location of its clients on the rungs of the community power ladder. In virtually reproducing the income and status hierarchy of its community, the American school is a prime example of the financial and political effects of local control.

The newspaper's stake in the system of local control stems from *its* client relationship and functions. The principal sustaining service of the newspaper is the creation and cultivation of a reading public of consumers concentrated in a market area which provides the base for the profitable operation. The "quality" and quantity of readers as consumers determine the value and price of newspaper service to its chief supporting clients, the advertisers. These market functions require the newspaper to attract readers by amusing, exciting, provoking, and selling, as well as informing them. Its institutional relationships and functions also shape the overall approach of the newspaper to other institutions and events, and affect the kind of attention it will pay to different publics. News and views are selected not only to be of broad general appeal but also to be of relevance and usefulness to the system of local controls in which the press and its public of clients wield their influence.

Newsmen's views, schoolmen's observations, and the literature in the field of press-school relations suggest that newspapers are most sensitive to two types of challenge to this structure of local control. One is further professionalization and organization in the education field, making that vast public enterprise more independent of local direction and management. The other is any major re-allocation of resources which might upset the present bases of newspaper and other business operations.

Some Conclusions

The average reporter on the school beat is an earnest and hard-working newsman. He is impressed with the significance of his assignment even if still somewhat restive about his prestige in the newsroom. He receives more time and support to do a better job than 10 years ago but is still harassed and shorthanded. He believes that his point of view, which is generally that of his management, represents the approach of the majority of lay citizens and taxpayers — or at least of those who "count."

The celebated "Boom on the School Beat" appears to have been limited to metropolitan dailies, and to have been more a sign of recognition than a rise

in the proportion of all special editorial employees holding school news assignments on American daily papers. The time, duties and status of the assignments vary greatly. Mobility on the job is still generally high. The "hard news, local angle" policy sets the style of reporting on most papers.

The local orientation of the American daily paper also assures a fair amount of community school news, and makes the newspaper sensitive to local organizational interests, movements and affairs. Its controlling institutional relations alert the press to any challenge to its prerogative to select and shape information by its own criteria of relevance to its functions and publics. National agencies, organizations and movements in education are usually perceived as special pleaders threatening the structure of local influence and control— a structure in which both school and press have a vital and sometimes at least partly conflicting interest.