

DR. WALLACE ALCORN
ON
THE CHANGE IN THE ROLE OF THE SECONDARY
SCHOOL TEACHER FROM 1953 TO 1986

By
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HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN AMERICAN CULTURE
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Abstract (Summary and Conclusions)
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From 1953 to 1986

The purpose of the interview was to explore the changes that have occurred in the role and responsibilities of the secondary teachers from 1953 to 1986. These changes are recorded through the observations of the narrator Dr. Wallace Alcorn, a teacher, pastor, author, private counselor, and active U.S. Army Chaplain. The interview was held on October 28 and November 6, 1989 at his residence, 1010 N.W. 7th Avenue, Austin, Minnesota. The historian is James Davalantes, a student in the course, History of Education in American Culture, course Number 49-604, Mankato State University. Dr. Alcorn notes that one area of change has been in the students attitudes toward the teachers' knowledge, authority and community profile. Teachers that are dedicated and have an honest concern for their students' success have the greatest impact. Although it also needs the support of caring administration, both for teachers and students. He also notes that more accountability is expected from teachers and that schools have taken on more social responsibilities.

The initial interview was held on October 28, 1989 with Dr. Wallace Alcorn at his residence, 1010 N.W. 7th Avenue, Austin, Minnesota. Dr. Alcorn is presently an author, pastor and U.S. Army Reserve chaplain. The purpose of the interview was to explore the change in the role of secondary teacher from 1953 to 1986. The interviewer is James Davlantes. The interview is being conducted to fulfill the requirement for the course, History of Education in American Culture, Course Number 49:604. The instructor is Dr. Richard F. Daley.

JD: For our interview as our outline said here that I gave you, we are going to start out with the biographical sketch and I guess it is not always polite to ask for age but that is one of the questions for demographic reasons. We need your age, birth place whether it was city or rural.

WA: Yes, I am 59, I was born in Milwaukee.

JD: Obviously, Milwaukee is not rural.

WA: No, Milwaukee is not rural.

JD: Milwaukee is city. Your educational background - where you went to college, universities etc?

WA: Undergraduate, Wheaton College in the Chicago area. I did a Masters there as well. Basic seminary, graduate seminary was at Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary. Another Masters from Princeton and a PHD from the School of Education of New York University.

JD: Presently you are doing, what?

WA: I am a private counselor in private practice. I am writing and about a third of my time I am on active duty as an Army chaplain.

JD: So that seems to keep you pretty busy?

WA: Yes.

JD: Your duties as chaplain - what do those entail. Are there really any teaching duties per say?

WA: ~~At mid-career~~ At mid-career there was. At this point I supervise the teachers or plan the course. It is primarily supervisory responsibility.

JD: So presently right now you aren't really doing any teaching - you have done teaching from my understanding when we talked before but presently right now you may be doing a little with the Army Reserve?

WA: Well, frequently I am a guest instructor in various areas. I suppose the most common are in religion, in writing and in psychological areas and in colleges as well as in the Army. This comes up quite frequently.

JD: We did have a chance to talk earlier so I do know some of the background and like I said I had a pre-recorded header here that tells a little about your background. Going back to, I guess we can say, when you were doing full time teaching so to speak. You started in 1953 I think you said, is that correct?

WA: Yes, I suppose the first formal teaching I did was as an enlisted man in the Army in 1953 but teaching really started pretty early as a Boy Scout even as one of the kids as a Patrolman and leader etc. I was the one who trained the Tenderfoots coming in. When I was in high school I taught a Sunday school class regularly. So I am not really sure, I suppose I was in the very early teens when I was doing my first specific teaching but so far as being paid for that sort of thing in 1953.

JD: What was it like in the 50's to be teaching? What were the expectations of you as a teacher what did your boss expect from you as a teacher?

WA: Primarily to teach what I had been given to teach. The attitude of the students was they were to absorb what was being taught.

JD: Basically the attitude of the student was to absorb what they were taught, did you ever have major discipline problems? Were they there strictly to, this person in front of me is a wealth of knowledge, I am going to soak it all or did you have the kids that didn't really care?

WA: There were some that didn't care but they usually didn't express it, you had to sense it. There was not very much arguing with the teacher. It doesn't mean that the students always accepted what the teacher said but they let the teacher go ahead and say it and if they were going to reject it they did so privately.

JD: In other words they looked at you more as the "Good-Bye Mr. Chips" type of image, the learned professor. So even if they didn't agree they still accepted the information.

WA: I don't think there was always necessarily respect for the knowledge that the individual had. There was acceptance of the office that is, I am a student, he's a teacher, he has to teach, I have to sit here while he teaches. You don't argue with it, you don't challenge it, you don't necessarily accept it but you don't tell him that. I began teaching in grade school in the 50's, within that

decade and also graduated from college in 1952, so in the 50's I was a student, even an undergraduate as well as graduate. I was teaching in the Army and also beginning teaching in public schools in the elementary level within the 50's. Again, it doesn't mean necessarily because a teacher had no trouble with the students that he was successful because students would often take notes, give it back on a test but still not internalize it or not put into practice if they actually went out.

JD: So it was more of respect for the position?

WA: Yes, they didn't necessarily respect the teacher. They didn't like teachers as much then as now. But usually you didn't tell the teacher you didn't like him or the teacher said to you do you like me - everyone said, "oh yes, Mr. Alcorn, of course. That sort of thing. It was a compliant sometimes even obsequious relation.

JD: How about your principal? One of the areas we were talking about was principal and teacher expectations when we sat down before this interview. What did you expect of your boss, the principal?

WA: Not to much I guess and I didn't get much. That is what there didn't seem to be, principals seem to be more administrators of the institution than they were supervisors. In other words, there wasn't much class room visitation by the principal in a supervisory capacity. There wasn't much feed back. If you had a student complaining, a little later than this, that had got into high school in the 60's, then when the student starting complaining you would get called in and you would have to answer about the complaint or parent complaint. But there didn't seem to much initiative on the part of the supervisor whether it be head of the department or principal or who ever it be. There wasn't much initiative on the part of the supervisory personnel to find out what was going on in the classroom whether you are being successful, whether you are happy. There was very little inquiry on that. Most of the contact with the principal had to do with administrative things - filling out reports and that sort of thing.

JD: So there was very little contact with the teacher. You saw the principal very few times in your classroom. He was just a figure head.

WA: Correct. The principal I had when I taught grade school was one of the best principals around and a fellow who really did care and I consider a personal friend. But if we ever got into how are things going, it was really on a basis of two friends talking rather than principal. I think he didn't do as much as he would want to because I think it didn't occur to him. Other principals weren't doing that, his principal didn't help him so it didn't occur to him to help

his teachers in that way.

JD: Was this something that the principals wanted to do, did they want to stay away from the classroom? It sounds like they were almost the CEO of a company that has very little contact with the men on the assembly line. Was that something they wanted to do or if a principal wanted to go into a classroom to see how things were going and get out of that paper work suffling administrative role was that considered a person who was a rebel and wasn't a good administrator?

WA: I think there were two causes of it. One I have already indicated. It didn't occur to the principals they should be more active in the teaching process than they were. That is they hadn't been told in their training that they should, and as teachers they had not experienced that. The other is much now as I wish they had become more involved in the classroom. At the time I would probably had not appreciated it. I would of resented it, I would of thought that they were being suspicious of me that I was being singled out, that my job was in jeopardy and it would of been simply because I was insecure. I knew I was not doing a good job and I thought if the principal didn't know that maybe it would work out. A very silly attitude is if that all by myself I could work these things out. Well, a lot of them I did but I would have done it more quickly and more effectively, even more thoroughly if a mature caring person had been in there to help me with it. You know saying, "you know while I was in your class, Jimmy Jones said this and you reacted to this and I had the impression you were angry at him and you were losing it, do you think that is so"? In a nonthreatening way if they had approached me and helped me - its what I needed but I didn't get it. I am saying I have to accept at least half of the responsibility because I probably gave signals that I didn't want the principal in there.

JD: That is interesting. So basically if you did not see the principal you were doing a good job so the assumption was?

WA: Yes.

JD: And basically if you saw him it was something like you were doing something wrong was the only reason he came.

WA: Right. If the only time I got called into the office or called aside to talk to is on a negative thing, then if he walks into my classroom I am going to think its a negative thing and so did the students. Generally the students liked me so then they would come to my defense and they would start acting unnaturally because the principal was there and they would feed me the answers they knew that I wanted, maybe everybody would behave well because some how they felt they were in on this and their teacher was not going to get into trouble with the principal. But the principal therefore never really knew

what went on in that class even if he visited the classroom. If he did it just occasionally and just with the expectations that were there we would have had to of created a totally different environment.

JD: Was this the general attitude of all the other teachers? Basically it was their classroom and they were on their own?

WA: Actually it was the other teachers, the more experienced teachers were a greater help to me than the principal and that is not all bad. But I think the principal should of played a role as well.

JD: You mentioned the other teachers, more experienced teachers were greater help, did you have a lot of that going on where say a 15 or 20 year veteran would come into your classroom or after school or during a prep hour and give you some pointers here and there, I mean did you feel offended if some of these teachers said, I hear or see you are having a little bit of a problem with this area or with this student here are some ideas. How did that go over?

WA: I think, well it was probably do to the obvious fact that the other teachers cared about me and cared about the students. One of them was when I taught the fourth grade a lot of it was the second and third grade teachers who had just had those kids a year or so ago and they had an investment in the kids they didn't want spoiled and so I think they were protecting their investments by following through.

JD: You mentioned your fourth grade experience, what happened as these kids went up to your junior high or senior high teachers, did you still have that same rapport, that the teachers still managed to mesh together and help each other?

WA: As I got into high school teaching in the early 60's I think the mutual concern was more with methodology and content than it was with personhood of the students. Elementary school teachers seemed to be more concerned about the personhood of the students, high, college teachers seem to be more concerned about the subject matter or their method. And so as I think over the discussions I had with other teachers in the English department, very seldom did it concern how to reach out to a certain student and how to relate to that student and win that student or help that student but the techniques of teaching English.

JD: Did that present any problem, we mentioned about discipline. You said there really wasn't much of a problem did that change in your senior high years because of the focus of teachers being more on the methodology and what they were teaching as opposed to the human being itself?

WA: Perhaps so. I found in junior high school that a lot of the

teachers are scared still of the students and the kids very quickly find that out in fact, they come into the classroom with the attitude is this a teacher I can scare or not. If I can scare the teacher or get the teacher mad or turn the teacher's stomach or whatever then I write him off, he is of no value to me. If I can't scare him or buffalo him, if I can't pull the wool over his eyes then I can respect him and maybe it is somebody who can help me.

JD: That is an interesting comment. Did that happen to a lot of teachers, a lot of them intimidated at that period of time?

WA: Sure. In the most typical way of overcoming that fear and its the way I used it and I used it very successfully. Its you beat the student at the game. You make them more scared of you than you are of them. Try to cover up your fear by out intimidating them.

JD: It is almost like the Wild West.

WA: Yes.

JD: The fastest gun fighter.

WA: I feel very, very guilty about the way I handle junior high school students when I taught junior high school. I didn't learn enough about myself until later. I had the attitude I know what you kids are up to, you are not going to win, I am going to win. And so it was I win, you lose game. And I didn't realize at the time that nobody won when it was that situation and so I control classes. When I was substituting principals would really fall over each other to get me into junior high school as I was the only one who could maintain discipline. But I did it in a very military kind of way. I even had some of the worst boys doing push ups in the classroom. But I controlled the class. But I don't think I taught very much.

JD: It was them versus us.

WA: Yes, but the principals were satisfied with that because then they didn't have to come down and break up a brawl. They could go by and there was no noise in the classroom, they said, "good, forget about that one".

JD: It looks like military training helped in education.

WA: Very definitely.

JD: Should we recommend that junior high teachers go to the Army first, the Marines or Special Forces?

WA: No. And that's just the problem. And those of us who have had that experience need to realize that can actually be counter productive if you are really concerned about

learning it can be counter productive. Now, I think you can use that because I was a military police officer in a Reserve MP unit. I had been riding with the local police before I went to one junior high school and the kids saw me and then I showed up in the classroom they thought I was a cop moonlighting and teaching or something and I didn't have any trouble in that school at all. The word really spread. You know who our sub is today, it's the cop.

JD: We will keep going on because we seem to hit on it, basically it was a them-us situation. The students seem to respect you if you could back them down and I guess to go in with the student-teacher expectation, was that something that the kids expected of me or was it going to be, you are the one with the heavy hand?

WA: Well, there are two things there. Respect is one word and fear is another. They are somewhat related but I think that a teacher needs to know who he is or she is, they need to know what they have to offer, they need to know their own value. They need to have confidence in how much they can help the student. They need to see through the games kids play. When a student tries to turn the teacher against him, get him angry at them, they have to refuse to become angry at least at the person. Certainly they can be angry at what they do and even express that anger. What they need to say in effect to the student, I don't care what you say or what you do, I'm for you kid. I am your teacher whether you want to learn or not. It is important to me that you do lean and I respect you more than you respect yourself and that is why I am going to be so hard on you. I think that brings about respect. Fear is another thing because I don't think people really learn very much in a fearful environment.

JD: How did the parents seem to fit in with all this? Did they give you the support you needed or did they view education as a necessary evil, everybody had to go to school? How did they really fit into the overall picture with you educating their children?

WA: That differed very much with the parent. There were some parents who didn't want to meet the teacher, they didn't want the students quoting the teacher because the teacher was a college graduate and they were not and they felt inferior and they didn't want to be embarrassed by the teacher or anything the teacher said. One of the most difficult situations I had to get over when I taught fourth grade is I had hammered a couple of grammatical points, almost all the boys in my class were at a Cub Scout meeting and when one of the mothers was serving some food and the mother made the mistake making a very grammatical error that I had made and all these Cub Scouts jumped up all excited.

And she got so scared she dropped the tray of food and she was really angry with me because of that. Because these little kids embarrassed her on it and it took me awhile to get over that. I actually even called the mother and said that I sympathized with her and that's not what I meant. I had to plead the kids were excited that they had learned something that they found a chance to use it. They were immature and argued for patience. So often parents thought, I don't care to hear anything bad about my kid from the teacher because then I have to face it and so they would deny it. They just wouldn't listen to what the teacher had to say because they didn't want to admit it was true. If it were true then they had to do something about it. On the other hand there were other parents who were totally different from that who really did want to know what was going on and what the experiences were with their children etc. So I don't think I could make any generalization about parents.

JD: You mentioned the parents didn't want any thing to do, didn't want the kids to associate too much with you because you were a college educated person, is that correct?

WA: Yes, and in a position of authority. The parents felt uncomfortable, some of the parents.

JD: Would it make a difference if it were blue collar or white collar parent?

WA: Yes. I think that these were largely blue collar parents.

JD: So basically they viewed you, I would gather as the students did, as a person of authority and someone that you just didn't want to get involved with.

WA: Sure. Almost as if the parents thought that they were getting a report card and getting "F's".

JD: Did you ever have the parent teacher conferences that we have today?

WA: Not as most of the schools see it today. It wasn't required, it wasn't a routine sort of thing. For that reason unfortunately it usually occurred when things were bad. You know the teacher got called into the principal's office when the teacher had goofed up and parents got called into the school to see the teacher when the kids had goofed up.

JD: So basically that was the only contact. We are still going back to the authoritarian type figure. It is almost like, as a parent you never want to be called by the police station or hospital or ambulance service.

WA: Right.

- JD: Now days we have counselors in school. Did you have any type of position like that where there were counselors that helped the kids? Even today we have social workers in the school. Did we have anybody doing that kind of function?
- WA: When I taught grade school we had one diagnostian for the entire area. And diagnosis is about all he did. He told us what the problems were and then he left. That was very inadequate. He was of very little help. Largely because he had such a heavy case load and so many schools to cover. In high school there were counselors there but I had been very disappointed by enlarge with counselors because so often they seem to have been teachers who didn't enjoy teaching. So wanted to stay within the educational situation but wanted a different role and so often they were just academic advisors, administrators, disciplinary procedures or something of that sort. I didn't see an awful lot of genuine counseling from the counselors and as I heard the counselors talking about their clients at work, I didn't have the impression that they were particularly concerned about them.
- JD: My experience with counselors is that they maybe had three or four per school and that the population was broken up in some way and assigned to each counselor, was that basically the situation?
- WA: Yes.
- JD: Then you mentioned something about discipline. Were they diciplinarians more than counselors?
- WA: That varied but often that was the case.
- JD: At what period or is there a time frame where the counselor suddenly appeared or started to?
- WA: I think in the 60's there began to be more of this. The work that I took in guidance and counseling was educational oriented and there were many in the class just beginning as school counselors, they had not done that before. It was a new field, this was in the 59, 60, 61 around in there. There were not an awful lot of case histories for the professor to use. It was fairly new, most of his case histories came from other than educational settings - hospitals or mental institutions.
- JD: Did the counselor ever help to improve the attitude or how the parent related to the teacher? We talked about how the parent didn't want any contact with the teacher because the contact was usually bad. Did the counseling era foster, we are here to help you - come on in lets talk about your child?
- WA: While I was teaching, I think when the counselors came in they suffered about the same fate as the teachers did. Since our own children have gone to school and so they would have

started in the late 60's and into the 70's and 80's, I am much more optimistic about the the teachers we have had. I have seen some very very fine skillful things. But still I get the impression that they are loaded with so much administrative work like getting financial aid for college, ACT testing, and all of the other things to be involved in there. Absentism from the school, all of that is necessary but I don't think it is counseling, it is mostly academic administration.

JD: I can relate to that because the district I taught in there was a lot of that. One district in particular the counselors were more of, when you had a problem with a student, you talked to the counselor first and if it went farther it went to the assist principal who was the head cracker at the time. Getting back to the principal, you said the principal never really got into the classroom, strictly administrative, did the time come when you saw the principal starting to get into the classroom? Or basically, I am asking at what time if at all, you saw the principal get into the classroom?

WA: No, not in my experience. I heard of situations where that is true. In the supervising bit that I have done, I have wanted to do that but I have found that again a new environment has to be created to do that, I would like the teachers and the students and the principals or whoever is doing the supervising to feel that regular and routine appearance of the supervisor in the classroom is very normal situation that nobody should give it a second thought. They should be there that frequently. I think the whole generation has to be educated in this. I had wanted to experiment into working into it where the supervisor would first come in and do some of the team teaching with the teacher. It would be perceived as a friend of the teachers, the students it might be critiquing what the teacher had done. They would be interacting in this way.

JD: You mentioned, team teaching. Going back to your team teaching experience, did you ever do any student teaching? Or when you finished college did they say congratulation, here's the diploma find a job or did you do any student teaching?

WA: No. I never did any student teaching. Those who had majored in education undergraduate school I suppose they did. In talking with them I didn't get the impression they had learned an awful lot from that student teaching experience. I think they are getting a lot closer supervision now, the student teachers, than they were then. I think classes were often left alone with a student, the class would be turned over to the student teacher and the teacher would go down to the lounge and drink coffee or go out and do some other business or even if they were working they weren't where they could hear the student and there was very little feedback to

the student at that time. In fact, many of us taught without very much specific preparation for teaching.

JD: So basically it was trial by fire and you are done with school, you finish your undergraduate, here you go and they expected you would be able to go. How about the community, the community expectations of this school? We hear so much about that today through millage votes and teacher conferences. How did the community fit in? Were you accepted in the community as a college educated person, as a professional or where you considered again an authorian?

WA: Again the community, it varies quite abit. The more the teacher can mix in community organizations as another citizen the more effective it is. He can be a member of a service club, church, probably involved in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or Little League or something of that sort. Initially, there will be a little uneasyness about it. Here is a teacher, little uncertainy, but if the teacher can sell herself or himself as an individual there can be more acceptance and that will help him in the classroom as well. I mentioned the blue collar attitude of being afraid of the teacher, looking up with resentment at the teacher. Later I was a pastor in a very affluent Detroit suburb where I witnessed the reverse situation going on. For instance, a teacher whom I know and the teacher would talk with me very freely, because I had been a teacher, they knew I would understand some things. One teacher was telling me about being in J.L. Hudson's in downtown Detroit and seeing a student and speaking to the student, and the student gave no response at all. On Monday in class the teacher said, "wasn't that you I saw at Hudson's?" "Well, yes it was", "well, I spoke to you why didn't you speak back"? And the student partly joking said, "we aren't suppose to talk to the help". Now, the student was really rubbing it in but the fact is in that community school teachers were looked down upon as somebody who had to do something like teach because they were not the CEO of a big corporation. With these you had kids of vice presidents of General Motors and Ford etc. They looked upon the teacher as sort of hired hands. So is the reverse there,

JD: When you were teaching how did you get involved in these organizations in the community? Did you become part of the community?

WA: Yes. I knew many of these people from church and other community activities. It made it a whole lot easier in that case. One of the greatest things a teacher can do is in church where he is not the authority, he is just another worshipper, is to sit down with some of your own kids and to be friendly to them there. Even in the neighborhood if kids can come by a teacher's house and just talk with the teacher it is a real thrill for them. Kind of silly but it is. It's difficult for the students to understand that a teacher can

be a real person and have real feelings.

JD: I would assume that made a difference with the students when they were in the classroom.

WA: Yes. Not only with them but the word spreads. They will say oh, you have so and so for a teacher, I know him from Little League or he goes to our church or we had a picnic together something of that sort.

JD: Did that make it easier to work with the parents?

WA: Yes, sure it did.

JD: I guess that kind of took care of what I wanted to cover now. I have to thank you. I have learned as much as just sitting here listening so there was quite a bit experience that you had and I want to thank you for this time.

This is the follow-up interview with Dr. Wallace Alcorn at his residence on November 6, 1989. The interviewer is James Davlantes.

JD: On our earlier interview we had some biographical data and there are some things we will clarify here, You mentioned you were born in Milwaukee and just for the record we will make that Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

WA: Right.

JD: I need your marital status.

WA: I am married.

JD: The names of wife and children.

WA: Wife's name is Ann. The oldest child is John Mark and then Allyson Ann and Steven Paul.

JD: Their occupations?

WA: The oldest one is a school teacher, public high school teacher, the girl is a musicologist, the younger is a army officer.

JD: And your wife's occupation, is she working?

WA: She is a public health nurse.

JD: Your parents, did they have an educational background?

WA: My mother was allowed to take two years of high school and that had to be Girls Technical school in Milwaukee just to take sewing and cooking because her father believed that a girl shouldn't be educated. But he did accommodate for her to take two years of that vocational training and that was all. My father had one year of college preparing for the ministry. until my mother's mother talked him out of the ministry, convincing him he wasn't capable of the ministry so he dropped out of college.

JD: I guess you have hit upon my next question, your parents' occupation. So I gather you father was not a minister?

WA: Correct. He was an engineering clerk.

JD: An engineering clerk, what did that specify him doing?

WA: He worked for an auto manufacturer on specification engineering.

JD: Your mother was then, I am assuming a housewife,

WA: For the most part but during World War II she worked in a war plant in a secretarial position and then while I was in college, particularly for that purpose, she worked for a department store in the accounting department.

JD: Your religion preference?

WA: I am Baptist.

JD: Your parents?

WA: Were Baptists as well.

JD: We mentioned in the first interview that your first formal teaching position was with the U.S. Army.

WA: Yes.

JD: What did that entail - more specifically?

WA: I was an instructor in psychology and speech at the Adjutant General School.

JD: Where were you stationed at the time?

WA: Fort Benjamin. Harrison, Indiana.

JD: Now your first formal public school teaching we did talk that you started doing substitute teaching. Let's go to your first formal job that you had.

WA: In the New Hall school district of Wyoming, Michigan, a Grand Rapids suburb.

JD: Is that rural or city?

WA: Suburban.

JD: What did you teach there?

WA: Fourth grade.

JD: Earlier, again going back to our initial interview you mentioned the principal didn't spend very much time in the classroom. Have you seen a shift in this administrative policy or did you see a shift in this?

WA: Yes, I think I did. I think principals are in classrooms more. It is a little difficult to tell because it is the principals who are telling me that they are and I think what I am most convinced of there is that they recognize that they should be and I believe that they want to be. It would be interesting to compare this with the teachers and say to the teachers, how often has your principal been by, I have a

sneaky suspicion the principals are probably exaggerating the frequency and significance of their visits.

JD: On the teacher end of that of the principal coming into the classroom, how would the teacher be held accountable if the principal did not come in and see what was going on. Was there some sort of accountability mechanism there?

WA: What point are you referring to?

JD: Nowadays, there is talk of teacher accountability, the students need to perform at a certain level, administration is theoretically in the classroom more. What was keeping tabs on the teachers to make sure their job was being done in the classroom?

WA: Again, what period of time because it varied?

JD: Let's start early in your career,

WA: Typically in the bureaucracy of the army it was very formal and very rigid and for awhile I was a training instructor, inspector as well. We would go into the classroom there is a table in the back set aside for inspector with a lesson plan from which you, the instructor, is suppose to be teaching. On that table the inspector sits in, he reads the lesson plan, he listens to see if the instructor is in fact teaching lesson plan. Back in the early 50's when I was involved in this the emphasis was on the accidntals on the firm rather than on the substance. They check you off if you didn't erase the chalk board after you finished the point, if all the blinds on the windows were even with each other and I think they did this because it was a lot easier to check off on that than the more substantive things. In the Army the training inspection that is going on now, I do see them dealing more with the content than the substance but I don't see them still spending enough time on quality of the method, presenting it, how well has the instructor engaged the students, does he show enthusiasm for his subject and that sort of thing. The government still tends to be more formal than content. In other school settings through the years there was an increasing attention on student response to the teacher in the relationship between them. Earlier accountability seemed to be more like management by acception. They assumed the teacher was doing a good job if there weren't complaints from the students or the parents. Without really knowing that was in fact and also knowing deep in their heart that teachers develop methods of making sure there aren't complaints that had nothing to do with the effectiveness of teaching. The fact of the matter, was when I taught high school I was very interested to notice because I had a perspective I hadn't had before. There were two kinds of teachers that got student response, some teachers didn't get any student response, but those who did, there was one that got an immediate response

this is the one that the present students were saying they are great guys, there were fine, they joked with them etc. There was another group that the present students didn't like at all, in fact, they tended to complain about them, But the alumni were coming back to visit them and they were totally a different group. The teachers who were being visited by the alumni, the graduates, the people who were back on a visit and were coming in to thank the teachers or just to be in touch with them. They were those who were very demanding were not generally popular with the kids but the teachers, my peers, who were popular with the kids were not being visited by their former students or contacted in any way. That made quite an impact, it told me that immediate popularity is probably a political social thing that has not very much to do with educational effectiveness, that the teacher who is really teaching is going to be perceived by that generation of students as, not necessarily unfair, the kids usually know if the teacher is fair or unfair, they will usually say he is hard, he is unreasonable or demands too much. They do a lot of complaining but these are the kids who go out and learn.

JD: You mentioned earlier in our initial interview basically if there were no complaints, no problems and things were going well so can I assume basically the way the principal held you accountable was if he didn't hear anything bad then he assumed it was good?

WA: Yes. And that also meant of course when it really was good there was no reward.

JD: So very little contact in the classroom as we said earlier and basically he checked upon you in the mere fact that he didn't hear about you doing anything wrong.

WA: Yes. There was a lot of emphasis upon what teachers were a trouble to the principal. If the principal or assistant principal had to go down to the room and quiet things down or if he went by in the hallway and heard a lot of noise and he had to worry about it, that was the bad mark for the teacher. But if he was never called to the classroom, if you were never sending anybody to the office they assumed that was a sign of a good teacher etc.

JD: Even when they went down the hallway and heard those noisy classrooms and the principal or assistant principal was worried about that teacher, did he ever go in that classroom?

WA: Yes. That was the likely thing to bring the principal into the classroom. But the point I am trying to make although an unruly classroom, if it is truly unruly, is never acceptable and any principal would be justified in being concerned about that. What bothered me is a classroom in order would be considered to be a good classroom but that doesn't necessarily

mean that learning was going on in there in the classroom. But the principal assumed there was or didn't care because there wasn't any trouble for him and I had the impression sometimes administrators were more concerned about not being bothered by the teachers' problems than if the education was really going on. Now, I think there were times when some classrooms seemed to be unruly to principals or least they were worried it might be when in fact, a lot of learning was going on because there was a lot of activity. Sometime the teacher had the ability to give the class a lot of liberty, to a point and then hold them in check. Sometimes those classrooms were noisy, I don't think that happened a lot but there was that possibility that if it were an unruly class it was bad, if it was an orderly class it was good with no further thoughts considered. That's like the problem the teacher has. There is a tendency especially for some grade school teachers to think that the student who gives no trouble is a good student and some of them have failed to recognize that the students with the greatest potential are an awful lot of trouble. Particularly there is that clinche, that old dicotomy between the well behaved, prim, polite little girl who isn't very bright and who hasn't learned very much except by rote and a very hyperactive rambunctious boy who has an awful lot on the ball and the teacher is just not entertaining him so he just goes off and creates his own enterprise.

JD: Moving on to a statement we talked about earlier - teachers helping teachers. You said a lot of that was going on in your public school career. And that you got more from experience teacher coming and helping. Two questions here, how did the teachers accept this and is that type of help being accepted by teachers now days?

WA: Sure. Some teachers don't want it of course. They are very insecure, they feel threatened. And I think the older and experienced teachers recognize who they are and they don't offer help. Or if they offer it they don't press it. You know if the teacher says I can get along, they say then why bother. I think it is the teacher who really wants to learn and will go to the older teacher, initiate that contact or some how by his attitude show that he is open. My guess is that they are very few schools that don't have at least a few teachers who see themselves as teachers to teachers. It's not a natural born teacher I don't know that there is something like that but there are some teachers who are sort of teachers right to the core of their being. And they have got to be teaching somebody. It doesn't make any difference as who or what the subject is, they have just got to be teaching. That sort of teacher would be as effective with the less experienced teacher as he is with his own students.

JD: Was there ever a feeling between the experienced teachers

who had things going well or the teachers who were struggling, or weren't doing as well: Was there ever a feeling that their colleagues weren't pulling their own weight?

WA: This depends upon the meaning of the word experienced. When I use the word experienced, I don't refer to length of tenure. I refer to the changes that took place in the teacher that experience has been internalized, that they learn from experience not that they have gone through experience. I think that the veteran teachers, let's use that as a quantitated term, the veteran teachers who resent the younger teachers requiring too much attention, not taking care enough of the collateral duties etc., these are people who have forgotten their profession and they see it as a job and they want to get it done as easily and quickly as they can. There is no growth, no professional growth or development in themselves. These are the teachers who resent the younger. Again, what I consider to be a teacher changed by experience matured by his experience. They don't see younger teachers as a nuisance, they see it as a necessary thing. They see it as part of their job to help those younger people.

JD: I can assume then that there was very little resentment of these teachers that were always struggling and have things in shambles.

WA: I don't follow that.

JD: Getting back to the idea of the other colleagues not thinking they were pulling their weight, there wasn't that resentment. Sally Jones isn't doing her job. We have to double up to get things done.

WA: I think the teachers who had stopped teaching and were just holding class. They did resent the younger teachers who were not doing as much as the others. But I am saying the experienced teachers, those who became teachers of teachers not only did not resent the younger teachers and the extra time they took, they understood and were willing to accept that.

JD: We talked a little bit about conferences with parents and teachers only occurring when something bad happens. It was something you had to do. Are parents more involved now? Are they questioning the teacher more now than they did early on in your public school career?

WA: Generally so, yes. I think that my best experience with teacher conferences has been as a parent. As our children were going through their own educational experience, by that time I had gone to college and graduate school teaching where of course, we had very little contact with the parents. So I was not at that point, that is during that era in which there was more student teacher conferences. I was not in the

educational setting where I experienced that but I did experience it as a pastor. I am sorry, yes I did, as a pastor with my own people. But as a parent, and it was almost without exception a very helpful experience,

JD: You made a comment earlier about a teacher is a real person with real feelings as students would view teachers. Let me rephrase that: The response was that the teacher was viewed as an authority figure and you made the comment that the teacher is a real person with real feelings. Comparison - your view now, has this changed? Do students view the teacher as an authority figure or do they view them as a real person with real feelings.

WA: They see them as an authority figure. However, there is much less buckling under to that authority than there used to be. Now it is more likely to be fought and be held in contempt. In some ways it's even more important for teachers now to become involved with students and to win their students' response. Before, earlier, you could maintain the authority position and the students would learn reasonably well because they would accept that authority even if they didn't like it. They might resent it, might be afraid of it. There are certain things they could learn, certain subjects you could learn more, in the hard sciences. The interpersonal relationship wasn't as crucial as it is in the social studies for instance. Or were there is more interactions such as in music and athletics etc. Now the authority really doesn't do much good because they won't accept it and the only thing that is left is the personal relational experience.

JD: Down the same line probably combining a little of the parent-teacher and the student-teacher relationship, Are teachers seeing more or less community support?

WA: I think that depends upon the community. In many many communities in particularly the urban, there is much less. And yet, I stumble over myself, there is such a variety. There is some communities in inner city where you expect the least kind of response, where there is really heavy demands on the school but these tend to come in terms of demanding racial recognition, racial equality as much political as educational. And there are areas where parent councils have been created to collaborate with the school administration etc. There tends to be more support in I think, suburban communities where the parents themselves have gone through a reasonable educational process and where they are more concerned in that way. Rural communities, I don't know the response. It isn't as good, I guess the worse would be in the communities that really lack the community spirit, the big metropolitan areas and where there a very heterogeneous, The greater cooperation is in homogenous communities probably with the white collar professional business, executive kind

of people working more closely with the school administration and teachers.

JD: This may be a broad question but let's see if we can compare it from your early public teaching experience to today. You did mention that there was the respect for the teacher as an authority figure but how about the knowledge you had, Was that respected more then or now? Basically, overall is knowledge with students more respected today then it was twenty or thirty years ago?

WA: I think that the knowledge that the teacher has on a subject field is more likely to be respected by the students now then the authoratative position that the teacher has. The teacher may not be able to win on the authority position but with a lot of the students he can win on his mastery subject, Particularly in the upper levels where secondary students can tell who knows the field and who does not, If they know the field, if they like the field themselves then they will respect it, the teacher who knows the field.

JD: Now a days we have the two wage earners, the working mothers. "Latch Key" is another catch phrase that is around. Was that prevalent during your teaching years? The whole gammit, the working mother, the "Latch Key"?

WA: No. By the time I was teaching we were beyond World War II when a lot of mothers did work and there was a period there in the 50's and into the 60's. Most mothers did not work or if they did work it was part time. They were still essentially homemakers.

JD: How has that affected education today? Back then, in the 50's and 60's, you did not have the full time mother worker as you said. Now we have a lot of that or a significant amount. How has that affected education?

WA: I think that parents tend to spend less time with their children now than they did earlier. I don't think it is as simple a thing as saying that the mother is now working because a lot of these are spending no time at all even though there is time they could be, could spend with them,

JD: The school has taken on different roles, sometimes it has been forced upon it. Let's go early in your career as a comparison, what was the role of the school? Was it strictly educational? You came to school, you were taught, you learned, you went home,

WA: Yes. There was very little accepting responsibility beyond the academic. The closest they would come to it, we are getting into the lunch program that sort of thing but that was even low key. That was just at noon time in those schools

for the kids who could not go home.

JD: Maybe a moot question but how do you perceive that now?

WA: I think that public institutions generally, not just the schools but the armed forces, a lot of social agencies etc. need to review what they have taken on. For many, many years the schools were fairly much ignored by the community other than teaching the 3 R's and that sort of thing. When the public began to look to the school to do more than just that I think the schools were encouraged or where finally being recognized, where being appreciated and they took some tasks on that I am not so sure they should have taken on. Simply because it justified their position and made it easier for them to get, no not simply, but one of the reasons is it made it easier for them to get tax support and all of that sort of thing. I think there are things they have taken on that are better taught in a home or even other community organizations. A school doesn't have to do it all. There are times and places where one would think you turn your children over at the beginning of the day and claim them at bedtime, in between the schools take care of everything. And the schools have been only to willing to do that in some cases.

JD: As a teacher how would this have affected your job, should you have had to deal with this stuff twenty, thirty years ago? Or even now? How was that affecting the teacher?

WA: I am not so sure the classroom teacher, himself or herself, gets that involved. It seems a lot of this is done by support people they brought in or specialist that really aren't in the classroom at all that are working. They are really doing social work or medical work or clinical work and that sort of thing.

JD: Another hot topic today is stress. Did you have it when you were teaching?

WA: Well, I don't think that I would say so. I think that all through my life I managed stress fairly well. Maybe other teachers would be stressed out in the situation in which I was not. No, I don't think there was a lot there. In college teaching there was probably more in that since I taught in a private school you really didn't have much job security and if the academic Dean didn't like you or was unhappy with you, your job, your livelihood was threatened, I think there was much more stress there.

JD: Let's generalize that, Did you see it in other colleagues? Did they have stress from the job?

WA: Generally not so. I think I saw the reverse, I saw too many teachers who in a sense should be worrying about what they

are doing and they are not. They may have their lesson plans drawn up, they have all their materials, they can go another twenty years with what they have to do now and do no more work. They have job security, they have their tenure and they don't worry about things that they should be worrying about.

JD: You said you didn't have any stress on the job. Did you have any stress off the job because you were a teacher in the community and it demanded certain things?

WA: No.

JD: Kind of a broad question here but what has been the greatest change in the role of teacher as you have seen it over the past years?

WA: I think there is much more accountability and much more is expected from the teacher. The teacher has to justify his or her performance more than personally, I mean previously. I think probably that is the biggest thing. An increased accountability not always necessarily a good accountability.

JD: Stress wasn't an issue with you. How about overall? What were the things that frustrated you over the years of teaching?

WA: I think with out any question, the biggest frustration is students who have the ability to learn and perform in life but just don't want to. They are not motivated and they won't accept any motivation. They expect to little, they expect people to do everything else for them. They are just there to put in their time and not to learn. Especially when you know the student has the ability and won't use it. That's very frustrating.

JD: When you saw that in a student, was there anything you could do to try to motivate or what things did you do? Did you contact parents? That kind of thing. What did you do?

WA: The expression I use very frequently particularly on the college level was something like: look kid I respect you more than you respect yourself. I have more confidence in what you can do, than you do. And I think I am in a better position to know what your potential is in this field, at least, than you are. And I am saying you can be a top performer and you are not and I am not going to accept you as anything less than what you can be.

JD: Let me ask. Did it work or should I say how often did it work?

WA: I think it usually worked. Yes, usually so. There are a tremendous number of students if not the majority, I would say the majority of the students are somewhat deficient in genuine self esteem. Now there are some who are insufferably cocky.

And those are the people who think the least of themselves. A great number of students have serious subdued self image problems and I think we need to affirm the worth of the personhood and show that we respect them. Very often the parents do not and they do not respect themselves. In a sense we are saying I don't care what your father or mother think or don't think about you. I respect you, I admire you and students are almost blown for a loop when a teacher says I respect you.

JD: As we have been through the initial interview and this follow-up interview can you think back are there any comparisons positive or negative that you would want to make then and now going back through your career that what you see twenty, thirty years ago as opposed to what is happening today and vice versa?

WA: I guess I am more concerned about the teachers than I am about the students. I have a right to expect more from the teachers. Earlier what we saw are a lot of dedicated teachers that is persons really dedicated to teaching so much dedicated that teaching students was more important to them than almost anything in the world and they were willing to take a small, low wage, were willing to work under less than ideal circumstances. They were willing to take a lot just because they had the opportunity to teach. Then in the early 60's there seemed to be a shift where teachers had been saying "enough". I've had enough of this". I remember in a faculty meeting in high school, one teacher standing and for the first time I heard this. He said, "I am sick and tired of the word professional because everytime a teacher wants something, somebody says you are not being professional. As if professional means that you are willing to be pushed around and cheated for doing a good job". He was right. On the other hand I think it has gone to the other extreme now where instead of using the word professional for a lot of teachers they should use the word commercial because professional means that no matter what your position is on money there are several things a whole lot more important than the money. Not to say that money isn't important and unfortunately, there are school boards, administrators and the public generally who abuse the genuine professionalism of teachers to cheat the teachers. Now it has gone the other way. Teachers in many places have gotten the upper hand and have gotten the political clout they didn't have and now some of them seem more concerned with a good retirement, with easy thing on the job. That seems far more important than teaching. And so when professionalism was abused by the public and the teachers sort of said, "let's forget about professionalism for awhile, let's be concerned with equity and fairness," in the process they become commercial and lost their professionalism in that genuine sense of a professional.

JD: One last question and we will call it quits. We have a little more tape here so we might as well use it here. We have talked now for a couple of hours on two different days. Is there anything we didn't touch on that I didn't ask that you would like to comment on?

WA: I think that last one I had in my mind before we started and I guess we hadn't gotten into that. It isn't just in the teaching profession. It is in professions generally. I see young people coming out of the colleges full of idealism. Sometimes unrealistic but idealism, dedicated, wonderful young people, really wanting to do a good job and I think this is enthusiasm and it needs to be challenged but I don't know what is going to happen to you when the old guys get to you, because there is a tendency for these young people to go into the school and some of the old pros, as it were, who aren't professional at all knocked all the enthusiasm as well as the idealism out of the kids. They just don't bare with that and channel it. They destroy it and sometimes within a few years these young people are just like the old hands.

JD: In other words the old hands tend to be on a glide path toward retirement.

WA: Some of them. There is no necessary relationship between how long a person has taught and having that attitude. I am just saying that an awful lot of them have fallen into that. And it is bad enough that they are that way. But it really angers me when they dump that on the young people for whom there is some hope. I think administrators need to step in and step on some of those teachers who are throwing cold water on some of these young people and affirm them and encourage them. Help them to make idealism realistic. Give realistic goals but keep stressing the worthwhileness of what they are doing.

JD: Dr. Alcorn, I thank you very much. This will conclude our follow-up interview and the oral history process. Thank you very much.