

Teachers for the Modern Schools

PROVIDING TEACHERS for modern schools is a major educational concern today. In presenting this issue on teacher education, we are not unmindful of the fact that recruitment of superior teachers is of utmost importance if we are to provide the kind of education which we believe children and youth need. Omission of specific discussion of causal factors in the present teacher shortage—inadequate salaries, social restrictions, lack of stimulation on the job—does not imply a lack of recognition of these facts. However, it is our purpose in this treatment to give major emphasis to a factor which we believe merits examination as a further cause of the present teaching crisis—the professional preparation of future teachers. Examination of teacher education as it now exists is imperative if we are to view the situation realistically. Revamping of professional preparation must go forward—with increasing rapidity—if intelligent young people of courage and vision are to enter and remain in the teaching profession. Not all the practices described herein are new nor are they found only in those situations in which they are described. Neither have they reached a state of perfection in those institutions. It is indisputable, however, that in too many localities they have never been tried or are still in the state of words rather than action. It is hoped that the accounts which follow will encourage further experimenting in securing better educational programs for future teachers. G.H. and E.E.C.



*Courtesy Dorothy D. Van Deman and Edith M. Leonard,
Santa Barbara, Calif.*

Tools for teaching are a need

Who Shall Teach?

KARL W. BIGELOW

The question of recruitment of teachers can not be observed in terms of quantity alone. If the educational problems related to providing a professional personnel adequate to the concept of a free public education for all of the people of our democracy are to be met, the question of quality is of prime consideration. In the following article, Karl Bigelow, professor of education, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, considers this matter of the kind of teachers we need.

“A TEACHER,” Henry Adams declared, “affects eternity: he can never tell where his influence stops.” Eternity is a long time, and about its remoter limits Americans are not disposed to worry greatly. But eternity prominently includes the next fifty years, and those

of us with any sense and understanding are right now deeply concerned about that period. We know that before it ends our country must face a whole galaxy of fundamental issues—that decisions of the profoundest significance must be made. We are aware that estab-

lished patterns of personal and social behavior in such realms as family life, economic arrangements, political organization, and international affairs are being vigorously challenged by new ideas and emergent events. We realize that choices have got to be made—by us and by our children—and that those choices will be fateful.

Whatever affects belief and behavior in the next fifty years is, therefore, of the greatest importance. Whoever exercises an influence, the ultimate consequences of which are incalculable, is a person of the greatest importance. We cannot afford to let such an influence be adverse. Since Adams was patently correct in his estimate of a teacher's significance, the question, "Who shall teach?", is evidently one that demands the most serious consideration in our times.

New Standards for a New Day

The question comes with a special challenge today, not only because the need for great teachers is greater than ever, but because the supply is currently at the lowest ebb in years. War took many of the ablest practitioners out of American classrooms and slowed to a trickle the colleges' production of new teachers of any quality. The resultant vacuum was filled with "emergency teachers", most of whom could not meet even prewar requirements for appointment. Thus we must re-establish the standards with which we were carelessly satisfied in an age of innocence as well as press on to those that will bear examination in the light of an atomic day.

The responsibility of deciding who shall teach in the latter half of the twentieth century is, of course, one in

which many persons must share. So is the task of making that decision effective. In the last analysis these are jobs for the whole body of the American people who, as citizens of a democracy, have the ultimate power to determine the caliber of teaching that their children shall receive. Granted that technical issues beyond the competence of laymen are involved, it remains true that the people—by interesting themselves in the matter, by setting their demands high, and by providing the necessary moral and financial support for educational institutions—can assure a high quality of teaching. Lacking such popular behavior, what professional forces can accomplish must remain strictly limited.

This is not, of course, to deny that professional forces have an essential role to perform. To them, indeed, the challenge to help provide today's and tomorrow's children with teachers worthy of their tasks is tremendous. Many agencies share that challenge: the colleges, to which the right to prepare teachers has been confided; the state departments of education, in which the responsibility of coordination has been reposed; the school systems, which have the power of actual employment, which determine the conditions under which teachers pursue their profession, and which influence the vocational decisions of youth; and the universities, with their powerful resources for helping in professional development. Any of these that fails to grasp the urgency of the contemporary need, or does not redouble its efforts to help in meeting that need, must stand convicted of dereliction of duty.

There remains one other group upon whose behavior the determination of

who shall teach notably depends—the great body of young people who might become teachers and of older people who are doing or have already done so. With their country's need so great, youth should give more serious thought to teaching as a lifework. Those who have wisely selected the profession should devote themselves with special dedication to the tasks of preparation. And those who are already at the teacher's work should strive continually to increase their competence. For the selection of an individual to teach does not determine once and for all the caliber of service that will be rendered. That must always depend in great measure upon his own enlarging vision, his own deepening devotion, his own continuing efforts. When asked, "Who shall teach?" the particular teacher's first responsibility is to choose between himself as he is and the person he might make himself become.

What Attributes Are Valid?

All concerned with determining who shall teach will need to bear certain considerations in mind. They must have clear ideas as to the qualities particularly needed in teachers for our times. They must take into account the probability of the future achievement of such qualities as well as the evidence of their existence at any given stage of an individual's development. And they must accept the inevitability, as well as recognize the desirability, of individual variations in the patterning of qualities that characterize good teachers. The qualities in teachers particularly needed can be deduced from the functions essential to good performance. These functions have to do with the relations the teachers bear to society, to accumulated knowledge,

to children, and to each other. As representatives of a democratic society, appointed to promote its evolving interests, teachers should share and exemplify its basic values: respect for personality, social-mindedness, and commitment to rational procedures. They should be sincere students of the contemporary social scene and willing participants in contemporary community activities. They should understand and know how to discharge their responsibility of helping young Americans become good and effective citizens.

If they are to have rich resources on which to draw while carrying out their duties, teachers must possess much knowledge, and know how readily to find more as the need may arise. It is desirable that their scholarship should be broad and integrated, and most important that it should be functional—capable, that is, of being related to the interests and needs of today's society and today's boys and girls. A teacher's knowledge should also be continually increasing.

But the command of knowledge is far from being enough in a teacher—the resource is of little value, indeed, unless effectively employed. Hence skill in the mediation of knowledge, and in the development of positive and critical attitudes towards it, is essential. Equally important is ability to develop other democratic attitudes and also—in a world where this capacity is increasingly needed—skill in cooperative behavior. Success in all these respects obviously depends upon ability to achieve right relationships with children, itself dependent on an affectionate approach to them and an understanding of their growth and development.

Explicit mention has been made of the

importance of a teacher's participation in community and larger social affairs, and an equal emphasis on the need for ability to work cooperatively in the classroom has been at least implied. It is quite as essential that a teacher should know how to play an effective part in the common affairs of the school and school system of which he is a member, and in the professional organizations to which he will naturally belong. In these settings as in all others the good teacher will be a good citizen. Capacity to deal with educational issues of broader than purely personal reference is called for, as are habits of cooperation and skill in educational evaluation.

In all relationships certain basic qualities, desirable in every democratic citizen, are particularly valuable in teachers. These are intellectual competence, emotional surefootedness, abundant health, and creative power—characteristics that influence each other and may therefore well be listed in a single sentence. Finally, faith in the worth of teaching deserves the emphasis that attends concluding mention. For despite all else no one is likely to do well what he does not fully believe in.

Provide for Steady Growth

The analysis that has been offered will no doubt seem to many to have under-emphasized or even missed certain points of importance. Yet it seems unlikely that

anyone would fail to welcome to the teaching ranks persons well developed in the various respects that have been specified. Indeed the danger is that Utopian demands may seem to have been made. Lest this appear to be the case the following comments should be made. First, we *must* set our sights high, and strive vigorously to hit what we see in them, if we are not to expose our children, our nation, and the whole human race to desperate risks. Second, it should be understood that there is no suggestion that the implied standards should be fully imposed at some particular early stage. Potentiality as well as accomplishment must always be considered, and universal provision made for continuous development of all needed qualities. Finally, the point should be repeated that uniformity must not be expected: good teachers, as unique personalities, will and should differ in the balance of qualities they possess.

"Who shall teach?" is a searching question. Any answer must take into account the functions of education. It must bear a clear relation to the needs of children and to the problems of the society of which they are the heirs. When those functions are as important, those needs and problems as tremendous, as they are in our country today, a brave and vigorous answer is essential. And what that answer calls for must be *made* to be!



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