The Teachers Our Schools Need

LESTER BALL, PAUL MISNER, HAROLD G. SHANE

What competencies are needed by teachers if they are to carry out their responsibilities successfully? In this recorded discussion Lester Ball, superintendent of the Highland Park, Illinois, schools, Paul Misner, superintendent of the Glencoe, Illinois, schools, and Harold G. Shane, professor of education at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, identify certain of these competencies and suggest changes that teacher training institutions will have to make in their instructional programs if they are to develop teachers who possess these qualifications.

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Ball: The first one I would suggest is that teachers after their training should be expected to have a belief in teaching; that is, they should come out of our teacher training institutions at least something other than ashamed of the fact that they are teachers. This hasn't always been the case.

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agree that teachers need to be skillful in planning learning experiences with students? Isn’t it important that they be able to observe the behavior of students and to recognize their individual needs, and then they should have the ability to plan with pupils so that there is a good deal of real student participation?

Shane: Another quality we can’t overlook is the matter of vigorous physical health. Beyond that, we probably would agree to include emotional balance, personal poise, and an awareness of principles of mental hygiene reflected in the life of the teacher. When teachers live meagerly, when they have limited experiences as far as recreation and adventure are concerned, they are likely to be rather dull companions to share five hours a day with children.

Ball: They’re not good for other adults either. No one is more important in interpreting the school to the community than the teacher, and the teacher who is a vital and secure person can make the richest contribution here.

Misner: It seems to me there’s another important area in which competencies need to be assured. Certainly a primary concern of the schools ought to be to prepare students adequately for the kind of world in which they are going to live. I would expect, therefore, that the teacher ought to be interested in the social scene and sensitive to its classroom implications. After all, youngsters who are in our classrooms now are obviously going to be living in a pretty complicated world and deserve and need the guidance of socially alert and sensitive teachers.

Ball: I would go one step further, Paul, and say that not only should teachers have social competency in terms of guiding children but they themselves should be effective participants in the problems of social living.

Shane: What do you consider to be involved in effective adult participation, Lester?

Ball: To vote and to discuss national affairs isn’t enough. I would like to see teachers active in all phases of community life with the same freedom other citizens enjoy.

There is still another ability I’d like to suggest. We should expect a teacher to have had the kinds of practical experiences in dealing with children in groups, and as individuals, that will enable him to exercise skill in what we generally call classroom management. Perhaps this isn’t a very philosophical point, but lack of this ability leads to the failure of many promising beginning teachers.

Shane: I think you’re touching on a very important point there, Lester. I’d like to add, however, that a good many inexperienced teachers graduate with the impression that a modern educational program is made up of methods or a “bag of tricks” through which one manages children. In addition to practical matters of management, the teacher needs to sense that school living involves applying intelligence to the solution of problems in terms of certain values. I think that teachers as a part of their educational experience ought to have many opportunities to apply values to problem situations. Unless they have these experiences they aren’t likely to help children solve real problems intelligently.

Misner: I wonder if we shouldn’t recognize that what we want in teach-
ers implies some pretty fundamental changes in the pattern of teacher education as we have known it. Do you think that we can get these competencies within the present framework of teacher education?

Ball: An important problem in this connection, Paul, is the problem of recruitment. In the past, teacher training institutions have attracted persons of below average ability. The result is that we have tried to work in pre-service education with a group of people who, frankly, were potentially not the best material.

Shane: Probably the nature of their pre-service experiences in many teacher training institutions did not help as much as it might have, Lester. Even now, I think, schools preparing teachers violate in their educational precepts and practices the very things that they are trying to help the students do more effectively with children. For example, at the college level you find subject-matter presented in unrelated compartments rather than through integrating experiences.

Ball: What you’re hinting at here, Harold, is the fact that the kind of training they have had predisposes them to the kind of teaching that we are trying to eliminate.

Shane: Another matter of importance is finding ways of bringing into the profession persons of ability with varied backgrounds. We want some people in our schools who know rural life. At the same time we want others who know industrial areas and people from professional families. We want persons who can work with their hands. We want individuals, in short, who bring a variety of experiences to their work with children. And above all, as I said at the outset, we want people of ability.

Misner: We seem to agree on the importance of more discriminate recruitment. Now, I would like to propose that the time has come when we should recognize the need for not less than five years of preparation for all teachers. I’d like to know what you men would say about this matter.

Ball: You’re right on the five years, Paul. Let’s consider these years in a sequence of the first two years of college experience, the second two, and then the fifth year. I would suggest that in the first two years, while it’s essential that we provide a broad cultural background for intelligent social living, we should develop a program that gives the prospective teacher experience in working with children. Perhaps the first year should be on an observational basis, with the second year’s experience broadened to include working informally with groups of children, so that from the beginning, college training bears some direct relationship to boys and girls.

Shane: The junior and senior years can be improved appreciably, too. Specifically, I think the colleges ought to increase their efforts to develop an experience curriculum in teacher training. As I proposed earlier, we should plan a more intimate relationship between the individual student and the college staff member who is working with students preparing to teach. I agree that they should have a much richer and more meaningful experience with children than they have had heretofore, and I believe that improved guidance for students is sadly
needed. Usually with very inadequate planning they have been exposed to two or three different age levels and left to sink or swim as best they could in terms of the experiences they managed to work out with the classroom teacher in charge. That brings us up to the matter of the fifth year which we discussed a moment ago.

**Misner:** I should like to see this fifth year planned with major emphasis on opportunities for a real internship experience on the part of prospective teachers. It seems to me that provisions should be made in our schools for the payment of scholarships, or subsidies, in order that these young people could spend an entire year working in the public schools under the supervision of a teacher training institution. Under such conditions the prospective teacher would have a much more varied and extensive preparation for teaching.

**Ball:** That's true, and it has one other promising feature. It provides a chance for teachers at the college level to get into the field and become more intimately acquainted with the problems of the public schools and the difficulties of beginning teachers. It can also be a means of vitalizing the entire in-service program of the schools.

**Shane:** One more point. As the fifth year becomes a reality might we not find, during the next ten years when our schools will be overcrowded, a means of using interne teachers to help lighten the growing teacher-pupil load?

**Ball:** If this will help serve the interests of children, I'm for it. The fifth year must be considered, however, primarily an internship experience for prospective teachers. It must not be employed as a means of reducing the number of regularly employed teachers. Exploitation of prospective teachers would destroy immediately the values inherent in the plan.

**Shane:** I heartily agree.

**Misner:** By way of summary, we seem to agree that a great need exists for the improvement of teacher education to provide our schools with more competent teachers. We agree, too, that like most other educational problems the solution of this one will require effective cooperation between teacher training institutions and public schools. It is quite apparent that teacher education will not be improved significantly so long as college and university programs continue to operate within ivory towers and so long as school administrators fail to cooperate with the colleges wherever and whenever they can. Can't we agree to hang together rather than to hang separately?