

Letters from Abroad

Gertrude Hankamp Fitzwater

Teachers and Their Training: Developments in Recent Years

☞ In recent times many of us have been impressed with the educational plans of the Government of India. The steps to extend educational opportunity throughout the country and the tremendous work of providing adequate buildings and teachers for numbers of new schools give to all of us a feeling of amazement and admiration for those engaged in this work in India. Prima Johari of the Ministry of Education of the Government of India in New Delhi sketches for us some of the problems involved and the ways in which they are being met.—*G. H. F.*

FOR ALMOST A DECADE the problem of teachers and their education has been prominently present in the minds of educators in India. There was a realization that the ignorance and illiteracy which has besieged the very great majority of India's people must be eradicated if she was to occupy her rightful place in the community of progressive nations and attain, some day, the status of a true democracy. Accompanying this realization came the urgent task of creating a capable and sufficient band of nation-builders.

A Search for Qualified Teachers

The task was a tremendous one. For not only did the paucity of education in this country inevitably make our teacher-returns all too slender, but what was almost more unfortunate, whatever stock we did have was of a poor quality: ill-educated, ill-paid, and miserably ill-equipped to shoulder the great responsibility that is the teacher's.

Inquiries were instituted and information collected. These deepened the conviction that the condition of the teaching

service, particularly at the lower (and most significant) stages of the educational system, was so unsatisfactory that unless the education and training of teachers was improved and their economic and social status raised, no real progress was possible. In the middle of November, 1942, a Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education met in Simla to consider the question of training, recruitment, and conditions of service of teachers. Its deliberations and consequent recommendations laid the cornerstone of future developments in this field.

The most important decisions of this Committee, which were later adopted by the Board of Education, were in regard to fixing the minimum basic qualifications for entry into the teaching profession, the duration and content of training for various grades of teachers, and a minimum national salary scale for teachers of the several grades.

The Teacher Shortage Is Universal

In more recent times, the aspect that has engrossed our attention is that of increasing the number of suitable teachers to man the countless schools that must be started if our scheme to introduce, with the minimum possible delay, a system of universal compulsory education for children in the age-group six to fourteen is to be implemented. In fact, the lack of a sufficient number of adequately qualified teachers is one of the main reasons for retarding our plans.

To somewhat bridge the gap and as an essentially temporary and emergent measure, in January, 1948, the Conference of Education Ministers and the Central Advisory Board of Education, whose meetings were held in Delhi, decided to

modify the recommendations of the 1942 Committee in regard to the duration of training and the minimum basic qualifications. The latter had declared that matriculation plus a two-years' training for the Junior Basic School teacher and three-years' training for the Senior Basic School teacher should be the minimum. The 1948 Conferences relaxed this standard to a years' training in addition to the matriculation examination or even the middle examination, if necessary, to meet the exigencies of the situation.

This lowering of standards has, to some extent, been counterbalanced by the provision of special short-term courses in selected subjects like geography and science, and by the holding of more frequent refresher classes. One province has carried out a particularly bold and useful experiment of instituting Mobile Training Squads which give a short intensive course of training to locally recruited untrained teachers at the centers where they are employed. Another province, with the object of augmenting the number of teachers, offered 300 stipends to middle school students on condition that they would enter Training Schools, and announced five advanced increments to graduates who contracted to enter the teaching profession.

Scholarships and a New Syllabus

In the matter of arranging special short-term courses and refresher classes, some of the already established progressive training centers have been especially helpful. Students from almost every province in the country are deputed for special training at these centers. Some Governments have even offered foreign scholarships to promising young men and women for teacher training and for courses in school administration.

Another important activity relating to teacher education, which has received growing attention in the last few years, originates from the reorientation that has occurred in our conception of the content and technique of elementary educa-

tion. The old orthodox ideas of the three R's and of passive instruction have given place to the activity principle and to a curriculum much wider than the three R's—a curriculum in which arts and crafts, music and physical culture, civics and social studies occupy a prominent place.

To suit this new concept of education for children, it has been necessary to re-fashion the syllabus of training schools and also to introduce instruction in the more progressive methods of teaching. The old type training schools have been replaced by the Basic Training Schools and Colleges. New institutions for training teachers for the recently started Basic Schools have also been opened. Basic Education Boards have been established, research departments attached to existing institutions, committees set up to examine the question of modifying the curriculum and for improving techniques, handbooks containing suggestions for Basic Education teachers published—all this to speed up the pace for reorientation and remodeling of training courses.

Improved Aids and Specialists

Simultaneously, and as a direct result of these reforms, improved teaching aids like school broadcasts and educational films are beginning to gain in popularity. Prospective teachers are given special training in the use of these new aids. Specialist training in music, arts and crafts, physical education, in vocational subjects like agriculture and carpentry, is being encouraged. Also, with the change from English to regional languages as the medium of instruction, improved methods of teaching modern Indian language are receiving particular emphasis.

Last, though perhaps not the least significant, is the importance that is now being attached to education in principles of child psychology and to mental testing. The Bureau of Psychology in Allahabad and the proposed Bureau in Delhi at the Institute of Education are witness of this development.

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