

The Men and the Boys in School-Community Cooperation

LLOYD ALLEN COOK

Have we made a fetish of school-community cooperation—"gone off our rocker" as the British say? Here is a critical article, asking that we rethink this issue.

IT IS plain to see that we have fetishized school and community cooperation, that we now preach it as an absolute good. This preachment has in it all the impulse to good doing which led most of us to enter teaching, to spend a lifetime at it. It has in it all the urgency of world saving, the *act now!* motions of firemen answering a five-gong bell. It has also, to name one other ingredient, a very bad logic, a way of thinking which in the long run can do neither school nor community any real good.

Teacher Ingroup Behaviors

To think about this business, one needs perspective and this is not easy to achieve. Many teachers now use such terms as *ingroup* without ever applying it to themselves, to a school staff, to all of us en masse. But that is a mistake for it neglects half the school-community problem, the way we as teachers tend to behave. One should, perhaps, think a moment on this, take a little time, for a frankly introspective picture can be hard to grasp.

Teaching is *work*, work of a certain kind. It brings teachers into contact with the consumers of their product, as does any service profession. An important effect is that clients direct, or seek to direct, the teachers at their

tasks. Clients apply sanctions and controls of various kinds—a suggestion here, an arched eyebrow there, pressures all along the line. There may be withdrawal of patronage, charges, threats, campaigns to get a worker fired.

These facts, and many more are needed, suggest our predicament. The act of teaching brings together (1) persons whose lives center about an occupational role, whose self concepts and ego strivings are rooted in that role, and (2) other persons—parents, pupils, administrators—whose relations to teaching are more casual, if this word will do. Any "whodunit" fan can smell trouble but let me try to trace it through.

By and large, teachers mistrust their clients. They regard them as unable or unwilling to appreciate good teaching, to judge its worth, to reckon the years spent in training for the job. In consequence of client attitudes, teachers resent any effort to take classroom control away from them, to locate it in parents, in pupils or elsewhere. Pupils are immature; they don't know. Parents are misinformed and opinionated. They are partial to their own child, their own kind. The public, what is that? Every teacher can name local pressure groups and, in the same breath,

Lloyd Allen Cook is professor of education at Wayne University, Detroit, Michigan. With Elaine Cook he has recently written a textbook on Intergroup Education (McGraw-Hill, 1953), dealing at length with the significant problems raised here.

contest their right to exercise control over the teaching task.

In this situation, what do teachers do? All things considered, we tend to isolate ourselves, to keep out of trouble, real or potential. We may even conjure up spooks to fear, to react to. We turn inward, elaborate our ingroup unities, speak our familiar soliloquies. Our shoptalk is much like that of any occupational group—how to ward off criticisms of the school, to get more pay for ourselves, better work conditions, and so on. Politicians know this, know these surefire appeals for the teacher vote. They love us, sure, but for the wrong reasons, meaning that they miss the loveable qualities we do have.

Cooperation as Fetish

I have yet to see a teacher or school head, one rising in the local status system, who did not favor closer school-community cooperation, who could not orate on it at the drop of a hat. I have listened to these speeches, no doubt made some of my own. I thrill to them, the same as anyone. But sometimes my thoughts may stray from some speaker who has climbed the stage, taken off on a cloud. How much of what he says is true? How much does he believe himself? What does he know about us as an ingroup? To be blunt about it, the boys in education talk a good line.

To get a deeper look at cooperation, let us examine a very influential little book. On its jacket, we read that this

volume is "the carrier of an epoch-making idea . . . out of which may evolve a basic revolution in the outlook of man upon man." For the "first time," we are told, "evidence is brought to show that cooperation, not conflict, is the natural law of life." What has been text material for countless Sunday sermons is, to conclude the quote, "now revealed as having a valid, scientific base."¹

Has it now, has it indeed? Not that any of us, or the world at large, does not need more of the spirit of mutuality, lest we destroy ourselves. Of course we do; we are no *anti* cooperators. But was Darwin such a bad scientist? Did he distort the true nature of organic life? Has he fooled his fellow scientists all these years? I think not. If cooperation has been dominant in human history, why all the wars and persecutions and rivalries? Is there no struggle for existence, for food and shelter and "beizbol"? Must we return to tribalism for security, depend upon a kind of ingroup nuzzling for "happy, joyous" children? Do we really value individuality, want people to mature?

Obviously, there is something wrong here, much I cannot go into. The main point is to keep balance, to let our normal senses work. Cooperate with whom? For what ends? Under what give-take conditions? We teachers tend to talk pretty loosely about cooperation—as if mother love never smothered

¹ Ashley Montagu, *On Being Human*. Schuman, New York, 1950. In a second book, *Darwin: Competition and Cooperation* (1952), the author seeks to overtake his first writing. He explains that his theory of cooperation does not conflict with Darwin's data, but rather extends them.

anyone, as if school or college can't be too tight, too compulsive, to permit growth. As if robber barons, five percent chiselers, income tax dodgers, did not cooperate!

All of this can be disturbing to professional cooperators, the boys in and out of education who make a living talking this line. For the teacher, the point is as said, to keep balance, to appreciate the field of forces in which all life is cast. Our society could not be the society it is without competition and conflict. To rule them out, if that were possible, would cost far more than the average American would care to pay. He likes to differ with his neighbor, to grumble at his government, to be a freeholder in the old sense. He wants cooperation, unity, and so on, wants them when he needs them, when some group-wise problem must be solved, but no more of them than he has to have.

Which Community?

The men in education often raise with teachers a rather difficult question. With which community do they wish to cooperate? What scheme of life are they educating for? If, by the very nature of the teaching task, the pragmatic amorality of the scientist is denied us, which side are we on? Here the men and the boys may cluster or they may divide. Let us test this out.

Imagine that your field is social education, that you spend part of your work time as a consultant on school and community problems. Suppose a miracle happens. The superintendent of schools in, say, Chicago, asks you to assist a representative school-citizen committee in making a study of race

prejudice in the schools. What would you do? Where would you begin?

"Let us start," said Wirth,² "at the ground level." What about school districts? Have they been gerrymandered to shut people in and out on a racial basis? Given a study staff, any school sociologist could answer this query. Once these facts were in, what then? File the report; forget it? Firm up the color line; shift some more pupils about? Move on prejudice; try to eradicate it? Clearly, *values* are involved, a choice of which tacks to sit on. It is here that I like the Chicago case, for I have been talking fact. Sensing trouble in trying to rid the schools of prejudice, this study-action group affirmed three moral principles. Every child should go, with the consent of his parents, to the school nearest his home. No child should have to cross a main traffic way if this could be avoided. Each public school should be used to its maximum capacity, thus saving taxpayer money.

One can call these principles by different names—practical, economical, democratic. The name I prefer is incontestable, for no thoughtful person, unless he disbelieves in public education, can argue well against them. They are not abstruse, or arbitrary, or particularistic. They are common-sense, workable and apply to all children. They are, or should be, the legal rights of all young Americans.

To get on with the case, how did it turn out? After the survey data were digested, school redistricting was begun. Anticipating on-going popula-

² In conversation with the late Professor Louis Wirth, University of Chicago. Wirth assisted the city public schools in this ongoing project.

tion changes, it was made policy to repeat the survey from time to time. But what I am most impressed with is the action phase of this project, for example the way pupil rerouting was handled. There were no scare headlines, no making of political capital. The job was done as matter of factly as ordering next year's coal supply. Of course parents came in to protest, and so did local pressure groups, as they have a right to do. Were they against every child attending his nearest school? No. Did they want any child to cross big traffic ways? No. Was it wrong to use each school to its maximum capacity? No. What, then, was the fuss about? Whatever the answer, it has seemed to provide no firm ground on which to stand.

Cooperate with whom? For what ends? Are these questions impossible to answer, as the boys so often affirm? Let us see about that. Are Negroes people? Are Mexicans people? Immigrant stocks? Jews? Catholics? Any and all minorities and majorities? If these people are people, Uncle Sam says they have rights. *They have full and equal citizen rights, their entitlements under law.* Second, are these common rights possessed by every citizen, assuming he meets the obligations each right implies? It seems to me pretty hard to get mixed up on this, to escape some sort of decision in terms of ground-level facts. Do people have their rights or not, and if not, where do the boys and the men now stand? This is, I would add, no special pleading, for the questions apply to any American and to us all.

Yes, the questions just raised apply to us all. To make this as real as possible

to teachers, I shall take another issue, one that involves our jobs. Again, space permits only a brief account.

Freedom To Study and To Teach

War times, whether hot or cold, are hard times on persons who value freedom. The pinch at present is in relation to Soviet communism, the imminent danger of world war. Though it has been argued many times that the world is big enough for different peoples, that some scheme of co-existence can be worked out, I shall pass up this complex issue. My concern will be with local communism, or more exactly with un-American "thought control."

"We were profoundly shocked," writes Biddle,³ "when Alger Hiss was convicted, when Julian Wadleigh . . . could steal information and hand it to a Russian. 'I just don't think,' Wadleigh is quoted as saying, 'that the word steal is very descriptive of what transpired.' Had this person been paid for his action, what he did would have been easy to understand. But he had not been bribed. He had followed the dark impulse . . . to be a traitor to his country for some imagined larger good of mankind."

Treason is treason and Biddle, a former U.S. Attorney General, makes clear that it should be dealt with. But this is not his major concern in the book I am reviewing. "Ours is a changed generation," he says, "more timid, less sure, defensive, and uncertain." This introduces the volume's theme, a critical study of the work of the House of Representatives and other committees on "un-American activities."

³ Francis Biddle, *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 6. Doubleday, 1952.

Before continuing this, let us raise a prior question. How do a frightened people behave? Under the stimulus of fear, what are human relations like? We cannot, of course, answer, for we have no data covering the nation, nothing the men in education could trust. Yet everyone has had experiences; everyone can cite relevant incidents and cases. Cousins' ⁴ study of Peoria comes to mind. Among persons with whom he talked was a professor.

"I am afraid," to quote this professor, "that the attack on the UN is part of something much bigger. The old nationalistic crowd is riding high, getting a strong hold on this community. People you used to be able to count on to keep things from getting too unbalanced don't seem to be anxious to speak up. It's the old story. You stick your neck out and you get the label of Communist. That's the end of you in this community."

What about your own teaching, professor, tell us about that?

"If you're teaching, say, about Europe, the Far East, or the like, you don't know whether to give the facts as you understand them or to say to yourself, the hell with the facts, then teach what will look good. Now, if someone wants to accuse teachers of being subversive on that account, he's right. More and more of us are doing exactly what they are doing in Russia. We're finding out what is safe and sticking to that. . . . How do you measure a good teacher these days? Simple. Someone who knows how to stay out of trouble. Forget everything else, just keep your nose clean."

⁴ Norman Cousins, "Peoria," *Saturday Review*, May 3, 1952, pp. 24-25.

Let me say at once that I have never seen such teaching, that no professor whom I know acts quite like that. But the signs of it are here, the omens and portents. What happens next to anyone of us is pure guess, unless Uncle Sam wakes up, takes hold of a trend which still looks manageable.

Biddle reviews the history of our plight—the old congressional un-American committees and the current ones, the Smith Act, McCarthyism, the McCarran law and much else. "Inevitably," he concludes, "a new form of control is established, control over thought," rather than over action plus intent as in traditional due process law. "For, to inquire into a man's associations—the groups to which he is attached, the individuals with whom he mingles, his friends, his relatives—can have but one object, *to discover and police his thoughts.*"

How does this business work? What are its mechanics? "The prosecution proves," says Biddle, "that the defendant was a member, that the organization did advocate violence, and rests. But, the defendant protests, he did not know what the organization advocated, so that he had no evil intent, and, secondly, he didn't cause anything, do anything. . . . But, under present law, he is guilty. His membership is sufficient proof. He is presumed to have known organizational objectives. By the mere act of joining the organization, he becomes legally the cause of evil."

This is "guilt by association," with proof of membership being accepted as proof of evil intent (subversiveness). This has found many recent dramatic

illustrations and many, too, that never make the national press, that occur day by day in schools and colleges in every part of the country. The New York City Boards of Education, higher and lower, provide a striking current example.

In October, these boards dismissed six public school teachers and three municipal college professors for refusing to state at a committee hearing whether they were or had ever been Communist Party members. The boards acted under a section of the city charter which provided that if a city employee declined to answer a question about official business on the grounds that his reply would tend to incriminate him, this person can be fired. All nine teachers had believed in our Fifth Amendment, the right of any citizen to refuse to give evidence which might incriminate him.

Where, now, do the boys and men stand? And the many, many women in education, whom, generically speaking, I have included all along with them? Here I would distinguish between the very narrow fringe, the lunatic fringe found in every occupation, and the great body of American teachers, the core of the profession. If this distinction is accepted, I would venture three guesses on the questions just asked.

First, no teacher whom I know or

know about is a Soviet communist. He or she would not, in serious moments, ever want to be one. Communism is as un-American, as contrary to our ideas and ideals, as anything could be. What it does to children, if nothing else, would condemn it among educators.

Second, all Americans have legal rights, including freedom of thought and speech and association, within the limits set by the U.S. Supreme Court's "clear and present danger" clause and due process law. Teachers will stand *on* and *for* these legal rights, for themselves and for all citizens. They will not absorb Comintern philosophy, take over the enemy's tactics, thus lose the battle for freedom here and abroad before it is really fought.

Third, I cannot see how the McCarran law can possibly hold under repeated Supreme Court tests. Today, October 16, a U.S. Court of Appeals has ruled that "mere membership" in a group listed by the Attorney General's office as subversive is not sufficient basis for discharging a federal employee on loyalty grounds. I doubt if this quite hits the bull's-eye, the issue of guilt by association, but if it does not there will be other cases. One way or the other, I think that a large number of teachers will want to study this matter, be heard and counted on it.



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