

# Issues and Problems in *Teacher Supply*

This article indicates pertinent questions and answers related to the problem of teacher supply.

**T**HE SUPPLY of competent teachers for the schools, both public and private, is a legitimate concern of everyone in our society. No one knows exactly how dependent every aspect of our culture is on education, but every thoughtful person knows that in general our society is strong largely because of our schools. And those who think a little further know that good schools are better for society than poor schools, and that good schools can be had only with an adequate supply of competent teachers.

If supervisors and curriculum directors really believe what is said in the paragraph above, they should act accordingly. To do so, they will have to mesh their own efforts with the efforts of other groups if they are to get and hold an adequate supply of qualified teachers. They cannot afford to act independently as if they were the only persons concerned with this problem. Perhaps the best they can do as a group is to develop some principles to

guide their members as they work within groups that are more broadly based. These principles may be suggestive:

1. In the determination of policies and procedures for the recruitment, preparation and retention of teachers the welfare of society should be kept uppermost.

2. The immediate needs of the schools for performing their functions with children and with the communities in which they are located should be the next consideration.

3. The continuous improvement of the teaching profession itself should be high on the list of considerations by any group dealing with the teacher supply problem.

## Some Issues and Problems

The development of measures in harmony with such principles as those just stated is likely to raise certain issues and meet with certain obstacles. The remainder of this statement deals with some of the more obvious issues and problems.

### *Who Shall Be Permitted To Teach?*

In the final analysis, this question must be answered by each state sep-

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arately because the certification of teachers is a state function. Most states now leave such technical matters to state boards of education, but some still depend upon their legislative bodies to determine standards in broad outline. Regardless of the final authority, most state departments of education have some discretionary power in the interpretation and application of certification requirements. Increasingly, though, these officials are turning to laymen and professional personnel from various positions in education to advise with them concerning the requirements that should be set for entry into the teaching profession. It is important, therefore, that those in status leadership positions be prepared to help decide who shall be permitted to teach.

The first and most fundamental issue relevant to this question relates to the level of education required of a teacher. This pertains especially but not exclusively to elementary school teachers. Some persons hold that teachers need not necessarily be well educated persons. Those who take this position do so for a variety of reasons. Persons interested primarily in subject matter fields are more concerned with the teacher's knowledge of a particular field than with the level of his education in the broad sense. Another group seems to believe that the teacher needs to know only a little more than the children so long as he knows a great deal about the way these children learn. A third position—that the teacher must first be a well educated person—stems from a different concept of the functions of a teacher. If the teacher, according to those holding this view, is

to interpret our society to the youth who are about to enter it as full participants, he must himself understand the major elements of that culture; which is another way of saying he must be well educated. If the teacher is to work with educated adults in the improvement of community living and with the parents of the children who come to school, then, says this group, he must also be a well educated person.

The first issue relevant to this question is important because the answer to it has a bearing on the kind of persons we are trying to supply. It is important also because the answer to it leads logically to another issue. The second issue relates to what, if anything, beyond being a well educated person should be required of a person for entry into the teaching profession. There are some who apparently believe that any well educated, well balanced person should by virtue of those qualifications be permitted to teach. Often they criticise certification requirements on the grounds that these exclude some well educated persons. In doing so they fail to realize that no profession accepts a person simply because he is well educated. There are others who believe that those who are permitted to teach should be well educated *plus*. This group points out that the difference between being well educated and being qualified to teach is probably not as great as being well educated and being qualified to practice law, medicine or accounting, but it believes the difference is just as significant.

If supervisors and directors of instruction are to be helpful with lay and professional groups trying to decide who should be permitted to teach,

they will need to think their way through to a clearly defined position on both of these issues.

#### *How Shall Teachers Be Recruited?*

Several issues of importance to status leaders are involved in this question but only one of these will be mentioned here. This one relates to the role of teachers in the recruitment of teachers. Two divergent points of view are held among educators and laymen on this issue. One group believes that the schools through the teachers are responsible for seeing to it that enough high school graduates enter teacher education curricula in colleges to fill the teaching vacancies as they occur in the schools. It has been put this way: If a superintendent of schools asks a college for twelve teachers this year, that college is justified in refusing to recommend its graduates unless the superintendent can show that at least twelve of his high school graduates of the previous year are preparing to become teachers.

Other educators challenge this point of view for two reasons. They believe, in the first place, that the schools and consequently the teachers have a social responsibility which the position of the other group violates. They say that the schools should take just as much responsibility for seeing to it that enough of its graduates prepare for medicine, law, engineering, accounting, nursing, the ministry, or agriculture to meet the needs of society as for seeing to it that enough of its graduates to meet the needs of the schools prepare for teaching. And, in the second place, they point out that to exploit their relationship with students is to violate their

responsibility for providing objective information on all occupations. Each student has an inherent right to choose his own occupation on the basis of the most reliable data that he can assemble.

The teachers and those who would provide leadership among them need to know where they stand on this issue. The answer has a bearing on the procedures to be followed in attempting to solve the teacher supply problem.

#### *What Programs of Teacher Education Should Be Encouraged?*

The standing of a profession in a society and the quality of service which it renders are determined largely by the quality of the institutions which prepare its members. With reference to the teaching profession, however, a special kind of quality needs to be included. It is not enough for an institution to be strong; it must apply that strength to the particular task of preparing teachers. And there is the rub: When is an institution using its strength properly in the education of teachers? This question is full of issues pertinent to the teacher supply problem. The most fundamental one is whether the program should require an almost complete dedication of the prospective teacher to his future professional functions or whether the program should be designed to foster both the prospective teacher's personal development and his professional competence. The other issues grow out of this one.

Typically, programs for the preparation of elementary school teachers have required an early dedication of the prospective teacher to the development of those understandings and skills

that will be used directly in the teaching of children. The curricula have been fashioned to that end. If what the prospective teacher has learned has contributed to his educational stature as a person, not as a teacher, it has been more incidental than purposeful. Such programs, say its critics, will reduce the supply and lower the quality of persons who will participate in them.

At the other extreme, many programs for the preparation of secondary school teachers have required little or no dedication of the prospective teachers to the development of the understandings and skills that will be used directly in teaching adolescents. Instead, the prospective secondary school teacher has been permitted to give first attention to his own education and only secondary consideration to his preparation for the functions he will later be performing as a teacher.

Where should educational leaders interested in an adequate supply of competent teachers stand on this issue? Their stand in the long run will doubtless influence the curricula for teacher education which, in turn, will affect the supply of teachers. The requirement of almost complete dedication to the profession at the sacrifice of personal considerations may rebuff many potentially competent persons. Conversely, to require practically no dedication in the preparatory period may cause many to fail to enter the profession after preparing for it or to leave it after a year or two of teaching. The fact that a higher percentage of persons who prepare to teach at secondary school level than at the elementary school level fail to enter teaching after they are prepared and drop out to enter

other occupations seems to support this belief. Educational leaders will have to decide what kind of curriculum is most likely to assure able persons of adequate attention to their own education and at the same time assure the dedication necessary to cause those who prepare for teaching to enter the profession and to be reluctant to leave it. Such a curriculum will have to be somewhere between the typical preparation of elementary school teachers and the typical preparation of secondary school teachers.

#### *What Standards Should Be Held for Admission to Professional Organizations?*

A distinction needs to be drawn here between professional status and snob appeal. Certainly the kind of social service-minded person needed by the teaching profession will not be attracted by a profession that constitutes an exclusive club. Neither is such a person likely to be drawn to a profession with no technical requirements for admission to its highest policy forming bodies. It is one thing for professional bodies to cooperate with other groups and organizations on public matters but quite another thing to admit just anybody to its membership.

These are some of the issues with reference to which supervisors and curriculum directors need to come to grips. Laymen and teachers need help in arriving at a sound position with reference to each of them. Status leaders will be able to give that help only after careful thought to such issues. The welfare of society, the schools, and the profession all need to be taken into account in arriving at a sound position on them.

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