

# A Master Teacher in Every Classroom

**"The getting of a sufficient number of qualified teachers in our population for the elementary and secondary schools is not an impossible task. Whether society will concern itself sufficiently to get these prepared people into the classrooms is another question."**

**S**HORTAGES of a given commodity in the market place, if long sustained, inevitably result in the emergence of competitive substitutes.

The continuing teacher shortage, already in its second decade, has evoked a number of proposed substitutes for the competent teacher. And these proposals are usually accompanied by labored analogies of teaching with medical practice and industry, in which teaching is pictured as a stick-in-the-mud laggard. There are proposals to increase the load of each qualified teacher materially, providing some compensation to the over-loaded teacher in the form of mechanical and human aids. Perhaps the most publicized proposal is that of using nonprofessional teacher aides. One suggestion is to increase the normal pupil load from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 times. Another is to increase the load to 90 children per room and teacher. While still another asserts that 200 to 300 children could be taught effectively by one qualified teacher, if the number of aids and aides were increased proportionately. And there are, of course, implied if not explicit claims that huge groups could be taught in some subjects by the use of technological equipment. Then there is the more popular proposal

that the "master teacher" idea be utilized widely.

In discussing these proposed remedies for an admittedly acute crisis in teacher supply, it seems obvious that the remedies can hardly be treated in terms of absolutes, as "either-or" propositions. It seems obvious that these proposals will find their proper role of usefulness; that there will be neither complete acceptance nor rejection, but a critical search for the best, the most valid possible uses of them.

Since there seem to be many definitions of the "master teacher" concept, perhaps I should indicate its meaning as I understand it. This concept would employ a superior or master teacher to head a team of ordinary run-of-the-mill, sub-standard teachers, or nonprofessional persons. The master teacher would serve as the directing, supervising or helping teacher for the group. In industry this relationship would be that of a sort of foreman who directs semiskilled and unskilled laborers. The argument for this arrangement is that since there are not enough qualified teachers—and, as some have it, there is no possibility in the foreseeable future of getting an adequate supply—the next best procedure is to

make certain that the talents of one master teacher be made available to as many children as possible. Also there is the implied theory that contact with the master teacher will favorably influence the teaching competence of the team.

These are but two (the teacher aide and the master teacher proposal) of the most popular, seemingly the most plausible of the proposed substitutes. Essentially, the two ideas are the same, for each would attempt to spread the influence of the superior teacher among a vastly larger number of children than would be true under normal circumstances. What of the validity of these ideas? I suppose the answer to this question would depend upon one's belief about the purpose of education. If one conceives of education as simply the rote learning of predetermined subject matter, perhaps the plans will work with reasonable effectiveness.

But, from my viewpoint, education that ignores or neglects motivation, readiness, maturation, that does not seek to develop the ability to do critical thinking, the ability to make value judgments is not education at all but an insidious kind of intellectual regimentation. And teaching that fails to recognize and nurture the deep validity of each person is not teaching at all—it is instruction.

### Evidence on Class Size

Time and again proponents of these two plans have stated that there is no evidence that children learn better in normal-size classrooms of 25 or 30. To state that there is no evidence that a normal-size classroom produces better educational results than the larger ones will not bear critical examination.

First, and to my mind the most valid of all, is the testimony of experienced

teachers. But this type of evidence will be immediately discounted as being subjective. On this basis, much of the progress of mankind could be ruled out as a figment of the imagination. Indeed, most of the professions have been built upon subjective judgments of practitioners, upon hypotheses which stimulated research. Subsequent research resulted in discarding some of the hypotheses and in verifying others. In matters so complex and intangible as the growth influences on human beings, subjective judgments based upon observation and experience may, indeed, be the most valid of all research.

On this point, Ray Maul has recently pointed out that class size in elementary schools, generally, is already dangerously high and warned that "Plausibly stated arguments and carefully controlled experiments to the contrary, final judgment as to the maximum number of pupils an elementary school teacher should undertake to teach will be determined by the teacher himself. Beyond the level of tolerance of each teacher, the increase in class size will tend to reduce the present supply of competent teachers by driving them out of the profession."<sup>1</sup>

Second, a review of research in class size at Columbia University, covering 250 studies made between 1903 and 1950, reports that of the 22 studies (among the 250) which were judged to meet six major criteria of validity, 16 favored small classes, three favored large classes, and three were inconclusive. "This," reports the study, "seems to lay two old ghosts: (a) there have been so many studies of class size in the past that if anything useful were going to be found it would have been found; and (b) the

<sup>1</sup> Ray C. Maul. "Is Class Size a Factor in Recruiting Teachers?" *Journal of the National Education Association* 45:416-17, October 1956.

weight of past evidence favored large classes as much as it did small ones."<sup>2</sup> Also, these studies reported that the full results of altered class size are not evident (or measurable) until the lapse of two or three years; and that advantages of small classes are much more pronounced in elementary grades than in high school grades.

Of course, the designation of a normal size as a precise number is hardly feasible because that number will vary with teachers, pupils, subjects, objectives and localities. The teaching profession has always recognized the necessity for reasonable flexibility in determining class size. Yet the profession is quite often pictured as adamant in demanding absolutes of 25 and 30, no more, no less, as fixed and unvarying.

Moreover, the NEA Research Division, in a study in 1956 of pupil behavior, reported teacher opinion as being overwhelming that the larger the enrollment, the greater the evidence of pupil misbehavior.<sup>3</sup>

### The Teacher Aide Plan

Properly conceived and used, the teacher aide idea has merit. It is not, in my judgment, an answer to the shortage of teachers and classrooms. As an emergency measure, to lighten the burden on already overcrowded classrooms and overloaded teachers, until we can get the needed classrooms and teachers, it has great value. But as a long-range or permanent proposal, its value, it seems to me, lies in the possibility of freeing the

teacher of a normal-size class from routine work so that he can do individual work with pupils.

In one class of 53 pupils at Bay City, the teacher, who was enthusiastic about the plan, was asked, "Suppose you could have a normal-size class and the aide too?" "Oh, that would be heavenly," she said, "because any way you look at it even with an aide I still have a pupil load of 53. No number of aides can relieve me of that responsibility."

Recently the Superintendent of the Bay City Schools reported for his staff to the City Board of Education on how the plan was working. In substance, the report said: (a) as an emergency measure to alleviate the shortage of classrooms and teachers, the plan was considered successful; (b) the plan is not a panacea for such shortages, as some outsiders are claiming; and (c) the members of the staff were unanimous in the conclusion that they would prefer small size classes without aides to the large classes with aides.

If I interpret correctly conversations with teachers, many teachers in all parts of the country, the basic frustration they have is the sense of being overloaded—with classroom duties and nonschool and fringe duties—to the breaking point. This is, I believe, more soul wearying to teachers than anything else, this sense of inability to perform the professional tasks for which they have been prepared. This complaint, by far, takes precedence over all other factors, including dissatisfaction with salary. Any aide plan that offers any promise of relieving this situation will be embraced by teachers—with a normal-size class, not with a class

<sup>2</sup> Donald H. Ross and Bernard McKennan, *Class Size: The Multi-Million Dollar Question*, Institute of Administrative Research (Study No. 11) New York: Columbia University, 1955, 24 p.

<sup>3</sup> National Education Association, Research Division, "Teacher Opinion on Pupil Behavior, 1955-56." *Research Bulletin* 34:51-107, April 1956.

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whose size has been increased to the extent that the aide is only a sop to pile on still more load, to multiply the sense of frustration.

### The Master Teacher Concept

I am all for master teachers. But I am for a master teacher in every classroom. I think children are entitled to that, not one master teacher whose genius is somehow supposed to rub off on a group of nondescript, nondirecting, nonprofessionals and, thus, in still further diluted form, to several hundred children. I can see the desirability, if a school system is fortunate enough to have a William Lyon Phelps or a George Santayana, for the entire student body to have some contact with such personalities. But who is going to do the routine acts, perform the drudgery after the genius has projected his inspiration? Who is going to grade the papers, interpret and diagnose the results of tests and papers, laboriously keep track of the successes, the heart breaks, the frustrations of 30 or 40 or 90 or 300 youngsters, and assume the back-breaking, often heart-breaking task of shepherding each one toward maturity and fulfillment. Rice<sup>4</sup> has stated the case well: "It is true that the example of a great teacher (who is often also a great actor) has a salutary effect. Yet the analogy which is sometimes drawn between the master teacher and the master surgeon is misleading. After the anesthetic, after the first incision, the surgeon can go down the line removing gall bladders one after another; but the case is different with the master teacher. He

cannot go from classroom to classroom, after somebody has erased the board and passed out the papers and given the assignment for the next day, to say the five necessary words about Shakespeare here and the five necessary words about Spenser there and then pass on to Milton."

I can see, for example, that teaching by television may be done effectively with large groups in some skill subject such as typing. I can see, and I think it is inevitable that we shall have more of this, teaching by television as a supplement and enrichment in all fields. In a field such as science where equipment is expensive, where content and concepts are changing at a geometric pace, certainly television will become of increasing value in teaching and its use is just beginning. I see these, however, as means of improving the quality, the effectiveness of teaching, not as replacing the competent teacher.

I am for the master teacher in every classroom because I am certain that this can be done, if society wants it done. What bothers the proponents of these plans is, I suspect, that we have too many teachers in our classrooms now who cannot be classified as master teachers. And the evidence is that the inferior teacher is still an inferior teacher, regardless of class size. They argue, therefore, with some justification, that almost any plan would be an improvement. What they overlook or ignore is that too little has been done by society to get master teachers and keep them. But the growing complexity of our world is going to demand that this be done. And it can be done. If for one decade society should support for teaching the same degree of selectivity, the same quality of preparation, the same competitive remuneration as it does for medicine or most of the other so-

<sup>4</sup> Warner G. Rice. "Efficient and Effective Teaching." *Current Issues in Higher Education*, 1956. Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual National Conference on Higher Education. Washington, D. C.: the Association, a department of the National Education Association, 1956. p. 17-21.

called private professions, every classroom would be staffed by a professionally competent master teacher.

The chief support for these proposed substitutes for the competent teacher arises from a sense of hopelessness that this nation will ever be able again (or at least in the foreseeable future) to construct enough classrooms and to get and keep enough competent teachers to serve its children under what have been considered normal conditions.

The Commission which I represent does not take a defeatist attitude about balancing teacher supply and demand. The basic cause of the teacher shortage, among others of course, as it is with other professional fields, is the imbalance in the number of births during the 1930's and recent years. Naturally, time will be required to bring into proportionate balance the two age pools—the one creating the increased demand for teachers and the other from which an increased supply of teachers must be drawn. But there is some evidence that that time is coming much sooner than many have predicted. College enrollments are now reaching new all-time peaks each year. The increase in enrollments in teacher education is exceeding the general college increase. The annual production of new teachers has started back up, after a steady decline between 1950 and 1954, and will show significant increases each year hereafter. Barring war or some such national emergency, the getting of a sufficient number of qualified teachers in our population for the elementary and secondary schools is not an impossible task. Whether society will concern itself sufficiently to get these prepared people into the classrooms is another question.

The threat of constantly lowered standards, resulting from the continued short supply of teachers, is used to in-

fluence acceptance of the proposed alternatives. The record does not seem to support this fear. The preparation level of employed teachers has shown a steady increase since 1949 (the first year for which we have conclusive data). In 1946, about 123,000 emergency teachers were employed—about 1 in 7. In 1956-57, the number is estimated at about 80,000 which is roughly 1 in 15, and the annual number is now declining. In the meantime, states have consistently upgraded minimum certification requirements, both for emergency and regular certificates. Since 1946, the number of states requiring a degree for beginning elementary teachers has increased from 15 to about 36. Obviously, the answer to the problem of teacher supply is higher standards, not lowered ones.

We can get the classrooms and we can get the teachers. But to do the latter teaching must be made our pre-eminent profession and provisions, safeguards and status commensurate with that concept constitute the great need. There is no magic way to solve this problem. There is no shortage of resources to get the classrooms and the teachers, if the American people are willing to bring the general welfare into balance with individual well being.

### Challenges of the Future

It is to be seriously doubted that American parents will acquiesce in having their children under the direction of teachers who are not capable of self-direction, but who must be guided themselves in the performance of tasks which are highly professional and of paramount importance to parents. Rice, in the reference previously cited, quotes a great teacher as saying, "I hate a pupil teacher; I endure not an instructor that

comes to me under the wardship of an overseeing fist."

It seems to me the greatest fallacy in the many proposals for increasing the per-teacher product is to assume a specious analogy with industry or with medicine. It is the assumption that industrial assembly lines may, in some measure, be simulated in our schools. I think the assumption of such an analogy is a mirage. It is a confusion of the inanimate with the animate, of the inert with the dynamic. It is the erroneous assumption that human beings, like things, will always react exactly the same under the same set of circumstances.

One would be naive indeed to contend, amid drastic changes and improvements in technology and in media of communication, that the processes of education will remain unaffected. The clear evidence to anyone who will take a critical look is that there will be profound changes in methodology, and in the greater effectiveness and enrichment of teaching through the use of technology.

We must contemplate education as functioning at rapidly graduating levels of skills and understanding. The shift in job emphases which an increasing automation will dictate inevitably means broader and deeper liberal education. It inevitably means preparation of vastly increased numbers of our population for professional, scientific, technological, ar-

tistic, and aesthetic services. But I insist that this means that teaching must be, as it has never been before, a highly personalized endeavor. Real teaching, not to be confused with instruction, has always been a personal thing. It must continue to be this, but more so.

To my mind, teacher loads in the future must be cut, not increased. Teaching must be made more intensely personal, not made increasingly impersonal. Furthermore, it seems clear to me that the cardinal weakness of teachers has not been, as the critics generally assert, the lack of mastery of the basic disciplines and the lack of ability to marshal factual material, as great as this lack has quite often been. The crucial weakness has been the failure to keep abreast and to be able to apply the available and validated research in human values—of growth and development, of motivation, of the principles of learning. Sometimes this weakness resulted from lack of competence, but quite as often from stultifying conditions which prevented the competent teacher from functioning at optimum capacity. This weakness will not be corrected but will be made more tragically apparent by assuming that machines and aides can compensate for a vastly increased load for each professional teacher.

Yes, I am all for master teachers—one in every classroom.

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