

Fashioning an Alternative to Ignorance

THERE is no educational frontier which remains generally so uncultivated as that of improving and continuing the education of teacher personnel. The fact that this function is of pervasive importance is, nevertheless, confessed on every hand. From Horace Mann's time to the present day, educational literature is filled with unqualified acknowledgements of the central role of the teacher. However, many things certainly more peripheral than this role continue to receive a major part of the time and attention of educational leaders.

This is no doubt true in part because tangibles are more easily attended, their natures are more immediately demanding, and one can see at once what

progress is being made. In addition, the problem of improving teacher personnel is primarily a long range problem. For more than 20 years now many such matters have been crowded into obscurity by a tumbling stream of expediency, imperative problems demanding immediate attention.

Perhaps a third reason for the recent neglect of this long range central problem is its essentially human aspect. Perhaps it is not unnatural for a people who for two decades have been gripped by fear for their survival to turn special attention to the physical, the non-human or coldly scientific aspects of all their functions, including that of education. Man himself has seemed to be so utterly indecipherable, so impossible to understand! Thus a teacher personnel policy at least a half century in arrears has been perpetuated.

This article does not deal with all of the work of improving teacher personnel. Only some aspects that bear upon the fashioning of an alternative to ignorance will be indicated. It is important, though, that any problem be seen against the backdrop of its larger context, which the writer sees as a staffing or teacher personnel problem.

Teachers must play a key role in preparing young people to live intelligently in the world of 1970 and beyond. This will be a vastly different world from that extant when the teachers themselves were in school. Therefore, the teachers, too, must become acculturated to the world of tomorrow. It has always been desirable for schools to reduce prejudice, narrowness, provincialism, and to cultivate appreciation, tolerance and cosmopolitanism. Today this is even more

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a necessity. How can staff personnel policies be refashioned so as to establish, extend and promote high standards of personal growth and self cultivation in teachers of all subjects and at all school levels?

The single most consequential fact of modern history has been the shrinkage of time and distance. This makes it both easier for today's teacher to know more accurately about distant places and peoples and more incumbent upon him to teach the actual facts about such places and peoples. All are aware, at the same time, that man's political, economic, and social thinking have failed miserably to keep pace with his expanding scientific horizon. An American elementary teacher returning recently from a field seminar¹ in African culture remarked that she could be accused of misrepresentation for the deficiencies in what she had formerly been teaching about Africa. What are some means by which such unflattering deficiencies may be ameliorated?

What Are the Possibilities?

1. Does the establishment of a kind of reconstituted Chautauqua reading circle for teachers have possibilities? The most economical way to learn about distant parts of the world or the changed world at home is to read. It is both surprising and distressing to learn how many teachers do not read.

Recent school studies of curriculum and instruction made by the writer, through questionnaires submitted to the teachers themselves, have indicated that approximately 40 percent of secondary teachers had read no book pertinent to the teaching field within six months. Members of the old Chautauqua read-

ing circles read four substantial books a year. Might not supervisors, curriculum directors, and department heads go far toward increasing their effectiveness by organizing and promoting such cross-fertilization among teachers? An expected by-product might well be greater mutual respect and *esprit de corps*. Routes to greater and supplemental resources of instruction would certainly thus be opened.

2. Does an in-service "Lyceum Series" offer possibilities for helping teachers keep abreast of their rapidly changing world? Present in-service teacher education programs tend to be restricted to the treatment of technique, matters of curricular revision, or routine. What is suggested here is attention to the kinds of matters which would interest teachers because they are and ought to be broadly and generally cultured persons.

If teachers are taken in on the planning, if extremely great care is exercised in the selection of the first few programs, and if time is set aside for teachers in small groups to discuss the implementation of ideas in the classroom, such an approach could be rewarding. Writers, architects, professors, any person who has had an enriching firsthand experience or has a creative idea would be a natural resource in such a situation.

3. School leaders and teachers must give greater attention to the finding and use of persons with firsthand or observational experience in classroom situations. Very few teachers are worldwide travelers. School boards wishing to enhance children's educational opportunities will consider ways and means to encourage and reward the teacher who spends his money and leisure thus enriching his own teaching resources.

¹ Field seminar sponsored by Kent State University, Gerald Read, Director, Summer 1962.

Provision will be made for sabbatical travel leaves. The teacher who has had extensive foreign experience will be made available within the system so that many pupils, not just his own, may profit by his experience. Full and appropriate utilization of the services of articulate and personable exchange students or teachers will prove stimulating and helpful to both pupils and teachers.

A recent visiting graduate student at Kent State University, a secondary school teacher in his native India, was in the United States to acquire an American master's degree. This graduate student was induced by an alert suburban Cleveland superintendent to remain in the U. S. a second year and to become a junior high school teacher in his system for a single year. The young man was used to teach about his native India in almost every class in the school system. Both teachers and pupils profited immeasurably.

More than 1900 American colleges and universities enroll foreign students, some of them experienced teachers themselves, from every quarter of the globe each year. To a great extent their educational potential for nearby school systems remains unassessed and unused.

4. Employing officials for school systems could encourage the broader training of prospective teachers by indicating a special interest in teachers who have had a part of their undergraduate preparation abroad. The junior year abroad, or an alternate plan designed to serve the same purpose, should be encouraged by all concerned with more adequate teachers. It is especially important to teachers of literature, art, music, and the social studies, although such an opportunity could be beneficial to the teacher of any field or at any school level.

Former members of the Peace Corps are now returning to communities throughout the nation. Some, having been inspired by their experiences abroad, will wish to continue in teaching. Other factors being equal, their foreign experiences should render them very desirable as teachers or as resource persons. Even when they do not choose to enter education on a full time basis, the schools can make good use of them, their 35mm slides, and their experiences for some years to come.

New Areas of Growth

A renaissance of interest in matters human, humanistic and humanitarian appears even now on the horizon of the devastatingly scientific age in which we live. For example, John Scanlon says that almost 2,000 business and professional leaders have participated in the Aspen (Colorado) Institute's Executive Program, while more than 30,000 people have attended its lectures and forums. He stresses, too, Walter Paepke's founding of the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies "dedicated to the 'affirmation of man's dignity' and 'the greatness of the human spirit.'"²

Even more than businessmen and other professional persons, teachers need opportunities for growth which will, above all, contribute to their becoming better human beings. They need ongoing help in increasing the depth of their insights, the keenness of their vision, and the breadth and range of their understandings. To provide less than this is to contribute to the leading of the lame by the halt, the blind by those who cannot see.

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² John Scanlon. "Aspen: A New Day for the Humanities." *Saturday Review*, December 21, 1963, p. 41.

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developing nations, and the vast dislocations occasioned, within the culture and the world, as these efforts find consummation. Investments schools might make in the resources needed for developing industrial processes such as these would seem small cost indeed against the dividends paid in cross-cultural and world understanding.

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Secondary—Kenworthy

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year from the Columbia University Press (2960 Broadway, New York 27, N. Y.).

Paperback books are an increasingly important source for teaching about the world. Scores of books might be mentioned, yet we select two for special attention. They are both anthologies of African literature. One is Langston Hughes' *An African Treasury* (Pyramid) and the other is Peggy Rutherford's *African Voices* (Universal Library). English teachers will find these two small volumes inspiring and helpful.

These are only a few of the rich resources available to high school teachers today to help boys and girls live effectively in the emerging international community of our time. Yet they are also some of the outstanding resources we can all obtain with little effort and little cost.

Alternative—Gorman

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If we fail notably to raise the cultural level of our teachers, we shall surely shape in our twentieth century schools minds admirably fitted to live only in the nineteenth century.

American humanity does indeed need to pull itself up by its bootstraps. Only through its schools can it create a generation of persons who may be capable of looking at another people and judging them on some bases other than the number and quality of material things they do or do not have. This aspiration will fail American education unless its leaders and thinkers help American teachers to find better yardsticks for measuring their own and their pupils' humanity. This is the fashioning of an alternative to an ignorance we can ill afford.

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