

# The "Committed" Teacher

TODAY'S teacher is almost overwhelmed as he views problems of urbanization, industrialization, economic and civic planning, civil rights, cultural lag, culturally deprived youngsters, school dropouts, technology, and automation. In viewing such developments he may be reminded of the stirring admonition of our late President John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." As a school person, however, he may also be able to quote Cicero's question of two thousand years ago: "What greater or better gift can we offer the republic than to teach and instruct our youth?"

Teaching is the largest profession in the world. There are over two million teachers in the United States alone. Much of the progress of civilization can be attributed directly to education. No other profession has a responsibility as

awesome as the primary one of the teaching profession—the potential perfectibility of mankind through education. The outcome of our present social revolution may indeed depend upon how well we fulfill that responsibility.

## Meaning of Commitment

The strength of any profession depends upon the degree of commitment of its members. Teaching is no exception. Its stature depends upon the degree of commitment of its members to the goals and purposes of American education.

The important question, however, is not one of commitment, but rather one of commitment to what. Anyone who lives according to his philosophy could be considered a committed person. It is not necessary for all men, or even a majority of them, to agree with a person's philosophy in order for the person to be committed or dedicated. In fact, dedicated or committed people are often members of minority groups. Few, for example, would doubt that most communists are committed to their cause. Their actions and activities are consistent with their philosophy. Fortunately, the philosophy of communism is neither persuasive nor palatable to most Americans. However, this does not deny commitment on the part of most communists.

As the idea of commitment expresses itself in a particular profession, the basic argument presented here applies. A committed physician is one whose behavior is determined by his philosophy of what is meant by the practice of medicine. A committed lawyer is one whose *modus operandi* is based upon his philosophy of law. Consequently, a committed teacher is one whose behavior is consistent with his philosophy of education.

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Although we continually talk about providing for the individual differences of our students, we often fail to provide for the individual differences of teachers. The literature is filled with lists of qualities of "the good teacher." Little variation exists from list to list. Apparently, the American stereotype of "the good teacher" is well established. He is intelligent, has a good sense of humor, respects others, has a good personality, is attractive in appearance, and has a noble character. In other words, he is the ideal American! The possession of such euphemious qualities, desirable as they may be, in no way assures an individual of success in teaching.

### Characteristics of the Committed Teacher

Even though committed teachers differ from each other in many ways, each has the following common characteristics:

1. *Desires to be a good teacher.* Perhaps the most important characteristic of the committed teacher is that he wants to teach and he wants to do this well. Naturally, desire alone will not cause a person to become a good teacher. However, it will encourage the teacher to evaluate his teaching, to work hard to correct his shortcomings, and to capitalize on his strengths.

The committed teacher enjoys working with children and youth and has a strong desire to help each person develop his full potential. He enjoys his work as a teacher; and his students, his colleagues, and the members of the community know that he enjoys teaching. Unfortunately, some teachers are the profession's worst enemies. They dislike their jobs, and they want everyone to know it. Perhaps it would be bene-

ficial to the profession if such disgruntled teachers would resign.

2. *Is more than a purveyor of facts.* It is a truism that one must have something to teach before he can teach. The committed teacher realizes, however, that education is more than an accumulation of factual information. The presentation of such information can perhaps be more effectively accomplished by the utilization of teaching machines, television, and other technological devices.

With knowledge doubling every ten years in our rapidly changing society, the teacher must be a selector of knowledge. This means that he must understand the structure of his discipline so well that he will be able to select the principles, concepts and generalizations which will enable the youngsters he teaches to understand the many changes which will occur in that field. His primary role is that of fostering intellectual curiosity and a desire to learn. He keeps informed of new developments in his field, and welcomes questions from his students concerning materials that are not "in the book." He is concerned with "uncovering material" rather than "covering material."

The committed teacher maintains a balance in his own education between specialization and liberal education. He avoids overspecialization, which too often makes a man very knowledgeable in a narrow area but abysmally ignorant in all others, and avoids the too liberal education in which dabbling in minuscule knowledge in all fields of learning often leads to intellectual dilettantism.

3. *Recognizes and accepts the worth of each individual.* The committed teacher is concerned with the education of all educable youth, not just the gifted

or college bound. He recognizes that students vary in size, color, intelligence, background and motivation; and he attempts to provide for such differences. His classroom allows for the development of all students. He understands that each day must begin where the student is, not where the teacher would like him to be. Although he is committed to every member of his class—the brilliant, the average, the slow—he does not confuse equality of educational opportunity with egalitarianism. He helps each student progress through developmental tasks commensurate with the student's ability, realizing that Emerson spoke for all students when he said, "Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can."

The teacher's commitment to the worth of each individual means that he is concerned with the total development of his students, not only their intellectual development. For that reason, perhaps no single facet of a teacher's personality is more important than his moral character. Children and adolescents are in a very formative period of their lives. Certainly members of the community other than teachers will also affect the students' moral character. Nevertheless, in terms of time spent with students, teachers are in a position to have a great influence on their character development.

The committed teacher agrees with Max Lerner's contention that "the faculty does have a moral role to play in the life of a student far more important than any disciplinary role it may have."

We often hear that teachers should also be committed to teaching democratic values in their classrooms. Unfortunately, the task of promulgating a common set of democratic values which is universally accepted in our pluralistic society is indeed an awesome one. The

school's acceptance of and insistence upon middle class, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant values will be repeatedly challenged by vociferous minority groups. Teachers who shy away from the teaching of any values by assuming a pose of amorality or ascetic intellectuality because they are afraid of "becoming involved" are doing a disservice to the minority, as well as to the majority. The committed teacher respects the minority views which exist in our emerging social order but, at the same time, conserves our basic values.

*4. Fulfills his professional responsibilities.* The committed teacher recognizes his professional responsibilities to students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and the community. He accepts, as a member of the teaching profession, the responsibility of advancing the cause of education, improving the quality of teaching, promoting the welfare of teachers, and elevating the status of the profession. He realizes that he cannot fulfill all of these responsibilities by himself; therefore, he becomes an active member of local, state, and national professional associations which have been organized to achieve such goals. Although he is concerned with improving all aspects of the teaching profession, he never forgets that the profession's *raison d'être* is the education of students.

What rewards does the committed teacher receive? Undoubtedly, his greatest rewards are intangible—a smile from a student whom he has helped, a feeling that he has contributed to the development of a student's personality and character, a sense of achievement as he watches a class develop, an expression of gratitude from a parent, knowledge of the successes of former students, the feeling that he has truly contributed sig-

*(Continued on page 72)*

getting very deeply into any. This book probably spreads itself thinner over more topics than most other texts. Like most other similar volumes, this work does not have a particular orientation to hold it together. The reader, therefore, is likely to be left with a disarray of information and the impression that we really know very little about adolescence. Since this impression is approximately true and since many students desire such a general introduction to adolescence, Powell's book will probably serve many persons usefully.

The book has chapters on the definition and study of adolescents, their physical development, intelligence and achievement, personality and culture, emotionality and adjustment, socialization, sexual development, the family, religion and values, attitudes and interests, vocational planning and guidance, the school curriculum, teaching adolescents, and juvenile delinquency. Throughout, the author attempts to bring current research to bear on the topics and to present the viewpoint of adolescents themselves. There is also a rather successful attempt to incorporate data from other countries into many of the sections.

Omitted from *The Psychology of Adolescence* are some authors noted for their insights into this age group, such as Erikson, Friedenberg, and Jersild. Also missing from the volume are detailed case studies of adolescents, which this reviewer finds most valuable for helping teachers understand these young people and the professional behavior appropriate for them.

One would guess that Powell's book, and many books like it, will help students of adolescence pass final examinations on the topic. Yet one wonders what such collections of ideas and details contribute to professional behavior. Taking

a hint from Bruner's *Process of Education*, one might ask why such college texts could not more effectively get at the big ideas, the processes of the discipline, and the skills necessary to put learnings to actual professional use.

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#### Purpose—Ammons

(Continued from page 17)

*Educational Objectives—Cognitive Domain.* New York: David McKay Co., 1956; and *The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives—Affective Domain.* New York: David McKay Co., 1964.

12. Virgil E. Herrick. "Teaching as Curriculum Decision Making." *The Nature of Teaching.* Milwaukee: School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1963. p. 66-80.

13. John I. Goodlad. *Planning and Organizing for Teaching.* Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1963.

14. James B. Macdonald. Paper presented at the meeting of professors of curriculum at ASCD, Miami Beach, Florida, April 1964.

15. Thomas L. Faix. "Toward a Science of Curriculum: Structural-Functional Analysis as a Conceptual System for Theory and Research." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1964.

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#### "Committed" Teacher—Fox

(Continued from page 20)

nificantly to the educational growth and well being of his students.

In other words, his greatest reward is the realization that his role in life is an important one and that he is fulfilling his purposes. Shakespeare said it another way: "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

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