

*Greater esteem, wealth and social power for teachers
may be the price of a better informed citizenry.*

Teachers' Social Mobility

N. R. Dixon

NO ONE who has felt the recent jerks and starts in American society can seriously doubt the authenticity of the social revolution in which we are involved. Old gods are crumbling: a new iconoclasm is emerging.

History has turned a sharp corner. For instance, the Negro, who for decades meekly accepted a position of social inferiority, has decided that the United States Constitution was meant to include him too. He has become an activist—seeking better housing, education, jobs and recreation. The Negro has demanded equal opportunity to share in all that America offers. He has fought his battle in conference rooms, in the courts, and in the streets. Armed with successes achieved by these means, by the 1964 Civil Rights Act and by the zeitgeist, the Negro has shown that he will continue, accelerate and widen his fight to attain his rights.

The war on poverty which is designed to raise the standards of living for millions of Americans is an assault on want—an assault which will result in a rise in status. The onset of a cybernated age

which is eliminating 40,000 jobs per week and dramatically creating new jobs has caused continuing crises in employment. Market-supported jobs are rapidly declining.

The increasing action of the federal government in matters of education and community uplift signals the opening of a new era in politics. In this age of social upheaval, teachers and teaching must assume a new posture. Institutionalized education must supply the intellectual resources with which American society delivers optimally on its long-awaited promise of equal opportunity for all.

An Open Society: The Democratic Ideal

The widely accepted ideology of an open society in America is becoming a suspect one. Social class status is conferred on individuals and groups. The indicators are "social power, wealth, and esteem."¹ Despite its commitment in theory to equality of opportunity for all, this country—for all its material riches—has never come close to making its ideal a reality. Lynd and Lynd have bril-

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¹ Don Martindale. *American Social Structure*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1960. p. 442.

liantly shown how basic American beliefs are eroded by juxtaposed contradictory values.² These conflicting ideas, which are found pulling against each other, tend to make vertical social mobility extremely difficult—often impossible!

For classroom teachers, the matter of vertical social mobility is complicated by the fact that there is social stratification within the education establishment and in the community. Classroom teachers usually have lower status than guidance counselors. Elementary teachers usually have lower status than high school teachers. Teachers of science and mathematics have higher status than social studies teachers. Athletic coaches have higher status than classroom teachers or guidance counselors. Principals and supervisors have higher status than classroom teachers, guidance counselors, or coaches.

Without a doubt, the superintendent has the spot of number one hen in the educational pecking order. Administrators and supervisors who man the controls in education exert power throughout education. Despite the fact that educators professedly work equally with their peers, those lower on the totem pole often fear to express honest doubts and sharp disagreement with the holders of the controls lest they be charged with everything from "fighting my program" to insubordination.

The value of the respective roles and role occupants in education is not only reflected in power, but also in the salaries paid. Stratification in organized education is dangerously divisive—especially so, since it often subverts energy into searching for ways to attain "higher" positions with the accompanying increased power and money. The danger

² Robert S. Lynd and Helen Lynd, *Middletown in Transition*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1937. Chapter XII.

comes from the *reasons* for the seeking and the diverting of energy and effort from the main business of education. To liquidate stratification within organized education requires a new astuteness in schoolmanship.

In the community there are categorical limitations on the upward social mobility of teachers. For instance, laws in some states forbid teachers to engage in activities which are open to those in other professions. In many instances, teachers cannot seek and hold political office while teaching. In other instances, community tradition and expectancy limit the extent to which teachers may seek to gain upward social mobility.

Teachers today teach children against the backdrop of democratic ideals. They teach freedom, independence and responsibility as the bedrock of the democratic ethic. Yet, the community denies them the very rights and privileges for which it professedly stands. In such instances, teachers may come to feel that achieving vertical social mobility is difficult—if not impossible—in a society devoid of vibrant moral commitment.

Society's Valuation of Teachers and Teaching

"One who chooses to become a teacher must be willing to join a profession which receives little recognition or position in the occupational structure of his community."³ Furthermore, he must content himself with modest public esteem despite the fact that Plato felt that esteem was of primary importance.⁴

In most cases, he must realize that he will receive poor pay and will be insecure in his job. Worse yet, he will be en-

³ Joseph P. Cangemi, "Raising the Status and Esteem of Public School Teachers," *Clearing House* 38:540-42; May 1964.

⁴ Don Martindale, *op. cit.*, p. 448.

meshed in a web of restrictions manufactured and labeled "For teachers only." One joining the teaching profession should readily discern that teachers are almost powerless to change public policy as it relates to schools. Also, teachers are not in the social class which sits at the controls of society; consequently, they occupy an impotent position in the community power structure.

Paradoxically, society values the results of teaching (education) far more highly than it values teachers. With the increased need for scientists and technicians, however, a higher status has been conferred upon teachers of science and mathematics. Along with higher public esteem has gone the correlative—higher pay. Teachers of science and mathematics have also had more social power bestowed upon them—because of the functional importance of their work and the scarcity of personnel.

Low public esteem for teachers may be traced, to some extent, to the quarrel—even among educators—as to whether teaching is a profession. This argument often shows up in conflicts between protagonists for the NEA and the American Federation of Teachers. It is easy enough to define the term "profession" and to plaster it on teaching. But, operationally, is teaching a profession? For lack of a categorical answer of "yes," large sectors of the American population still feel that "anyone can teach." Such an attitude toward teaching does nothing at all to reflect a shining image of teachers or to foster the upward social mobility of teachers.

When it comes to upward social mobility, the case of Negro teachers is a study of entrapment. Most of them, living and working in the South, have little hope of vertical social mobility either in the profession or in the Southern community.

They have little or no chance of becoming a school board member or a school superintendent. Negro teachers have been an unusually docile group—especially so since they often feel that they may be the victims of illegitimate power. Only now are they beginning to seize the opportunity to overcome more than three centuries of enforced mediocrity.

Since American democracy and the teaching profession are sensitive to race, Negro teachers, North or South, are hopelessly trapped in a caste system. In general, Negro teachers are highly valued by Americans—but only "in their place," where they are, in "Negro society." This view is easily verified by the paucity of qualified Negroes serving in prestigious national educational positions: e.g., on editorial boards of national journals and as major participants on national programs. What is worse is the fact that neither the teaching profession nor the public has strained its voice, to call for a change in this policy which bespeaks low esteem.

Toward Greater Social Mobility

In order to increase the tempo and amount of upward social mobility for teachers, a virtual revolution must be effected among teachers and in American society. The job is not insuperable for knowledge-bearers and for those whose mission is to refine the democratic way of life. To secure greater esteem, wealth, and social power, teachers should launch the following actions:

1. Work to strengthen teaching as a profession. Roles, role occupants, and role performance must all be upgraded. Professional associations should strive to gain control over admission to and retention in the profession. They should seek

(Continued on page 603)

13. Pauline S. Sears and Edith M. Dowling. "Research on Teaching in the Nursery School." In: N. L. Gage, editor. *Handbook of Research on Teaching*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963.

14. Fred L. Strodtbeck. "Progress Report: The Reading Readiness Nursery: Short-Term Social Intervention." Chicago: University of Chicago, August 1963. Mimeographed.

15. Joan W. Swift. "Effects of Early Group Experience: The Nursery School and Day Nursery." In: Martin L. Hoffman and Lois W. Hoffman, editors. *Review of Child Development Research*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964.

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to license teachers and retain only role occupants of decided competence.

2. Work to secure adequate salaries for teachers. Many teachers are required to attend summer school periodically to hold their jobs. Also, they must buy the trappings of class status which the community requires. Often through no fault of their own, many teachers are victims of loan sharks. Others, especially men teachers, turn to moonlighting to supplement their inadequate salaries.

3. Work to attain job security for teachers. Teachers should not have to bow before school boards and the public to maintain their jobs. Teacher tenure laws should be sought. Teachers should be protected from scurrilous attack by laymen and the caprice of administrators.

4. Work to develop a national system of award for outstanding teacher performance. Such awards should be as significant as the Pulitzer prizes and should be based upon clearly defined criteria.

5. Work to develop a strong, positive image of teachers. Mass media should be carefully studied to determine the image

cast about teachers. Ways should be devised to prevent an Ihabod Crane image of teachers from being disseminated. Professional associations on all levels must themselves develop a strong, effective system of public relations which adequately portrays the profession to the public.

6. Work for full and complete involvement of Negroes in all aspects of professional endeavor. Professional associations need to purge themselves of the guilt of moral bankruptcy caused by decades of silence and lethargy in this matter.

7. Work to exert greater influence in local, state, and national politics.

Vigorous and intelligent action can foster greater social mobility for teachers. With the war on poverty already joined, teachers and teaching assume a new importance. This, coupled with a greater need for lifelong education, forecasts teachers as more important role occupants. A country which rests upon an informed citizenry must commit itself to increased wealth, esteem, and social power for teachers.

"Tough" Schools—Gorman & Ritchie

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Faith in the learner is fundamental. Too many teachers appraise a situation and find it hopeless. They let themselves expect limited results. It is not at all surprising that those are exactly the results achieved. The teacher must have faith in the learner's ability and willingness to learn, and he must have equal faith in his own capacity to teach him. The reverse is common on the educational front generally, but nowhere is it more frequently found than among culturally disadvantaged pupils.

4. *Are culturally disadvantaged youth inherently reluctant learners?*² The nine

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