



# Whose Children Shall We Teach?

ROMEO ELDRIDGE PHILLIPS \*

**T**HE writer recently served on a panel with a political scientist and a sociologist. The topic for the evening was given the ambiguous title, "The Polarization in Our Society." Our assignment was to ad lib as to our perceptions of this phenomenon.

The sociologist gave an analogy of the social stratification within the American society and delivered an excellent dissertation on acculturation and enculturation.

The political scientist, who has a degree in divinity, outlined the whys and wherefores of the American political system and how the church fits into it.

The writer supported the pontifications of the two speakers. However, I stated that the public schools are the only places where the sons and daughters of college professors, maids, janitors, pimps, prostitutes, and preachers are found. In a typical college town where there is only one senior high school, they are found in the same building.

## Teaching All the Children

It would appear plausible that the sons and daughters of employers and employees meet on a continuum of sociality daily. To look at this conglomerate of upper, middle, and lower income youths, one realizes that the public school is truly an arena. The writer submitted then and submits now that

the home and church have abdicated their individual responsibility to the young people of this nation. Therefore, the public schools by inheritance and default now must really and completely "teach" *all* the children of *all* the public! Let us cite some observations to support this hypothesis.

Many white Americans have contended that they did not leave the large cities to "get away" from black Americans, but because they desired a better quality of education for their children. On the other hand, many chose to live in a particular neighborhood because they, too, desired a better quality of education for their children. If a person's income permitted him, the movement became a living reality. One must remember, however, that an exodus from a given area does not render it a ghost town. To the contrary, living bodies remain—and in large numbers.

Let us follow the public school sojourn of a child whose parents have moved to a certain neighborhood in a typical college town. It is amazing how shortsighted we can be.

When one moves into a "certain" neighborhood, it is his intention to be with those of his kind, that is, at his level within the bourgeoisie. It is reasonable to assume that

\* Romeo Eldridge Phillips, Assistant Professor, Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, Michigan

the schools will be populated with these types of children. This assumption is one-third accurate: the middle-junior high school will have children from several neighborhoods; the senior high school will have children from *all* neighborhoods!

It appears that the runner ran in a circle. If one had wanted to expose a son or daughter to the "best" families, it would appear that this should be during the period of early pubescence when discriminate taste develops. During this period, it is not what Mom or Dad desires, it is what "I" want. We call this the period of adolescent rebellion. It is logical to conclude, then, that only the elementary school can supply the "quality education" sought by the mover-runner. Let us look into the high school where all three "types" are housed.

The teachings, mores, fears, prejudices, etc., of parents are placed on public display in the senior high school. It is in the senior high school that the 14-or-so years of neighborhood values training bear fruit. It is in the senior high school that the realities of heterogeneous living are tried. Truly, the senior high school is an educational arena. The public schools have been given the task either of curing all the social ills or of serving as a deterrent. For some 180-odd days each year the public schools face these problems head on.

Often potential teachers are heard repeating statements of veteran teachers about certain schools in certain school districts. They may express a desire not to work in certain schools in certain school districts. When reminded that they are seeking a certificate to teach in the *public* schools and not in certain types of public schools, expressions of ambivalence about teaching pour from their lips. The shock of being expected to teach *all* the children of *all* the public—including poor whites, blacks, American Indians, and Spanish speaking—creates a form of academic amnesia. One would guess that when they are reminded of this, the potential teachers may experience a form of amnesia. Sometimes it appears that such beginners no longer see public school teaching as before. Yet and still, a horrible disservice would be

created if they were not made to acknowledge such a commitment as being realistic.

The writer has often been asked these questions: What types of teachers are in the public schools? and, What sub-roles must we play, since the church and home no longer appear to really care?

## Types of Teachers

There are five types of teachers currently drawing wages in the public schools. Each is easily recognized.

1. The Rebel—is against the entire system, but has no suggested plan of change.
2. The Retreatist—wants out of teaching, is constantly seeking other employment, and leaves, usually, with his or her leave bank empty.
3. The Ritualist—has retired on the job, and continues to repeat the same lessons year in and year out. This teacher can quote page, paragraph, and sentence of the text.
4. The Conformist—goes along with what is current without making an effort to contribute. In many cases this person and the ritualist are related.
5. The Innovator—sees the need for change and seeks to bring it about without antagonism. This effort ranges from his/her classroom to the district.

One who teaches must be conditioned to accept the following sub-roles:

1. ... a mediator of learning
2. ... a judge
3. ... a disciplinarian
4. ... a confidant
5. ... a parent substitute
6. ... a surrogate of middle-class values.

If, in fact, we have five types of teachers currently in the public schools and if teachers should subscribe to these six sub-roles, we must look at the teacher-preparing institutions.

Since the orbiting of Sputnik I, men with names such as Bestor, Rickover, Conant, Clark, Malcolm X, and McKissick have charged that the teacher education institutions are not doing their job. Of these various charges, the one heard most often is that potential teachers are being prepared to work

with just one segment of our society—the middle!

The truth of the matter, they are saying, is that one does not really teach, *per se*, the middle segment. This highly motivated segment needs only guidance. Teaching must be at the extremes of the continuum. Because of this fact many veteran “teachers” obtain and seek assignments in such schools. Knowing this, potential teachers seek such non-available assignments. Teacher education institutions contribute to this dastardly deed by holding back two-thirds of the information needed—the fact that we have three types of communities within the public school arena. It is inexplicable why neophyte teachers must develop this awareness by empirical design.

Too many teacher education institutions have developed what the writer calls “slogan shibboleths.” Many of these are really polite euphemisms, for they appear to be evasive in nature. One does not talk about “teaching the whole child” only to point out negatives, for example, “low IQ scores,” “a product of an illegitimate affair,” and “too much freedom and money.” Children may be dumb, but they are not stupid. They need not be told which type of teacher so-and-so is. They know that actions speak louder than words. For potential teachers not to be prepared to teach *all* the children of *all* the public is malfeasance. Potential teachers must be told what is expected of them and the professor is professionally obligated to “tell it like it is”!

### **Problem of Accountability**

The problem on hand now is what must be done to teach students currently enrolled. The problem is compounded by the fact that many teachers are aware of these differences but choose not to adapt their presentations to fit the experiences of their charges. What can be done to rectify this situation?

Teachers unions appear not to be concerned about making teachers accountable. If a teacher is accountable, it is a personal desire. Accountability in labor unions known to the writer revolves around wages. As a worker produces so is he paid. When he works up to expectations he is, naturally,

praised; when he works under the basic standards he is moved.

A teacher is protected by state law plus a master contract. However, unlike the members of labor unions, a teacher has no demands made on him to produce. He is not accountable and accepts all pay raises with no scruples of conscience. Knowing this to be true, citizens have resorted to extralegal means to gain teacher accountability.

In the suburbs, parents often check the content of their children’s assignments. The same is true in “choice” neighborhoods in large cities and college communities. It is not unusual for Bobby’s father, who is a professor of math at the local college, to challenge the teacher’s math competency. Knowing the level of academic sophistication of his students’ parents, the teacher usually shapes up or ships out.

The ghetto poor lack academic sophistication; they measure results. They know that they send their children to school for an education. The children may remain for some 13 inclusive years only to emerge lacking the ability to read. Parents are not stupid. They are now seeking methods of community control via the purse strings of school employees. They measure step-by-step what their children learn. If it is adjudicated that the learning did not take place, they want the teachers’ wages affected, union master contract to the contrary notwithstanding.

When the ghetto poor rise up, it is unusual. A case in point is the Ocean Hill-Brownsville fiasco in New York in the fall of 1968. The public schools can expect more of the same as parents, ghetto poor parents, demand education of a quality comparable to that found outside their community. In the process the teacher education institutions will not come out unscathed. After all, it is they who trained the present cadre so inadequately. Pedagogics must expand to include the three socioeconomic levels. Teachers must be, so to speak, educational chameleons.

The business of teaching in this country is now, more than before, very serious business. Politicians no longer can afford to use the public schools as vehicles for reelection. Adequate funds are needed, and all

three groups are united in this effort. Politicians react favorably to pressure. The ghetto poor know that a person without a marketable skill is a drain on society. They expect the public schools to provide the training. Our country has been made aware of the reality of the waste of brain power by not tapping the resources of the poor.

### The Answer Is Easy

Whose children shall we teach? It appears that the answer is quite easy. We teach *all* the children of *all* the public, regardless of circumstance of birth, status of parents, and innate ability. If we do *not* believe in public education, we had better say so and commence to provide for those who will be eliminated. If we believe that the public *should* have the opportunity to be educated, then we had better act that way.

This means that the power structure, commencing with the teacher education institutions, must make the present and future cadre accountable. Ivan Pavlov used food with his dogs; perhaps money would be a viable control stimulus for humans, that is, pay would be determined by the quality of the work. No work—no pay! After all, we must stop the brain drain. If we can put men on the moon, surely we should be able to work with the known. Our greatest investments are our children. *All* of them must be taught!

Since the ghetto poor, like the members of the middle and upper class, desire and are

now demanding results from their children's education, the public school arena has become a battleground. The "haves" have the resources to supplement via the tutoring route that which the public schools fail to accomplish. The "have-nots" do not have the resources, but they are demanding the same results within the same period of time. Since both sets of children are to compete in the same society, it is fair that both be given equal opportunities. The only "resource" available to the "have-nots" is the ability to destroy. We need not go into the psychological reasoning why this "resource" is used, for we know that it is used. We must concentrate our efforts so that the ghetto poor will feel that there is no need to use this "resource." Although they have nothing to lose, likewise they will not gain by using this "resource." It is better for the "have-nots" to gain a fair shake than for the "haves" to be reduced to the status of "have-nots."

The acculturation and enculturation outlined by the sociologist, as well as the role of the church and the politics of our society outlined by the political scientist, highlight the responsibility of the public schools. No matter how lucid the oratory about the need for a high quality of public education for every child, it boils down to what was said by the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Either we're going to live together as brothers and sisters or we're going to die together like fools." It appears that the only light in the lighthouse to guide our society is the public school. This light must not go out. □

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Contributors: Jacqueline Grennan Wexler, Harry S. Broudy,  
Richard L. Foster, and Muriel Crosby

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