

ARE WE PREPARING OUR TEACHERS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP?

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Tradition and the basic nature of the teacher's calling have consecrated the concept that the teacher is essentially a leader and guide of the youth. Whether as the living repository of the lore of his tribe in ancient times or as the modern university scholar and sage, he has been regarded as the fountain-source of intellectual guidance and leadership. The gap which widened between life and formal education did not diminish this high regard for the teacher's role. But as the school and its concerns became more and more divorced from life, the sphere of the teacher's influence and consequently of his leadership gradually shrank. The notion developed that he lead only within the cloistered premises of the formal classroom and that people outside the school had no need to look up to him for leadership in those concerns of life that had nothing or little to do with the formal education of children. His duties were circumscribed by the immediate demands of classroom teaching. The school became his Kingdom in which he wielded the scepter of undisputed leadership. Content with his prerogatives and powers, he cared not for outside concerns and, by force of habit, developed a mentality insulated against the cares and problems of the world outside the school.

A number of factors helped to preserve the old-time teacher's isolation. There was the traditional curriculum of compartmentalized subject matter the transmission of which to the young constituted the ultimate goal of education. To impart the racial heritage as effectively

and economically as possible regardless of whether it had pertinence to life in a fast changing world was conceived to be the teacher's highest duty and obligation. The pre-service and the in-service education of the teacher reflected the emphasis upon subject matter and upon the methods of teaching school subjects in the most economical and effective manner. Thus in normal schools the professional staple food of the would-be teacher consisted mainly of principles of teaching, reading methods, language methods, arithmetic methods, science methods, spelling methods, writing methods, drawing methods, music methods, geography methods, history methods. When already in the service, the teacher was urged and sometimes compelled by superiors to read professional books especially those that would help him further improve his methods of teaching. Not how to make children live efficiently and happily but how to make them learn subjects effectively—this was the teacher's main concern. There was, in fact, little or no training which enabled him to view in correct perspective the relation of the school to the community. Was it any wonder that the school and the activities therein were out of touch with life and had no appreciable effects upon community life and its improvement?

But the gap between the school and life is narrowing once more. The concept that education is life is fast catching up with the older theories. The school is losing much of its cloistered characteristics as more and more demands are made upon it. The teacher

cannot but therefore revise his ideas and ideals of duty and service. For his leadership is now not merely over the children under his care. The sphere of his obligations has expanded beyond the premises of his school. As the activities of the school merge with those of life outside, people naturally expect the teacher to take a more active part in cooperative group life and in time or at times to take the helm of leadership in community activities.

Whether he likes this turn of events or not, the new responsibilities which it imposes upon him are inescapable. He has to assume them with all the grace he can muster and do his best to be worthy of the new public trust. He cannot shirk these responsibilities without surrendering the respect which the youth in his school have long had for him. He cannot willfully evade the new duties without being recreant to the highest ideals of his calling.

However, is he adequately prepared to assume leadership in community activities? Has he been trained for such new duties? What kind of training do these new spheres of leadership demand? My personal opinion is that normal school curricula in this country both past and present have not given the teacher the necessary preparation for these new tasks. In the first place, since the teacher will be thus in contact with all levels of society in the community, he will need greater cultural breadth and a wider range of interests than were necessary when his work was confined to the classroom. To hold his own with the intellectual elite, he must possess their intellectual interests. To get along with the less favored groups, he must be acquainted with their needs and demonstrate a genuine interest in their problems and welfare. He should, therefore, acquire a high degree of social sensitiveness, which comes to one only through a thorough understanding and appreciation of the problems of group life and through the ability to utilize

community resources for improving both the community and the school. The teacher must of necessity have adequate training in public relations. In addition, he should be taught the techniques of organization for cooperative undertakings, like working in committees, participation or leadership in group discussions and activities, etc. He should be taught how to get along with or manage adults, how to work in harmony with parent groups and to deal with PTA's, how to secure the interest and the cooperation of community groups for certain desirable social or educational ends, etc. Finally, he should be imbued with greater confidence in himself and his purposes and with greater aggressiveness in the pursuit of ideals and aims. Our teachers and prospective teachers have been trained to obey more fully than to lead. We have thus produced a highly disciplined corps of teachers, a fact in which we can take justifiable pride. But a program of systematic obedience is hardly one which can be expected to develop leaders. What we should also systematically strive to inculcate and develop in our teachers is initiative, self-direction, and independence of mind.

I ventured the personal opinion that teacher education in our country has not given considerable attention to a program of training calculated to develop the traits which I have enumerated as necessary for community leadership. Whether I am right or not in this appraisal, I leave to your better judgments to determine. But I submit that these are the irreducible minimum requirements for community leadership; and if teachers are to assume these responsibilities with dignity and confidence, our teacher education program must stress these aspects of the teacher's training. They cannot be left to chance or indifference; they must be consciously, systematically, and intelligently sought and striven after as desirable phases of a modern program of teacher education.