



—Hays (Monkmeier).

*"The role of the teacher in any society lies at the heart of its intellectual and social life."*

## **EDUCATING TEACHERS**

# THE NEED FOR RADICAL REFORM

By HAROLD TAYLOR

**O**NE OF the astonishing facts about the otherwise unastonishing White House Conference on Education of 1965 was its neglect of the problem of teacher education. All the subject got was an almost unreadable paper that rehearsed once more the conventions of Mr. Conant's thinking and ended with a curious summary of hypothetical issues, along with a two-hour panel discussion session that yielded some of the least surprising conclusions ever reported to the plenary session of any conference or to any occupant of the White House.

If one wishes to think of the conference itself as a reflection of the present situation in public rhetoric and private thinking about education in America, the place assigned to teacher education at the conference was about what it is everywhere else. That is to say, it is put off to one side and dealt with perfunctorily, as if its major questions had all been answered by a call for more academic preparation, better practice-teaching, and a less inhibiting system of accreditation. The direct link be-

tween the education of teachers and the going concerns of every sector in American society from the poor and the deprived to the intellectually and financially well-to-do, the direct connection to the major political and social issues of contemporary world society, the direct responsibility for the quality and scope of America's cultural and moral life, have all been missed or ignored.

In short, the education of teachers has been separated from the major intellectual and social forces of contemporary history. It is conceived to be the acquisition of a skill, a skill in assembling authorized information, distributing it to children and young adults, and testing their ability to receive it and reassemble it.

In fact, it is nothing of the kind. The role of the teacher in any society lies at the heart of its intellectual and social life, and it is through the teacher that each generation comes to terms with its heritage, produces new knowledge, and learns to deal with change. Provided, that is, that the teacher has been well enough educated to act as the transforming element.

The education of teachers is at the

nerve center of the whole educational system, and if it fails to function there, the system fails. When we talk about equality of opportunity for all American children we are really talking about an equal chance for every child to be taught by a teacher who understands him, takes his limitations and strengths into account, and has command over a body of knowledge relevant to his teaching and to his place in contemporary society. When we talk about educating the gifted, we are really talking about people who are gifted enough to teach the gifted. When we talk about educational failures and weaknesses we are really talking about failures and weaknesses in teachers and teaching, if teaching is defined as the means through which those who are taught are enabled to learn.

Why, in the face of these facts, which are at the very least self-evident, has the education of teachers never received the attention its massive importance demands?

Mainly, I think, because the public concept of education itself has been too narrow for the large dimension of the task to which it has been assigned. The

task is to sustain the spiritual force of a democratic ethos and, at the same time, to create the conditions out of which the millions of children and adults of an expanding society can each make a contribution to the creation of great art, great discovery, great works, great science, and a great society. In a democracy, the welfare of the society rests on its educational system.

But the concept of education held in the public mind and reflected in the practices of the schools is that of a formal training in academic subjects leading toward the achievement of a favorable position in society. Higher education thus becomes a higher form of the same kind of training, leading to a higher position in society. Lower education, or vocational training, is for those whose abilities do not reach to the expert use of language and abstractions, or skill in the academic disciplines, and who will normally occupy a lower place in the society. Those who fit neither vocational nor academic education are left without anything. They drop out, it is said. In reality they are left out.

What is missing in the concept is the idea of education as a liberation of oneself into new levels of intellect and emotion, education as a means of achieving new capacities and insights, which can then become part of the stream of contributions made by the human race in the development of societies and civilizations. The concept contains no call to lend oneself to great enterprises, to become *useful* in the larger sense.

Consequently, the idea of teaching and of the education of teachers has been narrowly conceived to fit a narrow concept, and the teacher is less an intellectual or cultural leader than an agent of social service. He prepares himself, not to serve as an example of man thinking or of man bringing ideas into life, but as man transmitting a curriculum. It follows that his education as a teacher need consist of nothing more than a knowledge of the material in the curriculum which he has learned how to transmit to pupils by studying methods of transmittal and practicing them in a classroom with practice-children.

The education of teachers, or teacher-training, to use its name, is therefore of no great consequence in the public mind. The teacher is a person who is certified as a practitioner of cultural transmission. It is not necessary for his employment that he be a scholar with an intellectual life of his own, nor is it necessary that the people who administer the schools be scholars or even teachers. They are cultural entrepreneurs, responsible to the parents and the community for seeing to it that the cultural transmission occurs properly



—Pitkin (Monkmeyer).

**"The philosophy implicit in the Peace Corps holds the seeds of a powerful new educational movement."**

and that the children become qualified for entry into further education and entry into a congenial place in society.

We will never achieve the goals we seek in education until we alter these concepts and turn again to the truth about teaching, that it is a creative art, a healing art, that it demands for its true accomplishment the qualities of character and intellect that can be gained only by those who are moved to reach out toward them. The beginning point and the secret of the whole undertaking lies in the sense of fulfillment that comes to the one who is able to make an honest act of commitment to a vocation in the true sense of that word, the kind of commitment the poet, the dancer, the painter, the sculptor, the doctor makes when he decides that this is what he must do and what he must be. Once a commitment has been made, the image of oneself as a dancer, a doctor, a scientist, an architect, a teacher, begins to take effect as a goal toward which each separate effort day by day in preparation makes its own contribution. One sets out to become what has



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been imagined, and the discipline of becoming is then undergone willingly and gladly, in the way the violinist lends himself to the demands of his instrument. The problem with so much of undergraduate education, for the general student and for the teacher, is that it is not undertaken for a purpose; it is not infused with energy by an act of commitment to prepare oneself for carrying out a task of known significance.

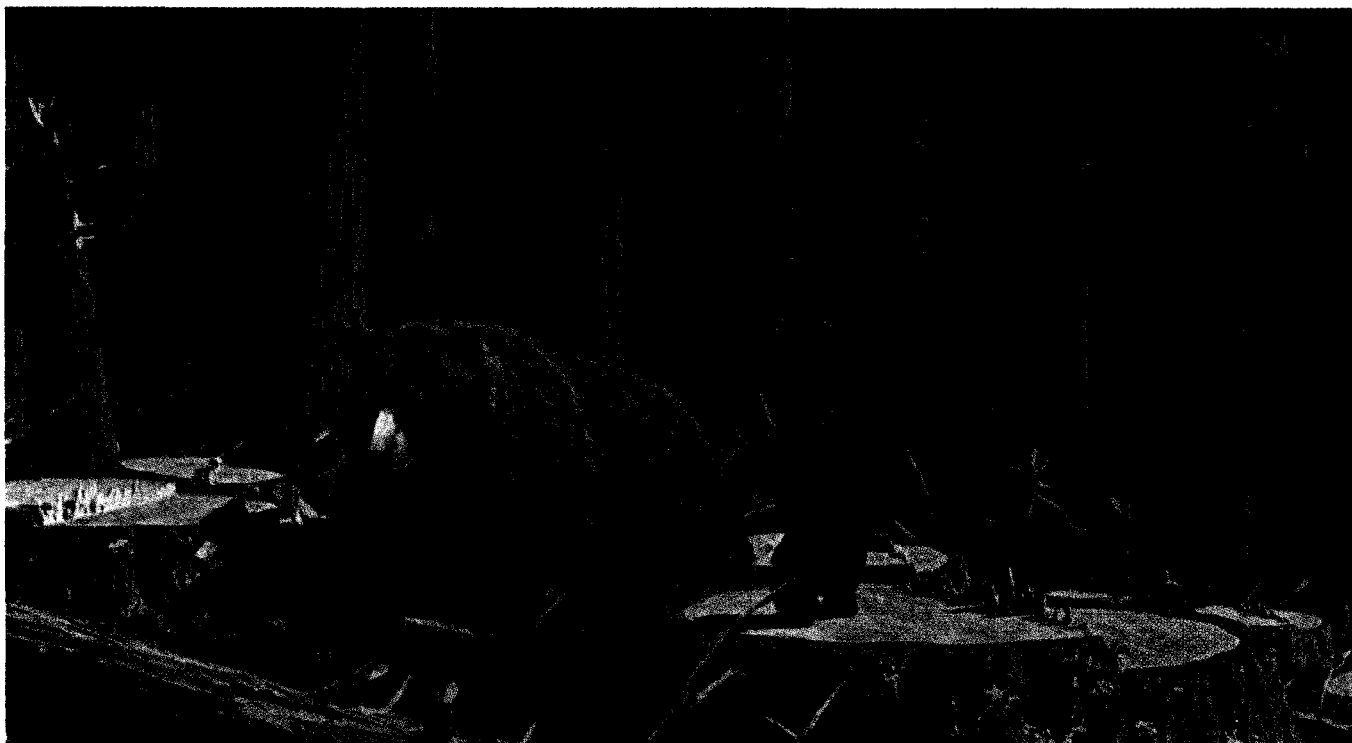
It is the sense of commitment to a useful purpose that sustains the Peace Corps volunteer, both in his act of volunteering and his preparation for Peace Corps service. The volunteer is asked to give himself, in whatever his capacity, to the world's task of improving the lot of mankind. His two years of service are a contribution to the sum total of human welfare, and his self-assignment for low pay in difficult conditions is like that of the civil rights worker who leaves his career in college or elsewhere to teach and to work with the Negro in the South. To begin the reformation of teacher education it is necessary to return to the roots of the matter, in the restoration of teaching to its place among vocations.

Until now, we have never mounted a full national attack on the problem of educating teachers, using large resources in money and intellect, no matter what proclamations have been made about the crucial role of education in the national welfare. The universities have left it to the teachers' colleges, the teachers' colleges have now begun to model themselves on the universities and to seek the respectability of not being colleges for teachers. In doing so they have usually given up the idea of teaching as a vocation in favor of the idea of the teacher as a man who has met university requirements. Nor have we ever called upon American youth to take up teaching as a vocation in which all their talents can be used to the full in the cause of American society. We can no longer afford our negligence. The urgency of the present situation demands head-on action, on a large scale.

When I speak of the present situation, I begin with the proposition that the radical social changes of the post-war years have far outrun the ability of the educational system to keep up with them. It is of course true that there is always an organic connection between changes in society that force new demands upon education, which, in turn, by the character of its response, transforms the demands into a series of further changes within the society. If the demands are for more scientists and technologists, who are then produced by the educational system, the mere existence of an expanded body of

(Continued on page 92)





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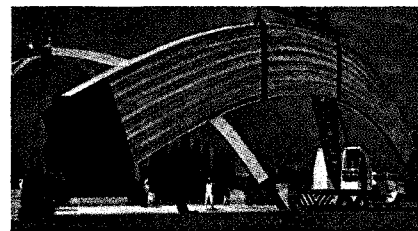
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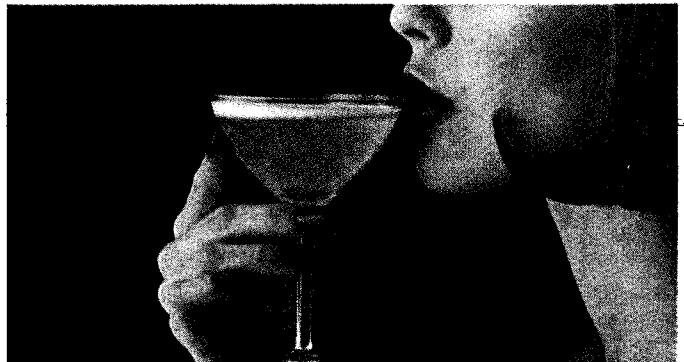


The whole world loves it after dinner.

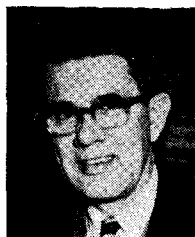
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## PERSONAL OPINION

# Chaos in the Social Studies?

*On this page, each month, a distinguished educator, writer, or critic of education is given an opportunity to express his views freely on a topic of his own choosing. The opinions expressed may differ sharply from those of the editors.*

By DONALD W. ROBINSON, *Associate Editor of "Phi Delta Kappan" and Chairman of the Civic Education Project of the National Council of Social Studies.*

THE most common—and the most absurd—of all the canards leveled against the social studies curriculum is the charge that it is chaotic, and that there is consequently an urgent need for revolutionary reform.

"Chaos" is a loaded word. It means confusion or disorder, and evokes images of utter aimlessness and lack of accomplishment. Therefore, when Charles Keller and other observers assert dolefully that the social studies are in a state of chaos, one wonders for whom such chaos exists. Surely not for the student.

In a most important sense there is no chaos, and can be no chaos in the social studies capable of being remedied by a new curriculum pattern, no matter how superior. There is, and should be, diversity in social studies offerings. But to mistake variety of offerings for chaos is to miss the point of democratic education.

The individual student in a four-year high school may study in successive years world geography, world history, American history, and Latin American affairs. Another student in another school may study ancient history, modern history, American history, and government. Still another may have business geography, English history, American history, and economics. In New York State alone fifty-seven different social studies courses are offered in high schools. Yet each child, if he is well taught, receives the benefits of the program to which he is exposed, regardless of what is offered in some other school. No conceivable program could introduce students to all of the possible social, political, geographical, psychological, and historical concepts that might be worth knowing. No educational system ever presumed to do this.

Coupled with the charge of chaos is the assertion that the social studies are laggard, obsolete, and anachronistic; they have produced no modern revision to rival the new math and the new physics. Typical of these claims is Mortimer Smith's assertion that "only the social studies seem to be where they were thirty or forty years ago." Although this observation may well be true of some schools, it is patently not true of the best, and not representative of the nation.

The best schools and the average schools have moved far since World War I. The political and military data that constituted history courses in most schools in the 1920s, had been supplemented by social content. The modern European history course has been replaced by a world history course that gives the student some awareness of the existence of cultures outside of the Greco-Roman tradition. Area courses, usually elective, have been introduced in such fields as Latin America, the Far

East, and Africa. More courses in psychology, sociology, and economics have been introduced. And by and large the teachers are probably more knowledgeable in a broad spectrum of social studies than were the teachers of thirty or forty years ago.

But what has not been done and is not about to be done is the construction of a master plan for "the" social studies sequence for all the schools of our country. Such a notion would be as preposterous as the creation of a national commission to formulate the ideal cultural program for all Americans.

Though there is no need for an upheaval in the social studies and no need to deplore the "chaos," there is always need for continued experimentation. And there is continuing response to this need.

On a dozen campuses major experimental curriculum projects are underway with federal financing. On other campuses at least a dozen additional programs are being tested under private or collegiate auspices.

The essence of twentieth-century social studies is pluralism. It is the avoidance of dogma, indoctrination, and the "one best way." In education it prefers a hierarchy of curriculum-making in which the individual teacher, the faculty, and local administration collectively, the state authorities, the colleges and universities, a variety of professional organizations with national influence, and to a degree the federal government itself, all have contributions to make. This flexible, multi-level structure insures a considerable body of commonality in curriculum offerings even while it insures the freedom of local choice that is so strong a thread in American educational tradition.

The peculiar contribution of the social studies to the creation of thinking citizens is acceptance of divergent thinking. The social scientist must find an acceptable solution without ever considering it *the* solution.

In mathematics and the exact sciences a problem permits of one or at most two or three, correct solutions. In the fine arts a problem yields as many answers as there are artists. The social studies stand in the middle, joining the artistic world with the scientific. The social studies provide the link between the subjectivity of the one and the objectivity of the other, and must itself include large elements of both.

Consequently the approach to curriculum building must be quite different in the social studies. Any attempt to devise an official curriculum or to emulate the new math or the new physics is doomed to failure. There is no "new social studies"; there are a dozen. And they all compete in the marketplace of ideas for recognition in the courses of study that will continue to be constructed by local curriculum committees, state committees, university groups, and national councils. The variety of programs so produced may represent diversity, variety, or a pot-pourri—but surely not chaos.