

For the Record

Teacher Education and Commitment: The Tolling Bell

"We see now," educational philosopher Philip G. Smith said recently,¹ "that the central purpose of American schooling is dictated by the democratic commitment of our society. The problem of translating this central purpose into objectives for teaching-learning (at the level of skills, habits, understandings, attitudes, and appreciations) calls for a sustained program of complex conceptual analysis and empirical research." He was asking for a stronger educational profession and for increased professional control of the schools. By implication, he was asking that schools and colleges of education focus on analysis and research, on getting our democratic commitment into operational terms. There has been enough public debate and "squabble," he said; we must "get on with society's business, for example, as the medical profession does."

Is it indeed the case that there is sufficient agreement on the value dimension in education for teacher educators to concentrate exclusively on training in expertise? Is it indeed the case that the "central purpose" of American schools requires no more discussion, even among teachers-to-be? Is it sufficient to declare that "in a free society committed to the principles of a democratic ethic," the commitment of the public schools can be assumed to be to "democratic principles"?

We find it difficult to take refuge in abstractions today, difficult to be sanguine. Vice President Agnew's speeches ring in our ears: the attack on "effete and impudent snobs"; the declaration that the government can afford to separate dissidents "from our society—with no more regret than we should feel over discarding rotten apples from a barrel"; the condemnation of the "instant analysis and querulous criticism" offered by television commentators after President Nixon's November 3rd address. The "silent majority" construct haunts us, as do the conspiracy trials, the massacre in Vietnam, the seemingly endless war, the talk of "law and order" at the Justice Department.² The final report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence lingers in our mind. We need, the Commission said, to reorder our national priorities: "While serious external dangers remain, the graver threats today are internal."³ Poverty, discrimination, overcrowding—these are the threats, and the "high level of violence" resulting "is dangerous to our society." The report went on:

It is disfiguring our society—making fortresses of portions of our cities and dividing our people into armed camps. It is jeopardizing some of our most precious institutions, among them our schools and universities—poisoning the spirit of trust and cooperation that is essential to their proper functioning. It is corroding the central political processes of our democratic society—substituting force and fear for argument and accommodation.

Democratic commitment? Democratic ethic? It seems to us that, for many people, they

have been drained of content and become empty. A democratic commitment is a commitment, after all, to individual fulfillment. "Security," "prosperity," "stability," like social institutions generally, are justified by the degree to which they serve the person and his quest for meanings, his efforts to effect controls over experience in his particular world. The internal threats described by the Commission are largely due to feelings of frustration and desperations, aroused by the inability of this society to satisfy the felt needs of many important individuals, to give them a sense of significance and purpose, or at least some awareness of possibility.

This is not, unhappily, the way the democratic ethic is articulated in what Thomas Green calls "the polity of education."⁴ There, among the officials, community representatives, teachers, and administrators through whom power is distributed and choices made, people too frequently pay lip service to individual fulfillment—and, therefore, to "democracy." Too often their professions of concern for democratic education resemble the "Glorious Loyalty Oath Crusade" in *Catch-22*. As the Captain says in that novel, "It doesn't matter whether they mean it or not. That's why they make little kids pledge allegiance even before they know what 'pledge' and 'allegiance' mean."⁶

If there were more operational concern with this in schools and colleges of education, we would be more inclined to accept Professor Smith's view that we can take the prevailing commitment for granted and get on with "society's business." An individual here and there may grumble about the "silent majority"; but few people ask themselves what the schools have contributed to such "silence" or (and this is far more important) what can be done in the schools to make possible informed, articulate consent and dissent. Shock is expressed at the news of the massacres in Vietnam; but no one seriously contemplates the fact that, two or three years ago, most of the young men involved were attending public schools. The responsibility for ghetto school deficiencies has only recently been acknowledged by the professionals, as has the responsibility for slanted textbooks and the distortion of American history where black people are concerned. Of course "conceptual analysis and empirical research" are necessary; but surely "society's business" has not yet been adequately defined. We are reminded, when we read Professor Smith, of Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby and his image of himself: "He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that —and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty."⁶ Can people in education simply *assume* that "society's business" is in some manner sacrosanct because it is named "democratic,"—or must they confront (as Gatsby should have done) the presence of a "foul dust" in the air?

It is a well-known fact that education students tend to be less activist and more complacent than students in other areas, that professional schools have been relatively unaffected by student unrest. We are saddened by the realization that education students have played a smaller part in civil rights actions and peace moratoria than other students, that education faculties have been less inclined than other faculties to take public stands on such issues as the war in Vietnam. We are quite aware that the education profession, like medicine and law, signifies a social role "whose content and significance are defined by norms operative in the society"⁷ and that, in some sense, teachers are not "free" to

commit themselves in the way others are free. Nevertheless, we are somehow appalled when educators choose neutrality as their political position, or when they blandly choose not to choose. Teachers, after all, are expected to be uniquely concerned with enabling others to make decisions of principle, to identify and create themselves. It is difficult to understand how those who hesitate to make deeply felt commitments can stimulate others to commit themselves. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, when Marlow is musing about "all the mysterious life of the wilderness," he speaks about how the incomprehensible fascinates some human beings and is detestable to others. "Mind," he says to the retired seamen on the deck of the anchored yacht, "none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency."⁸ It may be that a similar devotion (what Raymond Callahan once called "the cult of efficiency"⁹) defends many educators—and teacher educators—against involvement and outrage. It may be the "business" image, or what some call the "factory metaphor," which keeps educators' minds focused on the efficiency and the production process in the schools.

Robert Paul Wolff,¹⁰ in reacting to Clark Kerr's defense of the multi-university "as responding to social needs or as satisfying demands made upon it by society," develops a critique that is relevant. He says that no adequate distinction is drawn, in Kerr's argument, between the concepts of "effective or market demand" and "human or social need." A need is a lack, an absence of something which, if present, would contribute to "the full and unalienated development of human power. . . ." Market demand means that, in a market economy, there exist a number of buyers prepared to purchase a commodity; but there is never a guarantee that the most potent human desires and needs felt at any given moment are being expressed as market demands. Thomas Green¹¹ is not the first to make the point that the values of managerial education are among the predominant values now shaping the functions of the public school. Managerial education is precisely that kind of education which is intended to satisfy market demand, and it involves evaluations governed by a notion of utility. The schools, in other words, are thought of as producing distinctive products—the workers, technologists, administrators, soldiers, et al. "needed" by society; and school systems are judged by their efficiency in satisfying effective demand. Although in this case, too, significant felt needs may not be finding articulation as market demand, the managerial seems to be the prevailing point of view. Ghetto residents and others who have been educationally short-changed seem, as Professor Green indicates, to espouse it. With certain exceptions, they object chiefly to the inefficiency of the ghetto school in preparing members of minority groups for "making it" in the market economy which exists. The few who are separatists or serious revolutionaries challenge the fundamental nature of the economy; but the majority, although they may now deem society inherently inequitable, support Black Studies programs, open enrollment, and other devices with full assimilation in mind, entry into the mainstream of what already is.

This managerial or market orientation does much to explain why protests are infrequently heard in the educational profession. If one is in the business of marketing a commodity and satisfying those who can afford to buy, one is not likely to criticize the buyers' values and way of life. But is this orientation appropriate in teachers' colleges, in schools and departments of education? Is it the kind of orientation which stimulates confrontation of

concrete educational problems in the contemporary world? Is it the kind of orientation which permits the teacher-to-be to define a role for himself as a thoughtful practitioner, equipped to teach diverse and particular children in diverse and particular schools?

It seems to us that, at various points in his professional training, a teacher-to-be ought to be given the opportunity to ask himself whether he *chooses* to be an agent of the technological society, obligated to pursue those behavioral objectives "society's business" appears to demand, or whether he chooses to be an initiator, a crusader against mediocrity, indifference, inequity, "silence." Too seldom are education students permitted to confront the discrepancy between conceived and operative values, between what is sincerely believed to be desirable and what is actually acted upon in the world. It is important for teachers-to-be to know that, as Thomas Green puts it, "educators are likely to explain their actions to one another in the terms of humanistic education and to act on values of managerial education. . . ." Humanistic education means the kind of education primarily concerned with the growth of persons and the autonomy of individuals, each one encouraged to discover meanings, to create his own identity in the situations of his life. Much of the talk in teacher education, it is well known, has to do with discovery, pluralism, and what might be called "democratic" education; but this talk too often echoes hollowly when the teacher takes his place in the field without having had an opportunity to come to terms with discrepancy and conflict, without charting his own life-world and deliberating on how to choose for himself.

Speaking at a Symposium at the University of Bristol, W. A. Campbell Stewart raised a question that is suggestive, a question too seldom raised in the terms he used. What, he asked, is the role of the teacher in the advanced society? The advanced society, he explained, "is one in which powerlessness, anomie, relaxation, ignorant acceptance are likely. Section-alized responsibility and social myopia are to be expected. An advanced society is so difficult to grasp that a constant and exhausting effort to understand is required and difficult to sustain. Here is the crux for the teacher."¹² To ask a question of this sort is to move away from the abstract-ness and generality of "democratic principles," from the simplism of "market demand." It is to suggest that the traditional role of the teacher no longer exists and that the teacher is faced with a wide range of alternatives (or ought to be) in deciding what role to play. Schools become more complex; more and more specialization is demanded. The teacher must not only understand his own particular role (as person, professional, specialist, generalist) but something about others' roles, since he can no longer take role reciprocity for granted.¹³ There are more alternatives, when it comes to what he can actually expect to achieve than ever before; but he cannot become fully aware of this unless, in the course of his professional training, he is made aware of the areas open for exploration and of the need to choose his own identity.

No single teacher can cope with the problems of "powerlessness, anomie, relaxation, ignorant acceptance" in general or *in abstracto*. Each individual, attempting to conceive the advanced society and to take his own stance with respect to what he sees, must decide on the action he, as a single one, can reasonably and authentically take; and it does not seem to us that he can make such a choice without a confrontation of the value dimension

involved. Generalized prescriptions will no longer work in the identification of his role identity; each teacher-to-be must choose not only a specialty but a specific commitment, a style. Some, for example, may decide to play the enabling, permissivist roles long recommended for the middle-class elementary school. Others, anticipating work with deprived children, will have to think through the tempering of permissivism with deliberate interventions, with the kind of structuring so often required by children who have suffered a lack of sensory stimulation and linguistic experience. Some will be drawn to cognitive emphases and to a continuing concern, not so much with the transmission of knowledge, but with teaching young people to learn how to learn. Others, troubled by overly intellectualist aims, will choose to concern themselves with the expressive and the creative, coping with anomie in that fashion, leaving to others education in "coping" with the changing world.

Most teachers-to-be, no matter what their predilections and styles, are going to face a significant decline in the authority associated with their roles. This means that they will be exposed to a new sense of fallibility as they work with children who are largely resistant to imposed adult codes. No longer considered moral exemplars, no longer considered sages, they will have to be present to their individual students as fallible persons, each one developing—as each student is developing—his own ethical code. In such situations, they are obligated not to announce what is good and right but to communicate a sense of what it is to live by principle, to make decisions of principle, to define adequate reasons for what they choose to do. This seems to us to be still another argument for including in teacher education programs more stress on deliberative thinking where values and ethics are concerned. It is simply not enough to take "democratic commitment" for granted and concentrate solely on its translation into "operational terms." To do so, again, for all the apparent specificity of Dr. Smith's "skills, habits, understandings, attitudes, and appreciations," may be to cancel out the moral responsibility of the individual teacher at a time when it may be the crucial factor in creating a "democratic" school.

Joseph J. Schwab has been speaking lately of a "commitment to deliberation."⁴ He writes:

Deliberation is complex and arduous. It treats both ends and means and must treat them as mutually determining one another. It must try to identify, with respect to both, what facts may be relevant. It must try to ascertain the relevant facts in the concrete case. It must try to identify the desiderata in the case. It must generate alternative solutions. It must make every effort to trace the branching pathways of consequences which may flow from each alternative and affect desiderata. It must then weigh consequences against one another and choose, not the right alternative, for there *is* no such thing, but the best one.

Reminiscent of John Dewey's work on reflective thinking and intelligent choice, Professor Schwab's views presume (it seems to us) an active, responsible, attentive teacher. He believes that teacher education should be concerned with "the uses and arts of deliberation," and we agree. We agree because what he is saying directs attention to

diverse and particular classrooms, to subject matters demanding alternative treatments, to the need for what he calls an "eclectic" rather than a rigorous single vision of curriculum and ends. Sceptical of "behavioral objectives" derived from conceptions of the structure of knowledge, he wants to see studies of what is actually going on in the schools; he wants to *hear* what is happening; he wants to find teachers who can generate alternative ways of teaching—"and trace the branching pathways of consequences." The teacher who can do this must, he says, be considered to be "a multitude of probable behaviors which escape the net of personality theories and cognitive scales"; but not every teacher can do all that has to be done, and "appropriate" teachers must be found for specific situations. Nothing could be further from a view of teacher in the abstract, or from a view of teacher as technician, functionary, clerk.

This concern for the "practical arts" supports and indeed depends upon a concern for personally chosen and reflected-upon responsibility. Also, it assumes the existence of specific, concrete situations, the only ones in which individuals can meaningfully identify themselves. We do not anticipate that the social order will be changed by the schools; but we do anticipate the appearance of teachers who can play what David Riesman once called a "countervailing" role. Working in actual classrooms, confronting actual children, imagining a variety of possibilities (rather than a predefined set of "behavioral objectives"), teachers may be able to combat the managerial values that prevail. Their deliberations may yet incarnate humanistic values at least in their own classrooms, and they may be able to commit themselves to the fulfilling—not of the market's "needs"—but the gradually expanding, "felt" needs of persons eager for sense-making, eager for an enhanced quality of experience.

Only when the teacher-to-be is conceived as an unclassifiable person capable of imagining alternatives, testing them, and choosing among them, will he feel free enough, autonomous enough to move beyond neutrality. And it is time for that. The teacher too is "a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine," not someone to be sealed off by the norms of his profession, by predefined "objectives" and prepackaged "principles," not someone to be limited in his moral responses by the need to satisfy demand. "Perchance he," wrote John Donne, "for whom this Bell tolls, may be so ill, as that he knowes not it tolls for him..." The teacher is ill if he pays no heed to war and massacre and poverty and hatred, if he lives vacantly in a technological world. The "art of deliberation" may heal him once more. At least it may open him to possibility; it may enable him to recall what teachers used to say they knew so well: "And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

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- 1 Philip G. Smith, "Objectives for American Education," in Stanley Elam and Gordon I. Swanson, Eds. *Educational Planning in the United States*. Ithaca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1969.
- 2 See Richard Harris, "Justice," in *The New Yorker*, November 8, 15, 22, 1959.
- 3 *The New York Times*, December 13, 1969, p. 22.

- 4 Thomas F. Green, "Schools and Communities," *Harvard Educational Review*, Spring, 1969.
- 5 Joseph Heller. *Catch-22*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961.
- 6 F. Scott Fitzgerald. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.
- 7 Robert Paul Wolff. *The Ideal of the University*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.
- 8 Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Signet Books, 1950.
- 9 See Raymond E. Callahan. *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- 10 Robert Paul Wolff, *The Ideal of the University*, *op. cit.*
- 11 Thomas F. Green, "Schools and Communities," *op. cit.*
- 12 W. A. Campbell Stewart, "The Role of the Teacher in Advanced Societies," in *Colston Papers*, No. 20, *Towards a Policy for the Education of Teachers*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, The Shoe String Press, Inc., 1969.
- 13 Peter S. Burnham, "Commentary," in *Colston Reports*, *op. cit.*
- 14 Joseph J. Schwab, "The Practical: A Language for Curriculum," *School Review*, November 1969.