

# THE IMPACT ON TEACHERS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

by

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The teacher stands amidst the multitude of momentous changes in the social scene, and largely in his hands is the answer to the question of their impact on education. A new world is in the making. Query: Will teachers take an active role and consciously adapt themselves to the needs of the day, or will they be a passive medium, allowing themselves and their teaching to be buffeted by forces left beyond their control?

First, there is the series of interrelated changes in the economic scene. One grouping of the most obvious and immediate of the significant social changes is the series of changes resulting from the revolution in transportation and communication. We live in a much smaller world than our fathers did, so that Algeria and Indonesia are as close to us as Chicago formerly was. This is reflected in the amount of space given to faraway places in the newspapers. In turn, it calls for more teacher knowledge of current events and of the social sciences, particularly geography, history, and economics. This emphasis will in turn be reflected in our teaching.

The closer tying together of the different countries of the world has furthermore brought about an interdependence that makes

for "one world" in the fullest sense. This calls for a liberal attitude in the teaching of international affairs, with emphasis on economic and political interdependence and the importance of the quest for a peaceful solution of the world's problems. The "brotherhood of man" concept should play a central role in our teaching.

The transportation-communication revolution has also brought in its wake a much greater mobility, both geographically and socially. These, together with other factors, have also resulted in a fundamental change in the composition of the population. Puerto Ricans and Southern Negroes come to New York City as easily as, say, Vermont farmers formerly did, and on the other hand, the upper social classes just as easily uproot themselves and take to the suburbs. Our school population is affected in at least two significant ways: (1) there is a vast shift to the lower economic groups, and (2) there is a frequent turnover of pupils in the less stable areas of our city. This calls for several significant responses. There must be a constant re-training of teachers, particularly in the urban centers, to accomodate them to an awareness of the changing population that they have to deal with, and to adapt their teaching methods to the needs of the underprivileged child. These children come to us with much greater school needs than the school population of previous generations. This means, for example, that we need more of the Higher Horizons type of enrichment and motivation;

it means at the same time the not inconsistent process of bringing one's teaching to the level at which the underprivileged child finds himself because of his socio-economic status. It calls for much more in special classes, such as remedial reading and arithmetic and classes for non-English speaking pupils, all along the ladder of the school system. Also called for is a flexibility in the curriculum and in the organization of the school - in particular, the spreading of the ungraded class, to take care of children with varied abilities and talents and with varying degrees of readiness for the curriculum of a given year of progress.

Next among the major types of social change that I wish to consider are those resulting from automation. The fluidity of jobs in industry calls for several types of adaptation in the school set-up. As Secretary of Labor Wirtz stated recently, "The school system is no longer preparing enough people for the jobs that need to be done. The job needs have changed, the educational system hasn't. There are no longer enough unskilled jobs to take up the school's failures. The usual price of a lack of education used to be commitment to common labor; now the price is frequently unemployment. There probably won't be full employment until we make education our No. 1 industry."

There needs to be a more realistic training and guidance program, speedily responsive to the constant and rapid changes in kinds of jobs available. Two examples are the need for ever

greater training in the use of office machines and for training in service occupations. The schools must be geared to a continuous process of adult education to help workers in their constant need for readjustment. As suggested by Board member Mrs. Mary Kohler, skill centers should be set up to provide training day and night, year-round, for students of all ages. Courses would then be set up for dropouts, unskilled graduates, and adults. As has been suggested again and again, academic and vocational high schools should be easily interchangeable, possibly on the basis of the comprehensive school. There should be a complete reorientation of the junior high school as the trade exploratory functions increase. In general, school programs must be made more interesting, meaningful, and challenging, in the light of today's problems as seen by the lower socio-economic classes of society.

The transition from school to work must be planned for, more consciously and deliberately. This means, as I have already suggested, increased vocational guidance, a greater variety of training in jobs that are increasing under the impact of automation and other technological changes, the expansion of cooperative work-study programs, and the expansion of vocational retraining centers.

Technological unemployment needs to be recognized as a serious factor in our economic life, and appropriate adjustments need to be made in the school set-up. The suggestions that I have made in connection with automation are applicable here too. In addition, we need to give serious consideration to the raising

of the compulsory school age. Junior college should replace high school as the standard minimum level of education for the average population. In addition to using the later school-leaving age as a partial preventative of unemployment, every aspect of our advancing civilization calls for more and more formalized education for the general public.

Improved technology brings a demand for shorter hours of work, and this in turn yields more leisure time. This requires more and more of a consumer orientation in our curriculum, with emphasis on proper uses of leisure time activities. This means, for example, a renewed emphasis on art, music, and literature appreciation, and on consumer economics.

An easily available tie-in between school and home exists in the widespread ownership of radio and television sets. This enables teachers to utilize these media as supplementary aids in homework assignments. Choosing good programs, through guided practice, can hopefully become a good life habit.

In integration we have another problem of immense proportions. The teacher must become increasingly aware of the need to come to a viable solution of the segregation and discrimination patterns as speedily as possible. It is essential that he empathize with the minority groups. He should be ready to accept reasonable solutions such as the Princeton Plan, i.e. joint zoning. In-service courses on integration and minority problems should be stressed.

Closely related is the great population increase and hence the increase in school enrolment. Coupled with our tradition of compulsory public education for all, there arises the problem of how to prevent universal education from degenerating into mass education. We must look to smaller classes and individualized methods of teaching as ways out of this seeming impasse. At the same time we must keep our minds open to the possibilities of the newer techniques of television, team teaching, teaching machines, language laboratory, and tape recordings.

While we should not oppose the changes in technique which prove themselves worthwhile, we must insist on maintaining the personal relationship between teacher and pupils together with an increased employment of teachers along with reduction in class size.

One final item of social change that we need to consider is the growth of the trade union movement, with its concomitant of collective bargaining. Since the New Deal days, unionism and collective bargaining have been recognized as necessary and desirable institutions which are encouraged by the government pursuant to the National Labor Relations Act. It has been incumbent on the teacher to slant his social studies teaching in favor of these institutions. A realistic functional study of labor union membership and activity should be undertaken at several levels of the school system.

Another question arises now, with the spread of unionism and collective bargaining to the area of teacher organization.

In New York City, as well as in some other cities, the organizing process has gone so far that it is impossible for a teacher to avoid taking a stand and at the same time be alive in any meaningful social sense. The union, the United Federation of Teachers, has become very much an inherent part of the educational machinery of New York City. The alert teacher will join the UFT and become involved in the decision-making process of collective bargaining. In any event, what the teachers do with and through collective bargaining will have a significant bearing on the future of the school system and the welfare of the children. That this is so can be garnered from a brief listing of a few of the topics covered in collective bargaining negotiations and in policy consultations: class size, recruitment of teachers, the difficult schools, the use of school aides, teachers' duties in lieu of administrative assignments, and a fair transfer policy.

In conclusion: The future of education obviously depends in substantial measure on the attitude of teachers toward the many educational problems that are coming up for solution.

These problems are created, or at least substantially affected, by the processes of social change. Among the major adaptations of the teacher will be those involving more teacher knowledge and teaching of current events, teaching the brotherhood of man, retraining of teachers, adaptation of the curriculum and teaching methods to the needs of the underprivileged child, a more

realistic training and guidance program, raising the compulsory school age, education for leisure time, adaptation to the demands of integration, and a receptive attitude toward unionism and collective bargaining.

The impact of these social changes on the thinking and attitudes of teachers must create a climate of activity that will be of tremendous significance in the world of tomorrow.

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