

Riverside Educational Monographs

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THE TEACHER'S HEALTH

A Study in the Hygiene of an Occupation

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PREFACE

THE importance of the subject to which the reader is introduced in this little volume is attested by the following bit of testimony from one of our most experienced school physicians: "In my experience as Medical Director of Schools," the statement runs, "I have time and again observed teachers afflicted with tuberculosis, asthma, deafness, defective vision, neurasthenia, malnutrition, anæmia, heart disease, or other disorders."¹ Similar warnings have been sounded in the last two decades from almost every part of the civilized world. Medical inspection of schools, which everywhere was instituted solely for the benefit of the pupil, is rapidly growing to include in its scope the medical examination and supervision of teachers as well. The latter was the inevitable corollary of the former, for the health of the school-child is intricately related to that of the teacher.

¹ E. B. Hoag: *The Health Index of Children*, 1910, p 151.

PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to summarize and interpret the most important investigations which bear upon the hygiene of the teaching profession. It is hoped that the findings of the brief survey will (1) make some contribution toward the conservation of the teacher's health by pointing out some of the sources of danger and by suggestions for a better personal hygiene; (2) that it will awaken those charged with the administration of our schools to the need for further investigations and to the desirability of adopting some concerted plan of action designed to ameliorate the present rather unsatisfactory hygienic status of the profession.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY,
April 10, 1912.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THERE are many factors in school efficiency about which we know little; the health of the teacher is one. For a long time many citizens have looked upon the teacher's work as a sine-cure; for an equally long time the teachers have contended that it is a life of strain and exhaustion. The value of direct experience as testimony should certainly carry some weight; but even more valuable is a presentation of the available scientific evidence, which Professor Terman presents in this monograph, along with his critical interpretations. But one conclusion from this study seems possible and that is, that neither the profession nor the public has been sufficiently aware of the morbidity existing among teachers as a class. In consequence they both have been inadequately vigorous in guaranteeing that health of mind and body which is essential to high effectiveness in teaching.

Vigorous practical measures ought to be the

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product of definite knowledge, and such knowledge as we have suggests that we should pursue six distinct policies : —

(1) The establishment of an efficient health examination of candidates for entrance into professional training or practice.

(2) The provision of an adequate training in hygiene and sanitation for all teachers.

(3) The adoption of measures that will guarantee a distribution of teachers among lines of work that are most congenial to personal temperament, training, and taste, and therefore less injurious to physical and mental health.

(4) The improvement of the physical conditions of classroom life so as to approximate the best standards of hygiene and sanitation.

(5) The betterment of the methods of school supervision and administration so that the demands of a constantly evolving school system shall be transmitted to the teacher with due regard to the personal equation in effective workmanship.

(6) The fostering of an intelligent appreciation on the part of the public that teachers, just

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because they are in a business that is exhausting, are entitled to a normal, restful, and recreative personal and social life.

It is unnecessary to argue the importance of all these purposes; for the most part they express obvious needs. It would not be necessary to mention them were it not for our persistent violation of the standards they imply. Teachers with communicable diseases still expose children to the danger of infection, and persons, too weak for manual labor or commercial occupations, turn to teaching under the delusion that they are equal to its demands upon their physical resources. Training schools for teachers are still so scornfully superior in their intellectual and spiritual pretensions that they fail to give their student-teachers a real and practicable command of the fundamental principles of hygiene and sanitation. Again, the sanitary arrangements of many schoolrooms, as regards heating, lighting, and ventilation, are far from satisfactory; this, too, in spite of much recent progress in our knowledge of what ought to be.

It is useful, therefore, to urge the value for

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teachers of sound physical health and wholesome mental attitudes. Modern teaching is not a formal and mechanical procedure, exclusively conducted through memory and habit, the twin economizers of human energy. It is a highly versatile occupation calling for alertness, tact, patience, persistence, judgment, and the other resources utilized in meeting novel situations. The constant solving of novel situations is precisely the kind of activity which leads to much wear and tear. Physical weaklings and tired people are poorly fitted to represent civilization on the frontier of childhood where conflicts with law, order, and intelligence, or emergencies involving the physical safety and the mental potentialities of children, are continually arising. The positive value of rugged health, with adequate reserve energy, is not to be underestimated in a scheme of work calling for the degree of self-restraint and continual personal readjustment required in being a foster parent and intellectual leader to the children of forty or more different families.

It is most important in this connection to em-

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phasize the mental health of the teacher, that wholesome functioning of a truly social personality in the presence of impressionable youth. The chief conscious purpose of school life may be the transmission of knowledge, but it is more than likely that the outcome of greatest value is found in the wisdom garnered in the classroom as a by-product. And wisdom, as we have often been told, is more than truth ; it is truth evaluated for the practical purposes of life with all its varying circumstances. It is just here that the wholesomeness or the unwholesomeness of the teacher's personality enters into the efficiency of the school. If the teacher's conscious pedagogical method transmits truth, it is the unconscious influence of his personality that gives it that bias of meaning which the fact will forever after have for the pupil. The teacher whose habitual mental reactions are filled with the common sense of a world-old wisdom, true to the better order of things outside the school, is the teacher with mental health. No other teacher will do. The merely school-made or book-made instructor will be an academician, a bookworm,

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a martinet, or a pedant, but not a teacher. The real teacher is made only by a wholesome participation in life, wherein books and schools are the accessories of a dominant interest in human life itself.

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THE TEACHER'S HEALTH

I

THE PROBLEM

IN order to maintain a reasonable standard of health among the eighty thousand soldiers and sailors in its employ, our National Government expends annually large sums of money in payment for expert medical and surgical attendance and in the prosecution of scientific researches bearing on military hygiene. Whether the contribution of armies and navies to the welfare of the world is sufficient to justify their support is, however, a question about which exists much difference of opinion.

In the United States there are about one-half million public-school teachers whose combined efforts are molding the intellect and character of nearly twenty million children. These teachers are official bearers of the torch of civilization to the generations which are to follow. No one

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doubts the value of their social contribution, or that the school is the most far-reaching and fundamental of our public institutions. Concerning the health conditions obtaining among these half-million teachers we know, however, extremely little beyond what common observation teaches us. So far as can be learned, not a dollar of public money has ever been expended in the United States even to investigate the hygiene of school-teaching, to say nothing of expenditures for remedial measures.

Regarding the mortality rate of teachers, in comparison with that of other professional workers, our knowledge is far from satisfactory; still less do we know about the relative responsibility of the various diseases. We do not know how many of our teachers are partially incapacitated by affections of the heart, lungs, throat, digestive organs, or the nervous system. We have not ascertained the safe limits as to size of classes, number of hours of teaching duties per week, years of service, etc., nor have we much definite information relating in any way to this public-service profession.

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The soldier is not accepted until he has been given a thorough physical examination and has been put through a searching inquiry as to his antecedents ; but the mentors of our children, as far as their health is concerned, are accepted upon the sublimest faith. We do not inquire how many of them are diseased on entering the profession, how many have been subjected to overstrain in their professional preparation, nor how long the average teacher serves before health begins to deteriorate. On the other hand, the army statistician could doubtless inform us fairly accurately upon all matters of corresponding import for military affairs, including even the hygiene and service life of the army mule.

The little positive knowledge we have regarding the hygiene of teaching is not especially reassuring. As will be shown later in detail, investigations indicate that the teacher becomes superannuated at a decidedly earlier age than the lawyer, physician, state official, or man of business. Evidence will also be adduced which seems to warrant the belief that between a quarter and a half-million of our school-children are being

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daily instructed by teachers who are already caught in the grip of the great White Plague. It hardly needs to be affirmed that to permit the presence of a tuberculous teacher in the school-room is a species of neglect which constitutes a terrible menace. It will also be shown that teachers are especially subject to pathological mental fatigue and that probably more than a million of our school-children are taught by persons who are neurasthenic or otherwise nervously unstrung.

Such figures must of course be understood as little more than guesses, based, as they are, upon fragmentary or otherwise unsatisfactory data. Whatever the facts, however, they should be thoroughly explored. There is no other occupation or profession, the hygiene of which is so vitally important to the public welfare. Teaching at present is the chief profession open to women. Our women teachers equal in number the combined Federal armies of the Civil War. Apart from humanitarian considerations, they are a national asset far too valuable to justify our apathetic disregard of the hygienic conditions which

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surround them. For the sake of the children, as well, it is a matter of the greatest consequence that teachers be kept at the highest possible level of physical, mental, and moral efficiency. The teacher who harbors tuberculosis and the teacher who dwells always in the abysses of despair and gloom or tingles with nervous hypersensitiveness are dangerous in almost equal degree.

In proportion as society recognizes its obligations to the teaching profession by the excellent practice of granting retiring allowances and sick-benefits the investigation of mortality and morbidity among teachers will become a recognized necessity. For this purpose we shall have to go far beyond the data usually collected for census purposes. Such investigation must seek to establish a reliable body of facts on at least the following points :—

(1) *The physical equipment of those entering the profession.* Is it true, as some authorities maintain, that adverse selection is at work favoring the entrance into the profession of persons who are not sufficiently rugged to measure up to

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the demands of other, supposedly more arduous, pursuits? Is it true, as others believe, that candidates for teaching are injured by overwork and bad hygiene during the period of their professional training?

(2) *The hygienic aspects of the teacher's work itself, and of the conditions under which the work is done.* This will include such topics as the size of class, the apportionment of work over the school-year and school-day, the length of vacations; the influence on health of salary, tenure, and different methods of supervision; special disease tendencies, together with the underlying reasons therefor; and, finally, the mental and moral hygiene of the teacher's work.

In the light of such investigations teachers will need to be instructed not only in the general laws of hygiene, but especially in those aspects of personal hygiene which pertain to their particular habits of living and working. The desirability of interesting teachers themselves in the sources of their ill health and in the means of its prevention cannot be too strongly emphasized, and in fact is the main justification for the present volume.

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Special attention is called to the fact that most of the evils herein recounted are remediable. Had such not been the case the writer would not have risked the danger of disheartening the teacher by directing her attention to them. It is conceivable that further inquiry into the hygiene of teaching will appreciably affect our methods of instruction, our prevailing types of school architecture, and even assist in the accomplishment of special educational legislation designed to conserve the health of our largest and most important body of public servants.