AN INTRODUCTION TO TEACHING

BY

WILLIAM C. BAGLEY

AND

JOHN A. H. KEITH

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PREFACE

THE present volume is the first of a series of books designed expressly for students of collegiate grade in professional schools for teachers. Forthcoming volumes of the series will treat in detail the various subjects that are now recognized as important in the professional education of teachers, including not only psychology, measurements, administration, management, curriculum-organization, and the technique of teaching, but also the materials of elementary and secondary education considered from the professional point of view. The books will be prepared by specialists in the several fields under the general direction of the editors. It is not intended, however, that the series shall reflect any single or exclusive theory of education. On the contrary it is the hope of the editors that each book will have an individuality of its own, and that the series as a whole will represent a sincere and successful effort to treat the complicated problems of education with the tolerance, the catholicity, and the open-mindedness that their intricacy and their fundamental importance demand.

Inasmuch as the series will be the work of many persons, extended perhaps over many years, it will have an opportunity to realize this ideal in a measure that cannot be approached by this introductory volume. The writers trust, however, that the following chapters will be found not entirely devoid of the characteristics

just named. The aim has been, through a brief but comprehensive survey of the field, to orient the prospective teacher with regard to the outstanding problems of education, to give him a balanced perspective on disputed issues, to develop in an initial way the meanings of the more important technical terms that his later studies will involve, and to make easier on his part an intelligent choice of a specific field of service.

The first chapter sets forth the advantages and disadvantages of teaching as an occupation. Following this, an effort is made to explain in simple and concrete terms the essential nature of teaching and learning, and in doing this to bring to the student's attention some of the basic problems with which educational theory is concerned. The materials of universal education are next considered primarily for the purpose of showing how these materials have evolved and why they have been accorded so important a place in the programs of the elementary and secondary schools. Succeeding chapters provide an introductory treatment of the psychology of teaching and learning. Here, in connection with each of the larger problems, typical school practices are described and discussed. Chapter X deals with public education as a vast social enterprise, and aims to encourage the student to build up an adequate mental picture of the highly organized service that he is planning to enter. Two concluding chapters consider the personal qualifications important in teaching and the specific qualifications needed for each of the major divisions of the teaching service.

At the end of each chapter are suggestions for further

reading and a brief list of questions, exercises, and problems. The suggested readings are in no sense complete bibliographies of the topics treated in the chapters. The references are chiefly either to non-technical books and articles or to the more elementary technical literature. It is assumed that other courses will go far more deeply into the various topics. Indeed, one justification of a general introductory course lies in the fact that it should make possible in the later courses (especially in the extended curricula) a more advanced, intensive, and thoroughgoing treatment than could otherwise be given.

For advice, criticism, and encouragement in the preparation of the book the writers are under a heavy debt to a large number of their fellow-teachers and to a host of students. A course dealing with the same problem was given in the School of Education of the University of Illinois by one of the writers during the years 1908–1917. Many of the chapters of the book have been presented for criticism to successive classes of normal-school teachers engaged in graduate study at Teachers College, Columbia University. Specific and detailed criticisms of the manuscript have been made by Miss Jane McGrath and Mr. M. J. Walsh of the Indiana, Pennsylvania, State Normal School, by Miss Rosamond Root and Professor I. L. Kandel of Teachers College, Columbia University, and by Professor Thomas Alexander of the George Peabody College for Teachers. The writers are also indebted to Miss Adrienne Moukad and Miss Frances M. Burke for aid in preparing the manuscript for the press.

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WILLIAM C. BAGLEY
JOHN A. H. KEITH

June 1, 1924

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Chapter I

TEACHING AS AN OCCUPATION

Teaching is a fascinating occupation. This is the verdict of conscientious and successful teachers everywhere. Not all of these teachers can tell just why they find their work attractive. Likings of all sorts are difficult to analyze. Often their roots lie very deep, — far beyond the limits to which even the most sincere attempts at self-examination can carry one. Undoubtedly some of the causes that would explain the attractiveness of teaching must be sought in these deep-lying and fundamental impulses. The teacher is in constant contact with youth, and it is natural for the adult to be attracted to and interested in the young, — it is instinctive for the mature to protect and care for the immature. The conditions which surround teaching stimulate and develop this impulse. It is an exacting responsibility and makes a constant demand for the most devoted service; but it is in rendering such service that many people find the richest and most satisfying values of life.

The contagion of youth. — Nor is this all. Inevitably the teacher responds to the buoyancy and hope and

enthusiasm that are the natural attributes of childhood and adolescence. Good teachers stay young through the very contagion of youth. They may grow old in years, but in no other occupation does one have the same stimulus and opportunity to remain young in attitude and enthusiasm. Youth rebuilds its spirit and its dream in its devoted teachers.

New problems are continually presented. — Another reason for the fascination of teaching doubtless lies in the new problems that it continually presents. Though a teacher may spend his or her entire working life in one apparently narrow field of service, — a fourth-grade room, or a rural school, or the English department of a high school, — every class is a new and different class, every pupil is different from all other pupils. There is a never-ending variety in the human materials with which the teacher deals, and this means a never-ending variety in the problems that must be solved. Monotonous, mechanized work takes on the soul-killing qualities of drudgery, and while there is much necessary (and very important) routine work connected with teaching, this need never be for the teacher a purely mechanical process. There is always the possibility of improvement, — of doing even the simplest tasks better than one has done them before.

Teaching stimulates the teacher's mental growth. — Successful teachers also find a source of continuous growth in the materials other than human with which they deal, — in the subject-matter that they teach. Even upon the lowest age-levels of education, these materials are rich and abundant. It is a very serious

mistake to think of the elementary-school subjects as simple and rudimentary; they are, rather, elemental and fundamental. If one studies them aright, they lead out readily and quickly into fields of discovery and investigation that may well challenge the keenest intellect. Successful teachers make numerous excursions into these fields, and come back to their young charges with a fresh equipment. They see old truths in new ways; and this again is a source both of keen enjoyment and of an invigorating mental growth.

Teaching an essential "productive" occupation. — Conscientious and successful teachers find an abounding satisfaction in the social significance of their work. Not only is teaching a field that is replete with opportunities for serving one's fellows, but the service that it renders is indispensable to the life of the community, the state, and the nation. The school, indeed, is the most characteristic feature of modern civilization. Universal elementary education is admitted by all to be the corner stone of an effective democracy, and democracy is the predominant form of social organization among the civilized peoples of the modern world. Teaching, then, is not only an important occupation; under the conditions of modern life it is an absolutely essential occupation. The teacher is actually and essentially a *producer*, — not a producer directly of food or shelter or clothing, which are sometimes thought of as the basic life-necessities, — but a producer of that trained and informed intelligence without which, on a nation-wide and even world-wide scale, modern civilization will quickly crumble into ruin.

Teachers as a group have important collective responsibilities. — Teachers who take their work seriously are coming to appreciate more and more keenly this essential social value of their work. They recognize, too, that their obligations extend far beyond the limits of their classrooms. They recognize that they and their fellows constitute a company of workers to whom a very important collective duty has been delegated. They must think clearly regarding the aims that they should strive to realize. They must formulate well-matured policies which in their judgment should govern the work of the schools. They must place these policies as clearly and cogently as possible before the people as a whole, with whom, under the conditions of a democratic social order, the final decision will rest. This growth of a professional consciousness and the parallel development of a sense of collective responsibility for the guidance of a fundamental social institution are contributing much to the attractiveness of teaching as a life-career.

Some persons to whom the work of teaching will not be attractive. — It goes without saying that the advantages of teaching as a life-occupation will not appeal to everyone. There is to-day so wide a diversity of human occupations that young people may "pick and choose" to a degree that was quite unknown in former generations; and while a hasty decision on the basis of a superficial acquaintance with this or that field of work is not to be encouraged, nothing is more certain than that one should avoid a calling for which one is hopelessly disqualified. Sometimes these disqualifications are due to desires and ambitions that the calling cannot satisfy;

sometimes they are due to temperamental traits which stand in the way of effective work; sometimes they are due to a lack of native ability for which no amount of training can provide a substitute.

Teaching will not satisfy certain types of ambition. — It is only fair to say that a person whose chief ambition is to achieve a wide public recognition — to "win fame" — will find in teaching as such few opportunities for realizing his heart's desire. Many of the most successful teachers are unknown outside of the neighborhoods in which they serve. Others who are known in wider areas are known only to their fellow-workers and not to the public generally. Men and women who teach have not infrequently achieved wide renown in the field of scholarship, — as investigators and writers, — but only in the rarest cases as teachers. Others, whose earlier work in life has been that of the teacher, have won fame as executives, — as builders of great educational institutions, — but their teaching, though often markedly successful, did not bring them fame. Still others have left the work of teaching and have found in business, law, or politics a measure of public recognition which was never accorded to them as teachers. To what extent these facts constitute a handicap to the teaching service it would be difficult to say; but life is full of compensations. Fame is a fickle mistress, and wide fame, by its very nature, can come to but few individuals. Equally certain it is that the distinctive values which the teacher's work involves are substantial and enduring; nor is their possession limited to a few individuals.

The financial handicap of teaching. — Teaching has the ill repute of being an underpaid occupation. This bad reputation is in part unjustified. The general level of teachers' salaries, taking the country as a whole, is not high, but this is due in part to the meager compensation of a large group of teachers — nearly one half of the total number — who serve in the schools of the open country and the small villages. As a group, these rural-school and village teachers are immature, untrained, and transient in the profession; yet they are so numerous that their low wages have a most seriously depressing effect on the general average. The relatively permanent and far better prepared teachers of the towns and cities are much better paid, and although the general level of teachers' salaries, even in these communities, is still below what it should be, the prospects for its gradual advancement are favorable. Under the best of conditions, however, teaching cannot be expected to offer the opportunities for large financial returns that certain other occupations offer, and those persons whose ambitions can be satisfied only by the accumulation of wealth scarcely need be urged to select another calling. Those who seek riches of a different sort will find them in abundance in the teaching service; and even the material rewards, modest though they may be, have a certainty and a stability that more lucrative employments seldom afford.

Certain temperamental characteristics that interfere with success in teaching. — Men and women who are attracted to the work of teaching by one or more of the advantages mentioned earlier in this chapter sometimes

find themselves disqualified for the service by temperamental defects that stand squarely across the path of success. Often they lack patience. They are irritated by the slowness with which some of their pupils learn, and this constant irritation gives a sharp edge to their tempers. They may lack, too, that indefinable quality known as tact which is so important in all occupations in which the human contacts are frequent and intimate. They may have any one of a half-dozen personal defects, which would not interfere in the slightest measure with success in certain other fields, but which none the less constitute a serious handicap to success in teaching. Not all of these personal and temperamental defects are irremediable, and many teachers who have failed in the earlier stages of their work have learned to conquer all obstacles, and in the end have achieved a high degree of success. It is the part of wisdom, however, for the young person who desires to enter the teaching service to take a careful account of his or her personal qualifications for the work.[1] Fortunately the professional schools for teachers can do and are doing a great deal to aid the student in determining whether or not he or she has made the right choice. They are doing much, also, to correct the personal and temperamental defects that can be remedied.

Unworthy motives for engaging in teaching. — Some persons who enter the work of teaching are attracted by apparent advantages of the occupation that are either quite illusory or so obviously an appeal to unworthy motives as to stamp those whom they influence as

[1] This problem is discussed in Chapter XI.

probably unfitted for the responsibilities of the service. Indeed, certain mistaken notions regarding teaching prevail so widely that the actual truth regarding them cannot be too frequently or too forcibly pointed out.

Teaching far from "easy" work. — The relatively "short" working day, the "free" Saturday, and the "long" summer vacation lead many laymen to regard teaching as an "easy" occupation to be shunned by sincere and self-respecting men and women who wish to do their full share of the world's work. By the same token, these features of the occupation sometimes loom large in determining the choice of teaching by men and women of the opposite type, who are looking — openly or furtively — for a soft berth on the voyage of life. It is scarcely necessary to say that those who enter teaching from this motive are more than likely to be bitterly disappointed. The actual work of teaching, it is true, involves relatively short hours as compared with some other occupations, but both the short day and the short week are more than counterbalanced by two other factors: (1) the need of constant, relentless, unremitting concentration throughout the school day; and (2) the multiplicity of necessary tasks and duties that can be accomplished only outside of school hours. As a result, the actual time given to the work during the week is, in the average of cases, well up to the limit usually recognized as a fair maximum for adult workers (forty-four to forty-eight hours), while the most successful teachers usually devote far more time than this to work that is directly related to their teaching. The summer vacation, too, as well as being in part a period of physical

recuperation unquestionably justified by the exacting concentration of the school year, is coming more and more to be devoted in part to advanced professional education.

Teaching as a "stepping-stone" to other occupations. — One of the most serious handicaps to the development of teaching as a profession, — and consequently a most serious handicap to the efficiency of the schools, — has been the appeal that the occupation has made to those who wish to earn money toward preparation for other callings, and often to use the spare hours of the school week (and even the spare minutes of the school day!) in study for such occupations. The evils of this practice are obvious enough upon the slightest reflection.

(1) Teaching, one of the most serious responsibilities that a person can undertake, becomes merely an incidental means to a quite extrinsic end. Instead of dominating as the life-purpose to which one devotes the major part of one's energies, it is taken up as a temporary employment to be abandoned at the first good opportunity to do something else. Under these conditions, attention is divided, tasks and duties are not taken seriously, and the work for which one is paid is likely to be done in a formal, lifeless, perfunctory way.

(2) The practice is manifestly unfair to the teachers who take their profession seriously and pay to it the fine tribute of an undivided loyalty. The pressure of the temporary teacher who is headed for another calling has tended in the past to force upward the "initial" salaries which have sometimes been far more generous than beginners in other fields usually command, and at