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TEACHING IN AMERICA

The First President's Lecture
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Ernest L. Boyer, President
The Carnegie Foundation for
the Advancement of Teaching

I.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is conducting a study of the American high school. We still have 12 months to go. But already one issue is absolutely clear: The quality of education in this nation is inextricably linked to the quality of teaching. And if the teaching profession is diminished, the nation's future is diminished, too.

Americans--from the very first--have had an almost touching faith in education. Over 130 years before the Declaration of Independence, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law requiring every town and village of 50 or more souls to provide, at public expense, a school master to teach the children to read and write.

The Massachusetts Educational Law of 1647 also ordered that "where any towne shall increase to the number of 100 families. . . they shall set up a grammar schoole the master thereof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the university. . . ." The pioneer historian Ellwood P. Cubberly has written that these Puritan laws of the mid-17th century were "the very foundation-stones upon which our American public school systems have been founded."

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To the Puritans, literacy and learning were essential and school masters were to teach both the alphabet and saintly conduct to their students. This profound task was a public obligation that could not be left to chance.

While a sense of urgency infused the enterprise of schooling, it's also true that--from the very first--this nation has remained curiously ambivalent about teachers. School masters who were to prepare a rising generation that would be literate, industrious, and pious were often without adequate status and support.

Dan C. Laurie of the University of Chicago in his 1975 study of school teachers, underscored our tendency to exalt education and deprecate the teacher.

- o Teaching in this country is at once, ". . . honored and disdained, praised as dedicated service, lampooned as 'easy work'." . . .
- o Teaching from its inception in America has occupied a special but shadowed place. . . Real regard shown for those who taught has never matched professed regard."

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The lack of "real regard" was vividly described by a writer who captured the school climate in rural Nebraska a century ago.

o "The first teacher in Raymond School," he wrote, "was run out by boys, who used stones as weapons of assault. The second met the same agony, but when he had soundly thrashed one boy, and the youth's father coming to take up the battle, shared the same fate, the reign of terror ended abruptly, and a new respect for the school was established. Many of the fellows considered the teacher Public Enemy Number One."¹

Isn't it curious that teachers were often treated as public enemy number one when at the same time they were expected to perform public service number one--the education of a coming generation.

In 1648 the Hopkins Grammar School was founded down here in New Haven and the rules of that early school capture the obligation of the teacher 335 years ago. One regulation said that:

o The Master and Schollars duly attend the Schoole Houres viz. from 6 in the morning to 11 o Clock in the forenoone, And from 1 a Clock in the afternoone to 5 a Clock in the afternoone. . .

¹Education Week, November 9, 1981. (p.13)

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Another read as follows:

- o If any of the Schoole Boyes be observed to play, sleep, or behave themselves rudely, or irreverently, or be any way disorderly at meeting on the Saboath Days or any other tyme of the Publique worships of God that upon informacion or Complaint thereof to the due Conviccion of the offender or offenders, The Master shall give them due Correccions to the degree of the Offence. And that All Correccions be with Moderacion.

In those early days, young teachers with little or no training, were expected to tame unruly youths, transmit the culture, and live angelic lives themselves. All of this was to be accomplished under working conditions that were often very grim.

Writing in the early 19th century, a New England teacher described life in his one room public school.² He said:

- o When I entered the school, there were fifteen scholars under five years of age. The greater part were under four, and several only about three.
- o The vacations have been very short; the school, in fact, is continued nearly throughout the year.

² American Annals of Instruction, II (August and October, 1831), pp. 380-383, 460-472.

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- o The fires were to be kindled, about half an hour before the time of beginning the school. Often, the scholar, whose lot it was, neglected to build it. In consequence of this, the house was frequently cold and uncomfortable about half the forenoon, when the fire being very large, the excess of heat became equally distressing.
- o Frequently too, we were annoyed by smoke. The greatest amount of suffering, however, arose from excessive heat, particularly at the close of the day.

During those days, teaching tenure was very short and the pay was poor. Again, the 19th Century New England teacher reports that:

- o A strong prejudice . . . existed against employing the same instructor more than once or twice in the same district. . . . I have not been able to ascertain the exact number of different instructors who have been engaged in the school during the last thirty years; but I can distinctly recollect thirty seven.
- o Instructors have usually boarded in the families of the pupils. Their compensation has varied from seven to eleven dollars a month for males; and from sixtytwo and a half cents to one dollar a week for females.

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During the one hundred years following 1815, over twenty-five million immigrants came to this nation--Italians, Polish, Irish--and, for them, schooling was a cherished dream. Never mind that many of these children could not speak English. In one school in New York City, for example, there were twenty-five different nationalities. Never mind that classes often contained fifty or more children. And never mind that the teachers in the ghetto classroom of the 19th century often gave the children baths, taught them manners, and instructed them in "proper" dress while also teaching them to read and write. With all of this, children from many countries were to enter classrooms and emerge as citizens of America. Again, this was a public obligation that could not be left to chance.

Now, in the fourth quarter of the 20th Century, Americans still have faith in education. We expect teachers to teach the basics, monitor the playgrounds, build respect for authority, counsel the delinquent, impose discipline and be moral mentors to our youth.

We expect so much of teachers because we care so deeply about the future of our children. But as the stability and authority of other institutions have eroded, we ask teachers to stand in for parents, supplement the police, and combat racial and class discrimination. And when they fall short anywhere along the line, we scorn teachers for not meeting our idealized expectations.

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In consequence, confidence in teachers has declined and teacher frustration has increased. The profession is caught in a vicious cycle, spiraling downward. Rewards are few, morale is low, the best teachers are bailing out, and the supply of good recruits is drying up. And as teachers organize themselves and go on strike, the frustration of the public grows more intense. It seems quite clear that--today--the profession of teaching is imperiled.

- o In just 11 years from 1969 to 1980, the number of parents who said they would like to have a child of theirs become a teacher in the public schools dropped to 48 percent.³
- o Less than 5 percent of last year's college freshman class indicated a preference for teaching, down almost 40 percent from ten years ago.⁴
- o More than one-third of today's teachers (37 percent) say they are dissatisfied with their current job. (NEA 1981 Survey)

³George H. Gallup, "The 12th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 62, No. 1 (September 1980), p. 38.

⁴The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 1981.

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- o Forty percent say they had no intention of remaining in teaching until retirement.⁵
- o Almost one-half (45 percent) of the teachers in the public schools say they probably (32 percent) or definitely (13 percent) would not become a teacher if they could start over again.

Today, despite tight economic conditions teachers are resigning and the ablest teachers are leaving first. Between 1962 and 1976 the percentage of public school teachers with 20 or more years of experience was cut in half.⁶

- o One study of 437 Wisconsin high school graduates who became teachers revealed that 40 percent had left teaching after five years. Based on ability grouping, 72.97 percent of the low ability students were still in teaching compared to only 59 percent of the most ablest students.⁷

Just three weeks ago The Washington Post reported the story of Ben Eichelberger who left teaching because of a desperate feeling of being trapped. He said:

⁵William H. McGuire, "Teacher Burnout," Today's Education, Vol. 68, No. 4 (1979), pp. 5-7.

⁶"Teacher Burnout: How to Cope When Your World Goes Blank," Instructor, Vol. 6 (1979), p. 57.

⁷Sykes, Teacher Preparation and the Teaching Workforce, N.I.E.

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- o "I had five classes and four different preparations. During one week I had to collect tickets at the basketball games on three nights. I had to beg for everything--even equipment for experiments--because I didn't have a budget. I never got to make any decisions," he said.⁸
- o Ben Eichelberger's life is different now that he's not in the classroom. He will earn about \$30,000 this year as an electrician.
- o Ben has learned the hard way that the best way to uphold the standards the public has set for itself--is to fix light fixtures and unplug kitchen sinks, not stretch children's minds.

Of course there are still a host of superb teachers in classrooms from coast to coast. And yet while serving students in imaginative and creative ways, they are portrayed as overpaid and careless and unless we find ways to stabilize the situation many of our most gifted teachers will bail out.

⁸The Washington Post, January 3, 1982.

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III.

This brings me to the nub of my remarks.

The quality of education in this nation can rise no higher than the quality of teaching. If public support continues to decline, and if teaching standards continue to go down, the intellectual and economic future of this nation will be threatened.

Today, we confront an education crisis and we must respond with a sense of urgency and vision. Three interlocking steps are absolutely crucial.

First, better students must be recruited.

The harsh fact is that we cannot have gifted teachers if gifted students are not recruited. The evidence here is enormously disturbing.

- o From 1972 to 1980, SAT verbal scores for education majors dropped steadily from 418 to 339, a loss of 79 points.
- o SAT math scores during this period fell from 449 to 418, a 31 point drop. (The comparable national averages: verbal scores dropped from 445 in 1972 to 424 in 1980, a 21 point slide; math scores declined from 481 in 1972 to 466 in 1980, a 15 point drop.)

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- o Recently, teacher education students scored lowest of all college students in an examination of international literacy.
- o Further, of 19 fields of study reported by the American College Testing Program, education was tied for 17th place in math scores, and 14th place on English scores.

Among graduating seniors in the National Longitudinal Study sample, class of 1976, education majors ranked 14th out of 16 fields on SAT verbal scores.

- o On the SAT math test, education majors ranked 15th among 16 fields.

Attracting better students will not be easy. Teaching has become less and less attractive and students--especially women--have, happily, more professional options than before. Still, the priority of teaching must be reaffirmed on campuses and the disdainful attitude of many academics must be removed.

I propose that every state establish a scholarship program to attract the ablest students into teaching. With state support for recruiting the academically finest, with rewards and recognition in place, I believe it will be possible to get the brightest and most idealistic students in the classroom.

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In the state of Florida, plans are being drafted to set up a state scholarship program to lure gifted students into a five-year program for training teachers. Under the proposed legislation, talented students would be given a \$1,000 a year stipend if they choose to enter the teaching profession.

Florida has already taken steps to tighten standards for teacher training programs. In that state, students must have at least mean SAT and ACT scores. They also must pass competency-based tests prior to graduation if they wish to proceed into the profession. Finally, full certification is not granted until satisfactory completion of one-year of teaching in school.

There is, of course, no simple path to take. Still, all states have an obligation to make a visible, substantive effort to help improve the caliber of those who enter teaching.

Second, the education and the continuing education of teachers must be strengthened.

There are serious problems with the education of our teachers. Many teacher training programs are inadequate. Accreditation of schools of education has been ineffective, careful selection of recruits for teaching is almost nonexistent, course work is occasionally irrelevant and dull, and there are few quality controls for programs in operation.

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In most states the college not only recruits the students and provides the training, but also--through the college's department of education--certifies the student for credentialed teaching. This interlocking authority is seriously flawed.

I suggest that teacher preparation should include a strong program of common learning, a solid training in academic subjects and excellent apprentice experiences in the classroom.

Further, training and certification should be a two-step process. The apprentice teacher would receive professional certification upon completion of the degree--followed by a period of apprenticeship (at normal entry level salary) before the standard license is issued by the state.

Further, the possibility of a recertification arrangement--every five years perhaps--should be considered. Clearly, good teachers must be retained and rewarded for their work but we also need a system to identify and weed out the few who harm children and bring discredit to their profession.

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But the education of teachers is not a one-shot process. School boards must accept life long education as an essential condition for every teacher. Today, knowledge is changing at a dramatic pace. Still, we expect a teacher trained 20 years ago to prepare students to live 40 years into the future with no policy of systematic continued education. Even the most dedicated teacher will fall behind and students will learn how to live not in the future but in the past.

Just six weeks ago, I was in New Haven. At that time, I spent two days looking at the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, and I was enormously impressed.

I saw some of the world's most distinguished scholars meeting with some of the nation's most dedicated teachers and--as a result--I'm confident the quality of education in New Haven was enormously enriched.

In the Jackie Robinson School, 20 junior high school students were reading with enthusiasm Oliver Twist, and in another class problem solving was being taught. Some of New Haven's most effective teachers said it was the Institute that kept them in New Haven. They were being intellectually enriched.

Third, good teachers must be recognized and rewarded for their work.

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Today, teaching in America is not financially rewarding. Many professionals with equivalent years of education earn far more than teachers. Last year, teachers entering the profession with a bachelor's degree earn an average of \$11,758, while salaries for entry-level engineers average around \$20,000, computer science majors begin jobs at around \$17,700, and liberal arts majors earn an average of \$13,296 at entry-level jobs.

A survey of Texas teachers revealed an average salary of \$14,112.89 after 11.7 years of teaching. In the same state, a bachelor's degree graduate in petroleum engineering the first year on the job begins at \$21,000.

While teachers--nationwide--earned an average salary of \$17,264 in 1980, construction workers earned an average of \$17,509. For sanitation workers, the average salary was just over \$19,000. An experienced policeman earned around \$18,500, while an experienced firefighter earned approximately \$17,800 in 1980.

For the average teacher who spends about 46 hours per week for about 36 weeks a year on about 25 students, the pay works out to a pay rate of \$.62 per student per hour--considerably less than the average babysitter collects.

Especially disturbing is the fact that good teachers are not financially rewarded for their work. The good and bad drift along together. The issue of differential salary is as sticky as

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the certification issue, but it is no less important. And while on this important issue, I am convinced teachers themselves must lead the way.

For many teachers, moonlighting is essential. In a Texas study, over 20 percent of all teachers moonlight providing an annual average supplement of only \$2,799.46. The respondents listed selling tickets, mowing lawns, babysitting, and waiting tables as the kind of work they do. The condition was captured in a recent Washington Post cartoon that pictured two young people looking at a street vendor. The one said, "I think we should by an apple for our teacher." The other replied, "That is our teacher."

But rewards for teachers mean something more than money. It means dignity and recognition when a good job has been done.

When I was U.S. Commissioner of Education, I called together 20 high school students from around the country. We spent the day talking about schools and how they should be improved. Near the end, I asked them to grade the teachers they had had from A to F. When everyone had responded, we ended with a teacher report card above average--a solid "B" at least. And all students reported that sometime during their high school experience they had a teacher who was absolutely tops.

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Then I asked the crucial question: "How many of you have ever thanked a teacher?" Not one hand went up! As one student put it, "It's just not the thing to do." These high school students had been with dozens of teachers every day for four years and yet not once--even after an exciting session--did a student stop by the teacher's desk or drop a note to say "Thank you very much."

Teaching is a grueling, thankless job. Most people who criticize the schools, could not survive three days in an urban classroom. And yet we expect teachers to work miracles day after day and then get only silence from the students, pressure from the principle, occasional criticism from an irate parent, and lectures from the editorial pages of the local press. Of course, there are some inept teachers and certainly the teaching profession can improve. Still the climate is so relentlessly hostile and nonsupportive. It's no wonder teachers choose to leave. Indeed, after visiting classrooms from coast to coast the miracle to me is that so may stay.

We confront nothing short of a national emergency in teaching, and I believe the time has come for every caring institution to honor excellence in teaching. Let's find ways to identify the great school teachers in our midst and give them the recognition they deserve.

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This is not mere sentiment, it's the recognition that all of us owe an enormous debt to a dedicated teacher who not only taught the facts, but taught integrity and creativity, and more than that, taught us self-confidence and a belief that we could be somebody great.

Several months ago, I was having dinner with Father Tim Healy of Georgetown University and we got on this subject of teacher recognition. Tim said that about two years ago he called 15 students from the Bronx High School of Science into his office and asked who was their best high school teacher. They gave him the name of the person right off. He called the principal to make sure the students weren't giving him a fictitious name, and sure enough, there was such a teacher who had been there for many years. Yes, the principal said, he was outstanding. That spring at commencement time Father Healy said, "I would like to introduce a candidate for an honorary degree. He teaches school at Bronx High School of Science. He is the one who made Georgetown possible."

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Conclusion

Twenty-five years ago, the Russians hurled a shiny satellite in space. America was stunned. Our self-confidence was shattered, perhaps even our survival was at stake.

Faced with unprecedented security crises, the nation focused on education and determined that trained intellect was the answer to our problem. In response, President Dwight Eisenhower shaped the National Defense Education Act which linked the quality of the nation's schools to the security of the nation.

The 1958 Legislation provided money for advanced training for teachers especially "in the uses of new teaching methods or instructional materials," and money "to discover latent talent or special aptitudes of high school students," and to assist institutions of higher learning to operate short-term institutes.

In pushing this landmark legislation, President Eisenhower said to Congress that

o ". . . I believe enactment of the emergency four-year program would have far-reaching benefits to education and to the national security in the years ahead. There is a compelling national need for federal action now to help meet emergency needs in American education. . . .

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o "If the United States is to maintain its position of leadership and if we are further to enhance the quality of our society, we must see to it that today's young people are prepared to contribute the maximum to our future progress and strength and that we achieve the highest possible excellence."

A national emergency was being met as the nation moved to strengthen the quality of public education.

Today's American education crisis is far graver than the one confronted 25 years ago. Our technological capacity is slipping and public confidence in education has declined.

In contrast to 25 years ago, the tendency to ignore these realities deeply alarming. We find it sadly ironic that at a time when productivity is being so heavily stressed by our political leaders, the term so often seems to mean simply the output of factories, mines, forests, and oil wells, as if such output can, somehow, be divorced from people.

Education in America has always been the responsibility of all the people. It is as the Puritans understood very well--an essential obligation that could not be left to chance. The failure adequately to educate--at public expense--a new generation of students, would be a shocking denial of their rights and a fatal undermining of the vital interests of the nation.

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It's time to affirm that excellence in teaching is the nation's most important and essential goal and that a national response is urgently required.