

## I HAVE HIRED MANY TEACHERS: WHAT QUALIFICATIONS HAVE I CONSIDERED MOST IMPORTANT?

A STORY about two salesmen is told by Frank Cody, Superintendent of Schools in Detroit. The salesmen were crossing the water and noticed a woman leaning against the rail of the ship.

"I'll bet she's a schoolteacher," said one.

"I'll bet she's not. I know a schoolteacher when I see one," replied the other.

"So do I. I'll bet you \$5.00 she's a schoolteacher."

"O. K.," said the second, "I'll take it."

He stepped up to the woman, and said, "I beg your pardon, but are you a schoolteacher?"

"No," she replied feebly, "I'm only seasick!"

We all know so well the type of teacher who gives point to this story that we are both amused and distressed. Far too often the "old maid schoolteacher" type exists in reality. She exists partly because of the old notion of teaching school—a ramming of unappetizing subject matter down the throats of unwilling children. She exists because communities too often prevent her living a normal, happy, human life as a member of the community. Some communities even go so far as to discharge a teacher who gets married. She exists because low salary schedules result in much mediocrity in the teaching profession. She exists because school boards, superintendents, and the teachers themselves do not recognize the importance of vital human qualities, broad interests, the finest things that go toward making up culture, and a real understanding of children, as essentials in any good teacher.

Education today is far more than a teaching of the three R's. It concerns itself with the all-round happy and satisfy-

ing development of children. It includes the development of sound bodies and sound personalities. It includes the development of special aptitudes and interests. It includes helping children to a deep-rooted social consciousness that is essential to character and essential to citizenship. And, of course, it includes giving children a mastery of those aspects of the three R's and of history, geography, and science necessary to effective living in the world as it is. Teachers who are to be successful in this broader type of education must themselves be the finest kind of human beings.

For many years in employing teachers for my own schools I have tried to gauge the teacher's ability partly in terms of her own background and interests. Of course, I check up on training and experience and previous success. I often find, however, that teachers are somewhat taken aback by the kind of questions I ask in the application blank or in a personal interview. I want to know about their homes, families, and family interests. I want to know what books they have read in the past two or three years that have interested them most; what fiction they have read, and why they have liked it.

It is surprising how many formally qualified applicants have confined their reading largely to *The Saturday Evening Post* or *The Reader's Digest*. Some turn their noses up at the idea of reading good modern fiction, as if it were too frivolous for a schoolteacher. Little do they realize that really fine fiction, books like *Pelle the Conqueror*, *The Growth of the Soil*, *Jean-Christophe*, *The Good Earth*, yes, and even *Anthony Adverse* and *Gone with the Wind*, give insight into human motives and emotions, give understanding of human drives, in a way that non-fiction seldom can do.

I ask them, too, what non-fiction they have read. Many have not read a book of biography, or a book on current social problems—such as the very readable and exceedingly informative little book *Uncommon*

*Sense* by David Cushman Coyle—or any other kind of serious discussion in non-educational (i. e., non-schoolish) fields.

I ask them, too, of course, about their professional reading. Too often this is confined to the books that were assigned to them by some reading circle, or books that they had to study in connection with some course in education in college or in summer school. As to professional magazines, more often than not one gets the reply that the only professional magazine read is the one which comes with membership in the state or national education association.

Again I ask them what world events have interested them most during the past three years. Usually they can rattle off something glibly—the Duke of Windsor's marriage, the terrible situation in Spain, or the New Deal. Pry a little deeper and one often finds extreme superficiality. What forces were back of King Edward's abdication? What is the fighting in Spain about, what forces are behind it, and where are their sympathies? Do they agree or disagree with the New Deal; why, and in what respects?

Again I ask them what traveling they have done in this country or abroad, what they did last summer, the summer before, and the summer before that. Are they using their summer vacation in a way that really is developing them, recreationally or as citizens or as cultured persons or as professional teachers? All such uses are good, but merely sitting around at home is not at all a satisfactory use of one's leisure time.

"What are your favorite amusements?" I ask. I want to know whether the teacher manages to get fun out of life, and how. Closely related to this is the question, "What are your hobbies?" A person without a hobby of some sort is liable to be a pretty limited person.

Of course I ask why they left or want to leave their last position, why they want to come to my schools, and why they want to teach.

This sort of application blank and interview tends to assure us fairly well that those who are chosen as a result are worthwhile people, people who can play a part in community life, people whom one is proud to introduce to anyone, people who would never be classified, whether they're married or not, as "old maid school-teachers."

But even at that, we have some failures. There are techniques to teaching, there are special skills and insights, and we have found by bitter experience that some very fine people make very ineffective teachers.

In order to get at the factors that enter into a teacher's success in a progressive school system, we undertook a study a few years ago, to find out why some of our teachers failed.<sup>1</sup> First of all we had our principals and supervisors list the outstanding qualities that seemed to make for the success or failure of the teachers then on our faculty. To that list we added qualities which had been found significant by A. R. Mead.<sup>2</sup> We asked the principals and supervisors to rate each quality on a six-point scale, ranging from "of no importance" to "of utmost importance; should have greatest weight." When we averaged their ratings, we got an interesting list of qualities with "power to encourage, stimulate, and inspire children's interests" and "understanding of children" the two highest, and "ability to control children without repression and domination," "genuine interest in work," and "possibility of growth" tying for second place. The whole list of forty-nine qualities is too long to repeat here. At the bottom, but still rated as of a fair degree of importance, were "businesslike efficiency," "gentleness," "good taste in dress," and "natural dignity and reserve."

This subjective judgment was not enough to satisfy us, however. We next selected five teachers who were so near failing that,

<sup>1</sup>Study by Vivian Weedon and Mabel Vogel Morphett in the Winnetka Research Department.

<sup>2</sup>"Qualities of Merit in Good and Poor Teachers," *Journal of Educational Research*, November 1929.

had we known of the difficulties they were going to have, we probably would not have employed them. In contrast, we selected eight of the best teachers in the system—the teachers whom many of us would be first to try to get if we were to move to another school system, or whom we would be most loath to lose. Each of these teachers was then rated by principals and supervisors in terms of each of the forty-nine qualities. She was rated as “decidedly lacking in it,” “having it to a less than average degree,” “having it to an average degree,” “having it to more than an average degree,” or “having it to a marked degree.” By numbering these 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, and averaging ratings, we compared the good teachers with the poor ones, and found out in which qualities there was the greatest difference in rating. For example, “respect for children’s personality and intelligence” was possessed by the very successful teachers either in a marked degree or above average (the average rating of all the supervisors on all the good teachers was 4.6). The poor teachers, on the other hand, on the average, rated 2.3, i.e., they had this quality to a less than average degree.

We then arranged our qualities in the order of the degree in which they differentiated between good and poor teachers. The topmost quality was “ability to secure good habits and orderly room atmosphere.” Close on its heels there followed “teaching technique,” “businesslike efficiency,” “power to encourage, stimulate, and inspire children’s interest,” and “forcefulness.” Near the very bottom of this list, practically not differentiating between good and poor teachers at all, were “good health,” “good taste in speech, voice, and diction,” “loyalty,” and “open-mindedness.” That does not mean that these things were not important. It simply meant that both the good and the poor teachers had them. Our preliminary selection, on the basis of interviews and recommendations, had kept us from getting

teachers who lacked these qualities, and in themselves they were not sufficient.

Our next step was to prepare a recommendation blank which could also be used as a self-rating blank within our own system, based upon these studies. On the left-hand page we listed in descending order those characteristics which most clearly distinguished between successful and unsuccessful teachers in our own system. On the right-hand page we listed those qualities which, although they did not distinguish between our successful and unsuccessful teachers, were rated as of marked importance by our principals and supervisors—qualities without which we would not want to employ a teacher, but qualities which a teacher might still have and yet not be very successful.

Before we employ a teacher we have those who know her best, rate her on each of these qualities: as “below average,” “average,” “good,” “excellent,” or “unusually marked.” As a check upon the person who is doing the rating, we ask, “Compared with the rest of your faculty or student body, would you place the applicant in the top tenth, in the top quarter, in the top third, about average, or below average?” “Is the faculty or student body with which you are comparing the applicant unusually strong, above average, average, below average?” The superintendent or principal who has tended to rate his teacher pretty high on the qualities listed, hesitates to admit that a teacher who is not pretty good is in the top tenth or top quarter of his faculty. If we find that on this last point he rates the teacher as about average, but has rated the teacher in regard to the qualities as good, excellent, and unusually marked right down the line, we know that the person filling out the rating sheet is padding the teacher’s rating, and make allowance accordingly.

When I hire a teacher I am not soft-hearted. I am thinking of the girls and boys whose lives are going to be really in-

fluenced by that teacher. I am concerned with getting the very best possible person, regardless of whether that person is married or not married, a Jew or a Gentile, a Catholic or a Protestant, a Republican or a Democrat. If the teacher has something real to give to her girls and boys and knows how to give it, I want her on my faculty; otherwise I do not.

Even after all this care, we still find that new teachers sometimes have a hard time adjusting to a new school system. Only today, before I began to write this article, I attended a meeting of my principals and supervisors, in which they were asking themselves some very searching questions in regard to helping new teachers to make their adjustments. They raised such questions as the following:

"Is a new teacher's schoolroom one of the best or worst in the building from the viewpoint of acoustics, ventilation, size, possible pleasant arrangement, and location?"

"What kind of group is the new teacher given—one of the best or one of the most difficult?"

"What organized help is offered to the new teacher? Is she given carefully planned assistance and guidance, that will harmonize and reinforce her continually? Do principals and supervisors do all they can, jointly and in harmonious co-operation, in this problem?"

"Is sufficient flexibility of curriculum offered the new teacher, so that she will feel free to substitute in some measure for our usual material and courses something which is vivid in her own background and experience and which will give her security?"

"Is there a general attitude that old teachers of a building assume a definite part of the responsibility for the success of the recent comer?"

"How can we be sure the new teacher has a fair chance and the genuine understanding and assistance which she has a right to expect in our schools?"

Naturally, we have been trying to do all these things for new teachers, but we realize that we sometimes fail, and that the failure of the new teacher may be our failure, not hers.

It is our job, first, to get the kind of men and women for our faculty who can contribute to the whole development of the children, because the teachers themselves are interesting and worth-while human beings, because they have the necessary technique, and because they understand children and can help them to a successful growth. It is then our job to see that when we get such people on our faculty we give them a chance—more than a chance, that we give them stimulation and help—to live up to their full potentialities.

CARLETON WASHBURN

### ROTE LEARNING

The problem is to get the school to open the minds of the children, to lead them out into ability to think clearly and to act sensibly. When the officers of the Julius Rosenwald Fund began looking into the little schoolhouses they had helped build in the rural South, they observed procedures similar to the following: Holding a health catechism, a teacher asked, "Why should we wash and comb our hair?" Little Negroes droned back, "So it will not get stringy and fall down in our eyes." In rote learning of this sort, children's minds die as stupidly as did the bodies of the soldiers of The Light Brigade.—EDWIN R. EMBREE

### THE DIFFERENCE

A pessimist finds difficulties in opportunities; an optimist finds opportunities in difficulties.—L. P. JACKS

Know the true value of time. Snatch, seize, and enjoy every moment of it. No idleness, no laziness, no procrastination; never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.—*Chesterfield*.