

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## I

### WHAT THEY ARE THINKING ABOUT

A REVIEW OF THE MEETING OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDENCE, N. E. A.  
FEBRUARY 25 TO MARCH 3  
ATLANTIC CITY

Teachers and others interested in education have for years felt that the winter meeting of the National Educational Association—which more properly should be called the meeting of the Department of Superintendence—and of associated national organizations, is more virile and worth while than the summer meeting. This may be due to two facts, namely, that the summer session has a longer tradition behind it and that its leadership is at times not so definitely that of the “doers” in the field of education.

As in recent years one who attends this meeting is in the position of being able to attend the conference of some fifty educational associations during the week of time allotted to the sessions, he has to pick and choose very carefully if he wants to use his time most fruitfully and to sound the fundamental interests of contemporary educational leaders. To a good many the meetings just closed were somewhat disappointing as to program. Two factors may account for this to some extent, namely the illness of President Calvin Kendall, so that his leadership had not been so definite, and the spreading of the meetings out over parts of two weeks in order that those who wished might attend the inauguration exercises. Any observer and attendant is of course likely, where the offering is so varied and the number of opportunities so great, to get a biased or distorted view as to the important themes.

Judging, however, from the nature of the program, from attendance upon meetings,

and from the discussions on the boardwalk and in the hotel lobbies, one noted first that certain topics, such as Americanization, citizenship, post-war educational re-organization, and democracy in education, had sunk into an insignificant place compared with the programs of the last few years. In the latter instance, in particular, last year's program featured the participation of teachers in the supervision and administration of schools, while this year the absence of attention to this problem was equally noticeable. Perhaps, as suggested by one superintendent, the feeling is current that teachers' strikes and walkouts which have occurred or been frequently threatened, are indications that teacher co-operation should not be hurried but rather allowed to work itself out naturally within the different school systems. In contrast, certain problems stood out prominently. Among these were rural education, educational and mental tests, health education, and visual education. Significant minor notes which received disproportionate interest compared with their place on the program were the topics of the junior high school movement and adequate school finances. The latter two will be treated first.

#### I. THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL MOVEMENT

Aside from considerations of the junior high school curriculum and the necessary organization to provide for this type of school properly, attention centered particularly in the debate held on the question, “Is the junior high school delivering the goods?” Superintendent Ward, of Fort Wayne, in upholding the negative insisted that out of the four or five hundred institutions using this name but a mere handful were true to type, inasmuch as most systems had simply grouped together the upper grades or had brought certain high school subjects into these grades. Principal Remy, of Springfield, Massachusetts, on the other hand affirmed that in ten

years no educational movement has accomplished so much, and further pointed out that to the junior high school movement could be accredited more significant attention to the problem of individual differences, more diversified and better adjusted curricula, better holding power of the schools, and earlier promotion by subjects and according to pupils' needs. Considerable interest was shown in a film of four reels picturing the elementary and junior high schools of Duluth.

## 2. ADEQUATE FINANCES: FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL

The futility of even discussing much-needed educational extensions of the present day or indeed of the provision of facilities as good as those of the pre-war period, has of late been clearly recognized, unless with that discussion is linked a plan for taxation and financial support to back up this program. One of the most frequently stated conceptions at the conference was that of the importance of "selling the enlarged program of education" to the pupils, the parents, and the patrons of the school.

The problem came up at various conferences, for example in the discussion of rural education and of the proper functioning of state education departments, but the interest here centered largely in the promise of the future passage of the Smith-Towner bill. Congressman Towner himself reviewed the history of this bill which, in addition to providing for the appointment of a Secretary of Education in the President's Cabinet, further provides for the spending of an initial sum of one hundred million dollars by the Federal Government to be used to encourage the states to make increased expenditures and to equalize the opportunities between the wealthier and the poorer sections of the country. It is hopeful that recently the state of Virginia has taken a step forward in removing the constitutional limitations on taxation and that her three nearest neighbors, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Maryland, have perhaps, as the saying is, "gone her one better" in such matters as the raising of property evaluations and the increase of appropriations to schools. This is a critical time and the next step in the Old Dominion on the part of teachers and all others con-

cerned directly in the problem of education is to see that no time is lost in entering upon a more adequate financial program for city and rural districts alike.

## 3. RURAL EDUCATION: ITS PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS

For a decade or more the national importance of rural education and better rural living conditions has been seen by statesmen such as Roosevelt, as well as by our educational leaders. Discussion of rural education has loomed large at many N. E. A. sessions, but never has so varied and comprehensive a program been presented as at the recent session. Moreover, fortunately the focus was changed and placed not so much upon the needs of the rural community in the way of adequate and increased facilities as upon actual progress as well as ways and means for capitalizing this progress and making it nation-wide. To this end, reports were given by city and county superintendents and teachers on enlarged activities in progressive schools.

However, one further very important note was struck. A few years have seen much in the way of an extended curriculum in the country community, but this curriculum has only been ruralized by the teaching of agriculture and kindred subjects and by injecting the problems of rural life into all subjects of study. In other words in our anxiety to un-citify the course of study for rural schools we have tended unduly to ruralize it in the hope of making it interesting and of keeping the country boy and girl upon the farm. Much interest will therefore be shown in an attempt in New York State to work out a properly socialized rural course of study, this attempt having been undertaken at the request of a large number of the farmers' organizations of that state. Perhaps we shall take a lesson from the plan of the new East Side high school plant in Cincinnati, which will include agricultural equipment for the training of city boys and girls and shall similarly try in the rural curriculum to present a socialized course of study which will include those elements which country life lacks. At any rate all will agree with the frequently voiced contention that the problems of rural education will be solved only as compensation and suit-

able living conditions attract our stronger teachers to the country.

#### 4. EDUCATIONAL TESTS AND INTELLIGENCE, OR MENTAL, TESTS

It has now been about ten years since Dr. Edward L. Thorndike devised with the help of his graduate students at Teachers College the first educational scale, namely the Thorndike Handwriting Scale. At about the same time he advocated, much against the convictions of many of his students and fellow-teachers, the rapid extension of these so-called measuring sticks to all subjects of instruction. This prophecy has been wonderfully fulfilled in recent years and the prophet has now been rewarded by being made Director of an Institute for Research in the Teachers College of Columbia University, which now trains over half of all the graduate students in education in the United States.

The part being played by these educational or achievement tests in school subjects, as evidenced in most of the major programs and the exhibits, strengthened the convictions of all that they have come to stay and that every teacher must sooner or later get on the educational band-wagon or lose caste. Perhaps the most interesting reports were made upon individual diagnoses in oral reading by Dr. Gray of Chicago University, and upon research in the field of silent reading by Dr. Horn, of Iowa University. It was the conviction of the latter that tests now devised, which test or aim to test only speed and comprehension of materials, must be revised and standardized to test also for organization of material and memory of material, that is, how the student relates or builds together the main items in his reading and how well he remembers them. He also noted that very different rates and types of comprehension were important in reading which was for skimming purposes and reading which was for mastery of the content in detail. He further called in question the extension of the use of phonics beyond at least the early grades, inasmuch as there is danger of building up vocal or muscular reading habits which operate to retard the getting of the thought and to delay speed in silent reading.

Probably greater interest was manifest-

ed in the subject of intelligence tests, or mental tests, largely because the subject is somewhat newer. However, already students in high schools and colleges, as well as elementary schools, are being tested. The rapidity of the movement for finding the relative abilities of students may be indicated by the fact that the National Intelligence Tests, which were based on the Army Tests given widely to soldiers during the war, and which have been on the market about a year, were sold during that time to the number of about half a million despite the fact that numerous other tests were already in the field. One sees at once the significance of the movement when one learns that in a very careful rating of the pupils of a large high school, intelligence scores ranging from 49 to 178 were found, that is, showing abilities ranging approximately in the ratio of one to four. Apt illustrations were made of the nature of the difficulty of the average teacher—for example, that she is trying to drive a forty-horse team where each member is quite unlike. Also that just as a group of boys of thirteen years of age are so much unlike in stature and physical development that while one can take only a two-mile-an-hour gait another can take easily a four-mile-an-hour gait, so they are equally unlike in mental gait.

In regard to all types of testing certain fundamental suggestions amounting almost to cautions were frequently thrown out as follows: (1) that tests should no longer be given for the purpose of giving and the results filed away in the archives of the superintendent's office or reported in educational journals, but that they should be given for the diagnosis of the educational problems of individual pupils and the improvement of their instruction; (2) that it is important at this time that we discontinue the making of a multiplicity of new tests and aim to refine and improve those we have; (3) that we seek in the use of tests—since they can be scarcely made "fool-proof"—to exercise the utmost care in both the actual giving and the interpreting, in the former case repeating where any uncertainty exists and in the latter either getting experts to score them or a number of people to give independent decisions; (4) and that after all, these tests represent largely the mechanical, technical, or scientific, and not the artistic, side of the educa-

tional process, so that, important as they are, teachers and educators alike should remember that they are but means in helping us to realize the great objectives and ideals of education.

#### 5. HEALTH EDUCATION

Health education, or physical education, was discussed in a majority of the different meetings in one phase or other. Dr. Strayer, fresh from the Baltimore Survey, where he had found schoolrooms in which the only light shone directly in the eyes of the pupils, school plants where the amount of play space was less than the amount of school-room space, and school buildings where the fire risk to the lives of the occupants was appalling, said that it was time that we saw to it that our schoolhouses were in no instances places of confinement where disease and loss of life were probable, and also that we should concern ourselves less about a hundred per cent ideal in spelling and more about a hundred per cent ideal in health and physical fitness. He added also that in the main we had been too much concerned with card indexes and the making of records of the physical defects of children and had actually done very little constructive work in either preventing or curing those defects which had been discovered.

The American Home Economics Association gave a full half-day program on the problem of the teaching of proper food habits in the schools. The feeling at the sessions of this Association was that in this field the objective must be changed from facts and habits in sewing and cooking to that of good health.

New methods of health education were demonstrated in the splendid charts of the National Child Welfare Association which are widely used in schools of all grades. Many interesting stories were told of the direct application of the lessons so learned by children in the high school and grades. Of unusual value also was the pageant given by Atlantic City school children of the Modern Health Crusade, entitled "King Good Health Wins." This illustrated how good health habits may overcome disease and it closed dramatically with a brief battle in which the knights of the double-barred cross conquered a monster representing the germs of disease.

#### 6. VISUAL EDUCATION

By visual education should be meant the applications of visual means and methods of instruction to the teaching of health,—as illustrated in the above discussion of health education,—of citizenship, of geography, or indeed of any subject in the school curriculum. There was a wealth of commercial exhibits of moving picture machines, stereoscopic and lantern machines and materials, while charts, maps, and pictures were much in evidence. As an indication of the interest in these matters the representative of one of the three magazines covering the field of education through motion pictures secured literally hundreds of subscriptions.

A suggestive comment was made by one speaker to the effect that while it is often said that instruction may go in one ear and out the other, no one ever says it goes in one eye and out the other. As proof of the progress being made, reports were given in detail of the steps taken in various city schools, and of extension work now being undertaken by most state universities and state departments of education in visual materials and their use. In fact, the professional training of the teacher will be rapidly expanded to include this aspect of work as indicated by the fact that films were shown at the various Association meetings on the junior and elementary high school, democracy and education, and thrift.

W. J. GIFFORD

#### EDISON SAYS:

"If a man has reached the age of twenty-one and is dead mentally, no amount of advice, example, or experience will ever change him in the slightest. If at some period between twelve and sixteen he can be interested in some subject and become enthusiastic, he will advance and become a high type of man. If not he will be a mental dead one."

Boards of education should have the power to select county superintendents from the country at large and should be required to select them only on the basis of professional preparation and ability.—P. P. Claxton, U. S. Commissioner of Education.