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I

THE MEASUREMENT OF TEACHING ABILITY¹

Teacher rating is more important today than ever before. Teachers' salaries are from fifty to one hundred per cent higher than they were four years ago. During the past eighteen months there have been some sharp declines in wages and salaries of employees in certain occupations. During the same period the general economic situation has developed so as to cause financial embarrassment to some groups of tax payers. Tax payers' leagues have become numerous. They seek relief through lower taxation. It is to be expected that they will ask for decreases first where the proportion of increase has been greatest. In many communities the schools are at or near the head of the tax roll in this respect.

To the best of my information teachers' salaries have been lowered by schedule in only a very few cities during the past year. There are more communities where there is a noticeable decrease of enthusiasm on the part of the public toward the new level of such salaries, achieved or sought. The comparison of teachers' incomes and those of other workers does not furnish as good argument as it did formerly. Again, the new level of teacher compensation has not been safeguarded by adequate requirements, and the result is twofold: first, those already in the profession and of known professional inferiority have in the main benefited as much by the change as have the average or even the superior; and second, not a less but a greater proportion of those admitted under the new regime of compensation represent mediocrity and inferiority than was formerly the case. I need not restate here the oft-quoted figures

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that are the basis of this assertion. The fact is an undeniable one. Its existence is noticed by the more observant laity of our communities, and it has already caused some of them to have at least the beginnings of doubt concerning the worth-whileness of maintaining higher teachers' salaries in the face of a combination of financial depression and increased taxes.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. There can be no doubt of the outstanding need of keeping salary schedules as high as we have yet been able to pay, and of raising many above where they now are if we are going to make teaching approach what it must be to deserve the name of a scientific profession. My point so far is that we cannot expect the public supinely to pay living professional salaries to teachers who are not professionally equipped. If school supervisors and administrators do not point out and seek either to improve or to eliminate the professionally unfit, the public through its representatives will take the matter into its own hands with results that will be hazardous to all concerned.

I make no apologies for what may seem to some an excursion from our topic. It is, in my opinion, one of the major considerations, whose import we are tardy in recognizing.

One possible reason why we have hesitated to make teacher rating a part of practice is that we have not been agreed as to what factors should be measured. A valid principle would seem to be that all the teacher's work, including every major factor of it, should be considered, but that these factors should be considered only with respect to what they contribute toward educational results under her care.² Thus far.

²Free quotations are here and elsewhere in this discussion made from an article by the writer, "What Shall Teacher Rating Schemes Seek to Measure?", *Journal of Educational Research*, December, 1920.

in formal rating schemes the composite resultant of teaching and of the effort of the teacher have received either minor consideration or none at all.

It is not difficult to trace the reason for this. The first teacher rating schemes were devised before the present movement of scientific measurement in education had really begun. These plans illustrate the fallacy of failing to distinguish between consumptive and productive values. The original basis proposed for judging the productive value of a teacher was not the *result* of her work but what she *brought to* her work,—her personality, subject matter knowledge, method knowledge, and knowledge of technical skills. This procedure may have been necessitated by the limitations of circumstances at first. With a strange inconsistency, however, we have continued this basis practically unchanged after we have reached the point of development where we claim in a limited way to measure child progress. I have yet to see a formal scheme for rating teachers that gives as much as 40 points out of a possible maximum of 100, to "results" or "product." A careful examination of such schemes discloses also an entire lack of any central tendency to make the teaching product the basis of determining the value of a teacher. These rating schemes have tried to measure the worker's possession of the characteristics judged necessary for success instead of measuring success itself. This function should be exercised before the individual becomes a full-fledged member of the profession. It is in reality vocational guidance. To measure potential abilities, even with scientific accuracy, is not synonymous with measuring actual performance or achievement. We recognize this truth in the case of the child; why do we not do it in the case of the teacher?

But probably the greatest impediment to the actual use of teacher rating schemes has been their administration. In the first place, the practical recognition of differences of individual ability among teachers is not so pleasing a fact or one so readily acknowledged as its existence as a scientific fact. Even one person can make it questionable whether the game is worth the candle if, to use a mixed figure, she camps on your trail. The cases where the grounds are the clearest for

not recommending a teacher for re-election are often those individuals who are the source of the most unpleasantness. For it is obviously true that the poorest teacher is usually the one who is most difficult to convince of her deficiencies. If she had the ability to be aware of them more readily she probably would not have permitted herself to remain so inferior.

In the second place, as supervisors we have failed sometimes to have at hand tangible, reliable evidence to justify our recommendations. We may be certain in our own mind,—and be right. But if we are not to be labelled autocrats, and justly so, we must have our proof. Let a group of teachers once become possessed with the idea that it is really an unbiased judgment of merit that is the real basis of what action is taken, and the administration of a rating scheme has passed its greatest difficulty. But let there be any ground, real in the minds of the teachers, that the personal factor outweighs that of merit, then the rating scheme can only be enforced; it cannot be administered.

In the third place there is entirely too much of a disposition to shift responsibility. There seems to be a fervid belief in the sacred injunction not to let your left hand know what your right hand does. Too frequently principals and supervisors are not willing to tell—at least do not tell—teachers what they think of their work, *or else* they do not think what they tell their co-workers about the same teachers. This is unjust, unprofessional, and not infrequently vicious. Every person charged with any part of the responsibility for results must either discharge such responsibility or else be condemned as unfit to assume it. We should understand that the principle of merit is as applicable to all of the corps, from the superintendent down, as it is to any individual member of it.

This leads to the fourth point, the unwillingness of superintendents to initiate teacher rating schemes. This condition is by no means universal and it seems to be decreasing. It is due in the main to timidity. This in turn may be charged against lack of sufficient knowledge about such devices, lack of self confidence sufficient to see it through, or a fear of outside interference. There is reason to believe that the majority of superintendents believe in the principles of merit.

In fact all of them apply it in some form and to some extent if they have anything to do with the selection and re-employment of members of their teaching corps. A few seem to believe that the best administered system is the one where peace and quietness reign supreme, forgetting that perfect peace is found only in death.

Outside interference is one of the major facts in determining whether a teacher rating scheme is a practical device. If the members of a board of education do not have sufficient confidence in their administrative and supervisory agents to maintain the layman's relation to it, the plan is useless. Board members are not chosen because of professional fitness or for professional service. Whether any rating scheme should be used is theirs to determine. They should also approve the one to be used. But for them to attempt to direct its operation is fatal. If teachers discover that they can get the private ear of a board member, then in this, as in all other matters of educational administrative procedure, the authority that should belong to the professional employees of the board is taken from them and given to the laity.

A recent writer in *Industrial Management* states that three classes of workers are so spoiled by their employment as to be unfitted for jobs in a modern industrial plant.³

"First to be avoided is the group composed of those who have been waiters or bell-boys at hotels, porters in sleeping cars, and public attendants in railway stations, all having as their outstanding characteristic that a 'tip' is involved. . . . These men have been trained under a system wherein their earnings depend not upon the quality of their work, but solely upon the wealth and caprice of their patrons. . . . A second group of applicants to be avoided is composed of those who have been railroad train crews, brakemen, flagmen, switchmen, and the like. . . . Elapsed time, not work performed, is the basis of railroad crew compensation. Pay is on the basis of hours and miles. . . . The men are now thoroughly schooled in this doctrine. The belief simply ruins such men for becoming efficient workers in ordinary industrial occupations. . . . A third class of men to be avoided for industrial plants contains those who have come from the coal mines. The mining of coal is piece work, the basis being the ton.

Men work, either singly or in couples, in 'rooms', each connected with the passage or entry ways. The possibility of continuous supervision or of surprise tests does not exist. The coal-miner may work diligently all day or he may loaf eight hours."

This is very suggestive. It reminds us of certain conditions among teachers.

In the first place there is the individual who holds her position because she is old, or long in the service, or has others dependent upon her, or has friends, but who is professionally incompetent.

In the second place there is the person who is in full possession of all mental and physical faculties, has been in the work many years, but has done little to improve herself, who also is incompetent.

In the third place there is the young, inexperienced, freshly and partially trained person, the professionally unripened enthusiast. How winning she is! But she, too, is incompetent.

Then there is the fourth person, one of great capacity, of splendid training, an exceptional teacher, the individual of superior competence.

Under traditional procedure any two of these people receive the same awards for what they contribute to the school system. Is there any wonder that our best teachers have many times left us, even before they were married? The only way to keep them was to promote them to some supervisory position. I have not the least hesitation in saying that the presence of even a faulty rating scheme honestly administered will do more to retain superior teachers, than no scheme at all. It will do more to secure self improvement in teachers, and a more open mind and intelligent inquiry toward scientific developments of teaching procedure. The average teacher is an average individual, and the average individual asks, "What is the use of making myself better if it means no difference to anyone except myself?"

On the other hand, a good teacher rating scheme properly administered will have the following results:

1. It will tend to eliminate the most incompetent. Some will resent the interference with the established mode of their even

³Quoted from *The Literary Digest* of January 7, 1922.

tenor and leave. Others will receive an inspiration and improve.

2. It will make definitely for an improvement in quality in the whole teaching corps. The device itself centers attention upon the quality of results, and that is exactly what will be thrown into the consciousness of every worker with effects that can easily be imagined. Those who are doing meritorious work will be encouraged by having it recognized. Others will strive for such recognition.

3. It will stimulate interest in new methods, educational research, and all scientific developments in education. Workers will seek the latest and best information as to how they can improve their product.

4. It will cause teachers to go in larger numbers to summer schools and to seek similar means of formal professional improvement.

5. It will necessitate the recognition of merit by differentiated compensation. In this way it may be thought of as one means of increasing the salaries of the most competent.

6. It will not only help to keep in, but it will also attract to your system, better teachers.

R. A. KENT

II

A STUDY IN GRADE DISTRIBUTION

This study was made for the purpose of discovering some of the characteristics of grade distribution in a certain school. As far as seems necessary, data upon which opinions and conclusions are based will be quoted.

The limits of the study are definite. All grades and all pupils accounted for are from the same school. All fall in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. English, History, Geography and Arithmetic are the only subjects in which the study is concerned. In these subjects the teaching is departmentalized. The number of different pupils and consequently the number of different grades

accounted for remain numerically the same with but few exceptions which amount in no instance to more than two or three in a hundred. The pupils whose grades are given in Arithmetic are the same pupils whose grades are given in the other subjects. Only those who completed the three grades in the school are included in the study. Finally, all grades tabulated are annual averages upon which promotion or failure in the different subjects depend.

All grades were determined solely on the basis of the teachers' judgments. During the period covered by the study in the school, the teachers did not attempt to discover a common standard for grade determination or for grade distribution.

The grade-groups upon which the distribution in this study is based are the following: 0-75%; 75-80%; 80-90%; 90-95%; and 95-100%.

ANNUAL DISTRIBUTIONS COMPARED

It does not appear from the study that the grade distribution within the school, year by year, varies greatly. The degree of uniformity prevailing in annual distribution is apparent in the table below.—All terms are in percentages and will continue to be so in all succeeding tables unless otherwise designated.

Year	0-75	75-80	80-90	90-95	95-100
1915-1916	6.1	22.5	55.7	13.9	2.5
1916-1917	6.8	26.7	56.6	8.1	1.7
1917-1918	3.5	20.9	55.0	16.9	3.5
1918-1919	3.7	22.1	56.6	15.4	2.1

GRADE DISTRIBUTION COMPARED

In considering the grade distribution of a series of sixth-grades with that of a series of seventh- and a series of eighth-grades, the degree of uniformity found to prevail is perhaps more pronounced than that found to prevail in the comparison of annual distributions for the school. No attempt is here made to explain why or how uniformity of an approximate degree is present. In the table to follow, by way of explanation, six sixth-grades are accounted for, six seventh- and six eighth-grades. The number of pupils and of grades remain the same for the three series.