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# Ideal Aptitudes and Attainments for a Teacher in the Rural Schools

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An address read before the Illinois State Normal School Board by Southern Illinois State Normal University (SINU) President Henry William Shryock. Shryock was the principle of Olney High School before joining the SINU faculty in the English department in 1894. He served as SINU President from 1913-1935. Shryock encouraged community outreach activities and created a Bureau of Rural School Work to enable the University to reach out and help improve the region's many rural and village schools. This speech was given while Henry Horner was governor so it dates between 1933-1935.

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# Ideal Aptitudes and Attainments For A Teacher In The Rural Schools

By

H. W. SHRYOCK, President  
Southern Illinois State Normal University



An address read before the Illinois  
State Normal School Board and ordered  
printed for distribution.

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## IDEAL APTITUDES AND ATTAINMENTS FOR A TEACHER IN THE RURAL SCHOOLS

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As the man who furnishes copy for the prospectus of the bond issues or other securities would say, "when and if", or maybe it should be "if and when", this depression passes away and America gets back into its stride, some things will be better provided for and better taken care of than ever before. The public school system, for example, will emerge from all this stress and strain with greatly increased revenues, with greater opportunities, and with greater obligations than ever before. In this new day which is coming, the burden of maintenance will be distributed so that every rural school as well as city school may have a college graduate for its teacher. And I am concerned just now with the problem of getting our school ready to turn out rural and village teachers with the right kind of four years' college work.

Nearly one-half of the inhabitants of the United States still live on farms or in farm villages of only a few hundred people, and without industrial groups other than farmers and farm laborers and those who serve farmers. The more than fifty million people who reside in these isolated farm houses and in the not much less pronounced isolation of the ordinary farm village, have the same right to cultural opportunities as the people who live in larger villages and cities. Under present conditions rural and village teachers are recruited almost uniformly from the group having the poorest scholarship of all who seek to enter the teaching profession. A district is counted progressive if it demands a teacher who has had two years of teacher-training preparation, whereas practically every large city and the more progressive small towns are demanding that every teacher must have had at least four years of college preparation, and for high school positions the Master's Degree is becoming the accepted standard.

When the teachers' colleges began to offer courses covering four years leading to the baccalaureate degree, the faculties and college boards had in mind the preparation of high school teachers only, or at least mainly, and the curriculum was framed to prepare the student for a teaching position in a high school; and practically all of our degree graduates went into high school positions. With the depression years, the turn-over in high school forces was insufficient to absorb the out-put in the degree field of our graduates, and little by little the number of four year graduates teaching in grade positions increased. By and by progressive country communities began to avail themselves of the opportunity to secure a four year college graduate. But all this time the requirements for the degree remained about the same.

Our school, I think, is a fairly representative teachers college. We require first of all nine term credits or twenty-four semester hours in education, including practice teaching. Each student must achieve a second major of nine credits or twenty-four semester hours in history, or chemistry, or mathematics, or some other academic subject. In addition he must have at least sixteen semester hours, or six term credits, in a minor allied to his academic major. For example, if his major is English, he may set up a minor in history or in French. Thus two years of the four required for graduation are concentrated in three courses. Furthermore, the student is allowed to, or even encouraged to set up a third major so as to increase his chances of getting a teaching position. As a result, the young collegian leaving our school with a B. Ed. may have an excellent record in about half of the departments, and possibly remain untouched by all the cultural riches offered in the other departments. We are proposing now that the student decide in advance whether he is willing to select as his field the rural school or the rural village school and prepare himself by achieving the broadest, fullest culture for his work in these communities. The course we are offering would particularly fit him to become a village principal or a county superintendent of schools.

We maintain twenty-one departments, and it would be a crime to spend money on any one of these if it were not the embodiment of some outstanding educative value, either utilitarian or cultural. But last year a student was graduated who was permitted to pile up nine credits, or a major in education; fourteen, or five more than a major, in chemistry; and nine, or a full major, in mathematics; and scattering credits through seven other departments; securing his entire forty-eight term units, or four years of college work, out of only ten of the twenty-one departments. In this particular case, I have no criticism. The young man is now enjoying a fellowship and will spend from three to five years in a university, and should emerge a brilliant specialist in chemistry. He will probably be employed in the research department of some manufacturing corporation; if not, his personality is such that he is almost certain to be retained in the university itself to direct advanced students in their research problems. If he willingly and willfully and advisedly shut himself away from the cultural contributions of the work offered by the other departments, it is no concern of mine; because if he teaches, he will teach chemistry only.

Over against this record permit me to picture with a considerable amount of detail a four year course of study that, with negligible exceptions, should, in my judgment, be insisted upon for the preparation of every rural teacher; and with some slight changes for every teacher in every two or three room rural village school. In the following curriculum leading to our degree, Bachelor of Education, the fitness of the courses drawn from the first twelve departments would permit of no debate whatever. If you will follow me as I read, you will, I think, agree with this declaration.

But beginning with the thirteenth and ending with the twenty-first, inclusive, it might seem at first glance a decidedly debatable matter.

I.	<i>Education</i> .....	6	Terms
	a. Educational Psychology		
	b. Principles of Education		
	c. Elementary Measurements		
	d. Rural Education		
	e. Primary Education		
	f. Advanced Educational Psychology		
	Practice Teaching .....	3	Terms
II.	<i>English</i>		
	a. Grammar, Comp. and Rhet.	3	Terms
	b. Children's Literature .....	1	Term
	c. Hist. of Eng. Lit. (Survey Course) .....	1	Term
	d. Hist. of Amer. Lit. (Survey Course) .....	1	Term
III.	<i>Art</i> .....	2	Terms
	a. Freehand Drawing		
	b. Public School Drawing		
IV.	<i>Music</i> .....	2	Terms
	a. Sight Singing		
	b. Study of Primary Music Materials		
V.	<i>Penmanship</i> .....	1	Term
		( $\frac{1}{2}$ credit)	
VI.	<i>Industrial Arts</i> .....	1	Term
		( $\frac{1}{2}$ credit)	
VII.	<i>Geography</i> .....	2	Terms
	a. Principles of Geography		
	b. Geography of North America		
VIII.	<i>Mathematics</i> .....	3	Terms
	a. Arithmetic		
	b. College Algebra		
	c. Trigonometry		
IX.	<i>History</i> .....	3	Terms
	a. Modern Europe		
	b. American History—	2	Terms
X.	<i>Agriculture</i> .....	2	Terms
	a. Soil Fertility		
	b. Animal Husbandry		
XI.	<i>Household Arts</i> .....	2	Terms
	a. Foods and Cookery		
	b. Textiles and Clothing		
XII.	<i>Health Education</i> .....	1	Term
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XIII.	<i>Botany</i> .....	2	Terms
	a. Introductory Course in Botany		
	b. Brief Study in Morphology		
XIV.	<i>Zoology</i> .....	2	Terms
	a. General Vertebrate Zoology		
	b. Economic Zoology		
XV.	<i>Chemistry</i> .....	2	Terms
	Two courses in basic Chemistry		
XVI.	<i>Physics</i> .....	2	Terms
	Two courses in basic Physics		
XVII.	<i>Political Science</i> .....	1	Term
XVIII.	<i>Economics</i> .....	1	Term
XIX.	<i>Foreign Language</i> .....	3	Terms
XX.	<i>Astronomy</i> .....	1	Term
XXI.	<i>Geology</i> .....	1	Term
			Total 48 Terms
			Credits
			or 128 Semester Hours

Before I discuss the supreme cultural value of the work offered by these last nine departments, permit me to defend the weakest point in this chain of scholarship, the requirement of at least one year of foreign language. I have been a teacher of English for more than fifty years, and I have become convinced that no one can realize the full cultural value of his vernacular unless he has at least one foreign language against which to project the paradigms, conjugations, syntax, and vocab-

ulary nuances of his mother tongue, in order to measure, by contrast on one hand or by likeness on the other, the effectiveness of these speech devices. And every teacher in the elementary schools must be a teacher of English. There is another reason, and I am willing to admit that this is seemingly a trivial one, but after all I am not sure but that it alone would justify the foreign language requirement. In the out-lying communities especially, the teacher should be such a one as may take strong hold upon the imagination of the children who are to gather round her day after day; and there is a fascination for any intelligent child in the companionship of a superior woman or man to whom a foreign language is an open book.

Your first reaction may be that so many different subjects are required that the work will of necessity be superficial. Someone is likely to quote Pope's dictum,

"A little learning is a dangerous thing  
Drink deep or taste not the Pierian Spring."

It is a matter of common knowledge that Pope possessed a considerable body of knowledge of markedly superficial character. He never took a deep draught from any fount of knowledge. His invalidism and the brutality of English laws, which because of his religious convictions shut him out of all the great English schools, prevented his being anything other than superficial. But despite his superficiality, he enriched the English language with more deathless phrases embodying beauty and wisdom, and opening up visions, than any other writer of the English language, Shakespeare alone excepted; and by his splendid achievement as a phrase maker demonstrated the fallacy of his own dictum, "A little learning is a dangerous thing."

You will notice that the proposed course of study provides twenty-four weeks for chemistry, twenty-four weeks for physics, twenty-four weeks for botany, twenty-four weeks for zoology, twelve weeks for geology, and twelve weeks for astronomy. Now, of course, the person who is always telling us about how thorough he is and how he insists upon thoroughness in the case of everybody else;—such a person will at once protest that a student cannot "master" chemistry in twenty-four weeks. Well, of course he can't; he couldn't if he had a thousand weeks; he couldn't if he lived to be as old as Methuselah and worked at chemistry every day of his life.

I presume the outstanding chemical phenomenon of today, rising above all the other phenomena of that wonderful science in thrilling interest and in seeming unknowableness, is catalysis. The use of the catalyst, whether in research work or in the regular production activities of the manufacturer whose enterprise depends upon the application of chemical laws, in multiplied hundreds of cases is the factor that converts failure into success. A catalyst, as you know, is a chemical substance which through mere contact-presence will cause swift and important chemical changes in other chemicals, but is not itself perceptibly changed. Millions of dollars are invested in hundreds of processes now employed in the hydrogenization of organic compounds, where the process

as a commercial venture is only possible through the use of a catalyst; and yet there is scarcely a chemist in the world who will attempt even a guess as to why the catalyst produces its effect.

No, no one can master chemistry in twenty-four weeks, but an average college student in his junior year under proper direction can learn a good deal about chemistry in twenty-four weeks.

These people who talk about being so thorough miss the point anyway, it seems to me, with regard to most of the educational field. It is not expected in this course that we are to turn out a teacher who is a physicist and an astronomer and a chemist and a zoologist and a botanist and a geologist; but it is hoped that the teacher who does the work will not be ignorant of the basic facts and laws in all these vast domains of thought. The teacher who graduates from this four year course would not have an opportunity in the rural school to offer regular work in any one of these subjects; but she will teach with more power if there is some understanding of chemical, physical, or biologic law in the background of her teaching consciousness. And here I want to make what at first may seem like a digression, but it is not.

Last year for the first time the wise men of the educational sanhedrin woke up to the fact that there has been no concerted effort to fix the place of emotional training in our educational scheme. But in the agenda sent forth for the guidance of the profession in the proposed investigations, the most important phase of the emotional psychosis, or the highly emotionalized experience, was not even mentioned; I mean, the possible attitude of intelligent wonderment on the part of the child when it is psychologically in the presence of an object or a happening that transcends all past personal experience. The most complicated and wonderful piece of machinery may be shown to a savage, and he will evince no wonderment whatever, even when the astonishing effect of the machine is exhibited, as in the cast of the ice cubes made in an electric refrigerator, or the transmission of the human voice by radio. If he attempts to explain these things, the savage bundles them all up together in the one word "magic". "Intelligent wonderment!" I wish I might by some possibility make you understand as I see it the tremendous educative value of this phenomenon.

There is an old story; of course the thing never happened, but it is a true story nevertheless; because it might happen any minute of any day of any year. Two men are standing, looking across Niagara Falls. One, overwhelmed by the majesty of the scene, whispers, "Wonderful! wonderful! wonderful!" The other retorts, "No. It would be wonderful, wonderful, if it didn't fall." The first with his nervous system alive at every nerve end, gifted with vision, with a special capacity for synthesis, storm swept by a tremendous emotion, sees between two heartbeats a whole cosmic cycle work itself out;—the sun shining on a boundless stretch of water surface, three-fourths of the face of the entire globe, warming the water, converting it into vapor, the vapor soaked up by the trailing masses of heated air carrying a never-ending stream of moisture over thousands of miles of sea, over other thousands of miles of land, over mountain tops, if they are not too high, at last rejecting the moisture and flinging it down in the form of rain or hail or sleet or snow



in the drainage area of the great lakes; and then the river systems of that great area gathering up the "run-off" to hurry it back to its original home, the ocean depths, ultimately, not a drop of it to be lost. As he sees all this and, shaken by the roar of the great cataract, sees at the center of his synthesis the great power plant in the incandescent gases of the photosphere of the sun with its temperature of more than ten thousand degrees Fahrenheit, he utters his "intelligent wonderment" in the thrilling cry, "wonderful! wonderful! wonderful!" The other man sees only a fluid sliding down a slightly inclined plane reaching a break between an upper plane and a lower one and merely tumbling off to the lower plane.

It is a great thing for a child to stand wide-eyed and astonished at the beautiful but fantastic designs worked out by frost crystals on the window pane; the piling up of trunderheads, silver white above and purple black below; the waxing and waning of the moon; the rhythmic march of the seasons; the slow southward drift of the sun through the shortening days of December; or any one of the other hitherto unnoticed miracles when for the first time the miracle is pointed out to him; and an explanation, no matter how incomplete, is offered; especially if the teacher possesses the one supreme teaching qualification, the power to stir the sense of wonderment and awe, and to awaken that other fine thrill that comes from apprehending the fact that the thing or happening may be rationalized or its cause made clear.

If I introduce here a brief personal experience, you will understand in advance that I had no eclipsing part in the performance, I was simply a "listener in", and I am reciting the experience because the teacher was one of the highly gifted ones, the greatest teacher I have ever known. It has been sixty-five years since as a child of eight "going on nine", as we used to say in the country, I heard some one of the older boys who made up the "Fifth Reader Class" read something about "True as the needle to the pole," and when the reader was asked the meaning of the passage, the boy confessed very frankly that he didn't have any idea as to what it meant. Of course he knew about poles, various kinds of poles, bean poles, hoop poles, fishing poles; and he knew something about needles, knitting needles, darning needles, sewing needles; but just what the author meant by a needle being true to a pole was as clear in his mind as mud. The teacher said, "Next week when I get back from Olney, (his home), I'll bring some things along, and I believe I can make you understand what that means."

He brought a horse-shoe magnet and a pocket compass of good quality; and putting the compass down, let us file past and see that it pointed northward. Then he magnetized the knife blades of all the boys. He spread out some needles and gave each boy a chance to lift a needle with the point of his knife blade. And last of all he took a larger needle, placed it across the face of the horseshoe magnet, left it in contact with the magnet for some little time, then thrusting it through a thin slice of cork placed it on the surface of the water in a somewhat deep half-gallon glass dish. He laid the cork-and-needle-combination on the water so that the needle pointed east and west. From time to time

the pupils tip-toed up to look, and by and by the needle pointed north and south. Again it was placed upon the water surface pointing east and west, and it slowly and almost imperceptibly swung back until the needle was north and south.

The prairie where we lived was rapidly settling up with new houses and new barns; and the carpenter who was supervising most of the building had a weakness of weather vanes and possessed some little skill in cutting the vanes into attractive or at least unexpected forms. From the highest part of one of the farm buildings at nearly every home in the neighborhood, the skyline sprouted into a wingless bird, a fish, a horse, or in one case what seemed to be a boy on horseback. So the children all knew what the teacher was talking about when he reminded them of the weather vane. He told them that the longest line of the vane lay in the direction of the wind motion. He warned the children that the magnetic flow was constant and unchangeable as to direction, and incapable of being felt by the human body, affecting one material only, steel; but that nevertheless, while it couldn't be seen or felt or recognized by any ordinary means everywhere on the face of the earth, that is, the hemisphere that we know, there was something like a current, a ceaseless, uniform, steady, northward pressure that could lay hold of every light piece of steel floated or borne in such manner as to move readily and could force this slender piece of steel to lay itself in the line of the current flow. Although sixty-five years have passed, I can still recall how we stood almost breathless in the presence of this mighty something that was steadily sweeping northward over the whole face of the earth.

I suppose a modern physicist would be appalled at the thought that a teacher should introduce the winds and a weather vane into an explanation of the steady pointing of the needle. Analogies are dangerous things to fool with in the exact sciences, but in this case the teacher was careful to warn us not to be misled into thinking that this flow of magnetic force was very much like the movement of the winds; but anyway, even if he taught us something which was actually unscientific, he was only running true to scientific traditions, because a twenty year period outmodes almost any textbook in any science. At any rate, the facts about the magnetic needle are not so important. The great thing, the supreme thing was the highly emotionalized experience, the wide-eyed wonderment, and the wilder thrill that swept us as we thought of that northward sweeping current.

Through thousands of years of civilization a fine, poetic tradition has developed itself and woven itself around the scenes and activities of the countryside; and those who have studied the matter are, I think, fairly well agreed that there is something in farm life under the best conditions that does give to the country boy or girl a better opportunity to achieve distinction than comes to the city born. At any rate in the whole history of America the convictions and loyalties and the leadership of the farmers have always been steadying influences in economics, politics, and even in matters ecclesiastical. It must not be forgotten, however, that there is in the nature of things something so calm and

sleepy in the atmosphere of country life that genius may never discover itself. When Thomas Gray in his "Elegy" wrote

"Some mute, inglorious Milton here may rest,"

he started a debate that has continued to this day. It is difficult to see how a potential Milton could possibly remain mute and inglorious; but it must be clear to anyone that a potential leader of a lower rank might easily pass through his whole life without being brought into creative activity. The city child, unless hopelessly dull, is bound to be stimulated into some degree of intelligent wonderment;—the roar of in-coming and out-going trains, the clash and clatter of the cars on the elevated lines, the frenzied crowds in the market places and on the highways, the awakening call from towering structures so tremendous that by comparison the famous Tower of Babel would look like a "lean-to";—these shout at the child from every direction, shocking him into some degree of activity. But at the farm side, the achievements of men are so feeble and restricted that if there is an awakening, it must be Nature whose call shall shock into action the slumbering powers of the child—live stock drowning in flooded lowlands; the torturing northwest, mid-winter wind, screaming in its rage; the scorching, blasting floods of sunlight in a drought stricken plain through July and August; the nightly pageant of the stars; the miracle of pollination; the mystery of the clouds of seventeen year locusts; the marvel of the chemical transformation in the chlorophyll-sunlight leaf laboratory; the glory of the borealis—these phenomena and a hundred others may be used by a skillful teacher to awaken dormant powers. But it must never be forgotten that on the countryside a brilliant intellect may never be awakened unless some quickening touch is laid upon its torpid lids, unless some kindly master bids it to look up and see; and such a master can never come from the ranks of those to whom chemistry and physics and botany and zoology and astronomy and geology and literature and art are strange and uncontributing factors.

In closing, permit me to frame a brief section that shall function as an apologia, an epilogue, and a thesis; and thus as an alembic to separate the essence of this homily from the mass of what I have said concerning the rural school, the course of study, the nature and needs of the child, and the aptitudes and attainments of the ideal rural teacher.

Knowledge and skill may be won and perhaps are always won by the "Line upon line, and precept upon precept" method of procedure; but power, it seems to me, never comes to anyone through the mode by which he achieves knowledge and skill; but comes possibly in a moment or, at least, in periods not long drawn out when through some combination his whole emotional nature is at its highest reach. As I see it, culture in its highest form is the end product of those highly emotionalized experiences through which the child passes from time to time in the years when he is developing and fixing his awareness of the objective world surrounding him,—the house in which he lives, the parents and other immediate relatives, neighbors, strangers, domestic animals, the birds, cornfield or grass-land, forest or meadow, cloud land or azure

dome, lightning and thunder, the wail of autumn winds and the roar of the tempest,—especially if these experiences are later in life molded, integrated, and unified through the esemplastic power of music, or poetry, or the drama, or fiction, or oratory, or painting, or sculpture, or architecture,—or of two or more of these combined.

In the use of the word power as above I have had in mind capacity for leadership, that something in human personality that enables one to compel, or to impel, or to persuade, or in some way to bend the will of another into compliance with the leader's will; and this imperial attribute of personality is in some ways possibly the greatest of all human attributes; but after all, looking at the matter from an individualistic standpoint, I should doubt this. It is a great thing to influence others to live as we would have them live; but it is a far greater thing to have control of one's own destiny,—one's tendencies and desires and appetites and passions; and withal, to have the courage to face with calmness the imprecations of the rabble, and to listen with disdain to the mockery of fools; and thus to live one's own life in one's own way. The finest spirits earth has ever known have willingly and proudly faced the prison, the scaffold, or the cross if only they might achieve in some measure, or at least bequeath to their posterity, the possibility that each might some day be permitted to live his own life in his own way, to dream his own dreams, to mold his own ideals, to follow his own aspirations;

“and add the gleam,  
The light that never was, on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.”

