

REMARKS PREPARED  
FOR THE  
OHIO TEACHER EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION ADVISORY COMMISSION  
ON THE SUBJECT OF "TEACHER IMAGE"

BY  
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THURSDAY, JUNE 9, 1983

Before painting too somber a picture of the state of the teaching profession today, we should look at matters in a historical perspective. Fifty years ago nearly 55 percent of the teaching force did not have the equivalent of two years of training beyond high school. Today nearly half (49.3%) of the teachers in elementary and secondary schools have a master's degree or beyond. Starting with the "normal school" over the years teacher preparation has evolved into a four year curriculum with a general or liberal arts education in addition to professional training. While in comparison to the legal and medical professions, education's development has lagged behind; nevertheless, progress was made. (It should be recalled that one hundred years ago anyone who could read and write could claim legal expertise on the American frontier and the state of the medical arts could be summed up in the motto, "When in doubt, cut it off!")

Nonetheless, today the status and image of teachers both within their own ranks and in the eyes of much of the public is in a critical state. In a recent survey, more than one-third of America's teachers stated that they either certainly or probably would not become a teacher if they had a chance to do it over again. Twenty years ago only eleven percent reported they would certainly or probably not choose teaching again. Furthermore, in 1982, only 5 percent of all college-bound high school seniors said they planned to pursue a major in education. Consequently, while the news media has recently highlighted the shortage of math and science teachers, the United States faces in the coming years a shortage in most teaching fields. Additionally, recent studies indicate that the majority of students now enrolling in teacher education are in the bottom third of their graduating high school class. (An excellent and readable report on the current status of the nation's teachers is C. Emily Ferstritzer's The American Teacher, Washington, D.C.: Ferstritzer Publications, 1983.)

From the standpoint of the American public, the 1982 Gallup Poll revealed only 8 percent of the general public gave public schools an A rating (down from 18% in 1974), 29% a B rating, and 33% a C, however, only 5% gave them an F. The major problems that the public sees in our public schools are, in their rank order, "lack of discipline," "lack of proper financial support," "use of drugs" and "poor curriculum".

From the viewpoint of teachers, the reasons why education is not an attractive occupation are:

- (1) Public attitudes toward public schools. With only 30% of the families in the nation having school-age children, derogatory attitudes are often the result hearsay. Studies indicate the greater the contact with the public schools, the more favorable the impression of the educational system.
- (2) The treatment of education by the media which is usually unfavorable.
- (3) Low salaries paid teachers. In 1980-81, the average beginning teacher's salary was estimated at \$11,758 compared to \$20,136 for college graduates with a degree in engineering; \$15,720 for beginning accountants; \$14,100 in business; \$14,472 in economics; \$15,936 in sales marketing; and \$17,712 in computer services.

The disparity over time increases between teachers and those in other professional and technical occupations. For example, a beginning accountant in 1981 earned an average of \$16,529, but a grade 5 accountant demanded a salary of \$35,141. An engineer who began at \$21,000 could at grade 8 earn almost \$57,000. No comparable advancement salary scale exists for teachers.

(4) Low status of teachers in the community.

To address many of the factors cited above, the Ohio Federation of Teachers would recommend the following:

I. The Establishment of Teacher Competency Entrance Level Examinations

We believe that a bias free examination to qualify candidates for the teaching profession as part of a full teacher education degree program which tests the level of literacy, knowledge of subject matter, and pedagogy will enhance the image of teachers in their own eyes but also upgrade the profession in the eyes of the general public. Such a test will not necessarily show who is a "good" teacher, but it will indicate who has the necessary basic skills and knowledge.

It must also be stated that the OFT opposes the use of examinations for decisions related to retention, promotion, recertification, salary, or tenure. Retesting is not required of lawyers, doctors, real estate agents and other professionals. In equity, it should not be required of teachers. We would also oppose competency tests that are solely or largely concerned with methodology.

Teacher competency exams are only one element of what is needed to raise the status of teachers and education in our society. Other elements must also be put in place.

II. The Establishment of High Standards for Admission to Colleges of Education

The OFT well understands that colleges facing declining enrollments and program cut-backs seek "bodies" to fill their classrooms. The temptation is there to make lax admission policies in teacher education even more lenient in light of "economic necessity." However, to upgrade American public education, the AFT supports the development and enforcement of standards for entrance into teacher preparation. The process of separating the wheat from the chaff should begin at the entrance doors to our colleges of education. It should be noted that in establishing admissions standards the AFT is opposed to any proposal necessitating quotas.

III. Improved Content and Instruction in Colleges of Education

It is no secret that colleges of education are held in low esteem by other segments of the university community and by large numbers of graduates from colleges of education. "Educators" have for some time suggested that a fifth or sixth year be added to teacher preparation. However, before OFT could support such a course of action, colleges of education will have to demonstrate that they truly have something to offer the prospective teacher. Besides, it is unlikely that many students would put this additional investment into their education without much higher economic rewards than teaching currently offers.

It should not be concluded that AFT and OFT oppose increased demands on education students in terms of greater knowledge of subject matter and practical experiences via student teaching, microteaching, simulations and modeling. But simply adding more of the same in terms of education courses is not conducive to upgrading the profession. We would offer as a more practical and realistic means of resolving the time issue, the establishment of internship programs in our public school systems. The Toledo Board of Education and the Toledo Federation of Teachers have cooperatively developed such a program, and it is worthy of study by others.

The state of Oklahoma has taken the greatest strides in this area. The Oklahoma state legislature in 1980 made sweeping changes in its teacher education program which include (a) increasing the standards of admission into colleges of education; (b) more clinical field work in the preparation process; (c) competency examinations in subject areas before graduating; (d) an entry year internship before certification; (e) the monitoring of first-year teachers by a team representative of the profession, and (f) provisions for continuing education for teachers and teacher educators.

#### IV. Improved Teacher Inservice and Professional Development for the Practicing Teacher

The OPT does not endorse the current maudlin practices that are often passed off as teacher inservice in many of our school systems. But, we do feel that if teacher organizations had a greater role in the establishment and direction of inservice training, intellectually stimulating programs could be developed that would fill in gaps in subject matter, improve instructional management, introduce technological advances, and bring out the application of sound research.

#### V. The Need for Teachers to Reach Out to the Community-At-Large

The "image" problems of teachers today are, as stated before, due in large part to public perceptions and the reporting of the news media. With fewer families having school-age children, it is necessary for teachers to reach out to the community-at-large to change those perceptions.

The AFT has long recognized that need and is one of the factors which determined our affiliation with Organized Labor.

However, teachers and other school personnel must seek larger and newer coalitions. AFT President Shanker has for the last few years pushed for a greater dialogue with the business community. Many leaders of business do realize that for their own self-interest and that of the nation, public education needs to be improved. Important figures in the business community recognize that improvement will necessitate massive infusions of money into education. They, of course, will have demands attached to their support of education. President Shanker has asked our unions not to reject nor accept at face value the suggestions put forward, but rather to seize the opportunity to negotiate change.

Additionally, there are a variety of ways local teacher organizations can reach out to the public. The Youngstown Federation of Teachers' "Dial-A-Teacher Program" and "Project Reach Out" for children of the unemployed are two examples. The former has been successfully used by teacher unions in other parts of the country. The latter is a pilot program that has had only limited success but is an effort worth trying.

It should be noted that programs such as these in Youngstown or the Toledo Intern Program must have their origin and source of support in the teachers of the school system. They cannot be arbitrarily imposed from above by management and be successful.

Finally, teacher organizations can, with what resources they can muster, seek to use the media to change public perceptions of our education system. The four public service announcements for TV prepared by AFT and shown around the country are examples of what can be done with limited resources.