

The Teacher in Relation to the Course of Study.

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My paper, I am afraid, does not deal with the subject exactly as announced. Though I shall touch upon the course of study, the points I wish to make, the lines along which I most desire to be helped, relate rather to the teacher, apart from the course of study; because the teacher is of more importance, is superior to the course of study. If anyone refuses me this as a postulate, I shall evade argument by agreeing with him. I can quite politely say, "No, you are not; but you ought to be." And it is to just such teachers that I wish to appeal; to arouse any who are a little indifferent; to encourage those who are a little lacking in self-confidence and originality, who have had little training or experience, and those who are inclined to vaguely worship the course of study as a sort of fetish or to think of it as an all-sufficient, a cast-iron formula; those who work by the letter and neglect the spirit of our really excellent educational system.

I confess that my knowledge of this fault, up to that time a mere intuitive sense, was crystallized by a speech of Judge Longley's at normal school commencement, or, I should say, graduation day, of 1902. That was a year of very free (and sometimes very foolish) popular discussion of the course of study, which has culminated in the late famous (or infamous) changes (according to your point of view). Speaking of the course of study on that occasion, the Attorney-General said: "Give me as many hundred *ideal teachers* as there are schools in this province, and you may take the course of study and do what you like with it; I'll have no use for it." Now, in any educational system there must be a degree of uniformity; so I cannot go the whole length of Judge Longley's forcible remark; but it well expresses the vital need of *teachers* who are great enough to include the course of study, as the greater includes the less, who have absorbed the subjects of the course so thoroughly, and who feel the broad purposes of the course so intelligently that this knowledge and this feeling work themselves out spontaneously in the daily teaching, forgetful of the course of study as a mechanism. That the course of study is of itself insufficient to the end of education, is proved by the spectacle, all too common, of pupils who have been put through its entire machinery and come out at the end not only uneducated, but sometimes mentally warped, dulled, with poor memories, poor manners, little judgment

and flabby characters, and, perhaps, saddest of all, with latent capacities undeveloped, and natural curiosity or activity suppressed to the point of extinction. But the course of study is not to blame for this—it is only a machine, an instrument; like a corporation, it has no soul, and it cannot be held responsible; but it is a splendid machine, an efficient instrument in the hands of a responsible being with a soul. No, the course of study is not to blame. There are several factors in this deplorable product, but the highest, commonest factor is the mechanical system of teaching—the cram system. It is quite evident that the changes in the course of study are intended as a raid upon the cram system, and the business men, the tax-paying public, who insisted upon changes, saw an evil that really exists. But six subjects or one subject can be taught by the cram system just as ineffectively as ten, and the results will continue to be as aforesaid, so long as reforms are aimed at the course of study, and not originated in the schools and in the teachers.

I say, "*in the teachers*" advisedly, for in our school system, at its present degree of perfection, very little more help can be given and very little more pressure can be brought to bear upon the teachers; and, besides, reforms and improvements thrust upon any class of people are usually ineffective. But the teacher, in the singular, each individual, must live and work with the conviction that he, she, is personally necessary and responsible for the success of the school system; that he is, as I asked you to grant me at the start, more important than the course of study, and that he needs (which is my second point) to give his attention to self-study, self-preparation and development.

Is it necessary, before I go on, to say that I trust I shall not be accused of setting myself up as a censor or a teacher of teachers? In this profession we are all, in an important sense, on a level. We all meet some of its difficulties; we all deal with some of its problems; we all enjoy some of its rewards and delights; we all see some of its splendid possibilities, some of its unique and precious opportunities. So it is but a false modesty, an affectation or self-consciousness unworthy of earnest men and women, that keeps us so often from speaking of our own life's inspirations and ideals, because, indeed, others very likely know more and think more about these things than we do. It is quite possible for us to reach out and touch and uphold or even guide each other, not in spite of, but because of, the fact that we are all upon the same plane.