

SCIENCE

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OBSTACLES TO EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS¹

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It is only a commonplace, I know, to say that the serious study of educational organization and administration is largely a product of the past quarter of a century, and that the largest contributions to our knowledge in these fields have been made by students during the sixteen years that belong to the twentieth century. Yet I need to say it as an introduction to the thesis I wish to set up. The past decade and a half have witnessed a remarkable change in attitude toward the study of education. Never before have so many capable men and women directed their attention to a serious study of educational theory and the problems surrounding the proper organization and administration of public education, and never before has the type of the men and women preparing for entrance to the state's educational service been so high as at present.

Schools of education, which now exist in nearly all our leading universities, are almost entirely a twentieth-century product, and are becoming so organized as to render an increasingly important service in training for educational leadership and service. Our knowledge on educational questions, derived in part from our administrative experience, is being rapidly organized into teaching form; fundamental principles in school organization and administration are being established; and a better trained body of administrative officers, with larger and broader vision as to means and ends

¹ Address of the vice-president and chairman of Section L, American Association for the Advancement of Science.

and the significance of public education, is being prepared and sent out. Numerous summer sessions of our leading colleges and universities are contributing much to the dissemination of this newly organized knowledge of administrative principles and procedure among those actively engaged in the educational service. Despite all these recent advances, though, in educational theory and in the organization of our knowledge of proper administrative action, in actual practise throughout the nation our progress at times seems most discouragingly slow. Only in city-school administration have we been able to make real advances, and these only in certain cities and certain sections of the country.

Another recent statement that has already become almost a commonplace is that public education, after the close of the present Great War, will of necessity become a much more important state service than it has ever been up to the present time. The great world changes which will follow in the decade or two after its close—social, industrial and political—are almost certain to be far-reaching and vast in extent, and probably will greatly modify many of our present educational conceptions, as well as many of our methods and practices in hitherto undreamed of ways. A much more fundamental education of our people, especially along industrial and technical and political lines, is almost certain to follow. Our present traditional practises and provincialism in the organization and administration of public education will have to be superseded by a larger and a more forward, as well as a more national outlook. If we are to play our proper part in world affairs in the future—politically, commercially, or industrially—our educational systems must be unified in aims and practises much more than is now the case, world and life needs must enter more largely than at present into the education

provided for the masses of our children, and a better-informed intelligence than the local democratic mass must direct our educational efforts, while a much larger nationalism in education must take the place of our present provincialism in school affairs.

We have then to-day a new interest in proper educational organization and administration on the part of a small but an increasing number of selected men and women, and we are facing new national and international needs opening up ahead of us which will make heavy demands on those who possess training and competency for the educational service which will be called for. The number who see these rapidly enlarging educational needs and are securing training to meet the future demands is still far too small to supply the trained and competent educational leadership that will be needed, but this number may be expected to increase slowly as communities offer larger opportunities to such men and women to be of real service. The thesis I want to lay down this afternoon, then, is that it is the lack of opportunity to be of real service which has kept and is still keeping many competent men and women from entering upon or properly preparing for the public educational service; that this lack of opportunity for real service still is, and until the conditions are changed will continue to be, the greatest obstacle we have to face in securing rational educational progress for our country; and that satisfactory educational progress can not be expected until the obstructions created by present laws and practises in educational organization and administration are removed by new legislation. Let us see what are some of the more important of these obstacles.

With us everywhere public education is still largely a local affair. The unit of organization is the school district—city,

county or rural—and in a majority of our states the little democratic school district, inherited in the early days from Massachusetts, is the prevailing unit for the organization and administration of education, and nearly everywhere these little self-governing units are but loosely bound together in the county and state educational organizations. With regard to organization we do not have a national school system, and, aside from the assimilation of the foreign-born, it falls far short of national scope in either conception or purpose. Even our state educational systems exist rather in a uniform school code and in clerical and inspectional oversight than in helpful state supervision, and too often consist largely in the imposition of a general state uniformity on communities in unimportant matters, while neglecting the larger concerns of a broad educational policy for intelligent future development.

It is to the school district, then—rural, township, city or county—that we go for the ultimate source of educational organization and administration in this country. Some of our states have twelve to fifteen thousand such little units, actuated by no common purpose or policy and devoid of any proper conceptions as to the nature or purpose of education in a modern state. Over these, as represented by their popularly-elected trustees, is a county school official with statistical and clerical functions but with little real power, and over the county organization is a state educational official with similar limited powers. In a few of the North-Central states we find that the township has replaced the school district, with the county over it; while in the New England states the districts have been abolished in favor of the town, this in turn being responsible to the state. In a few other states, mostly southern, the county has been made the administrative unit, while in all the states we find the separate

city school district, with more or less independent powers in organization and administration. Let us leave the city aside for a moment and examine the obstacles to educational progress as found in rural and county educational organization.

That rural education almost everywhere is in need of a radical reorganization and redirection is another commonplace statement. Too frequently our rural schools attain to but a small fraction of their possible efficiency and render but small service in improving the conditions surrounding life on the farm. Too frequently their management is shortsighted, their equipment poor, their instruction ineffective, and adequate supervision is too often entirely lacking. That such schools contribute but little to the improvement of rural life is well known. The trouble lies chiefly in that the system of organization and management still followed is half a century behind the times, and that, in consequence, there is no opportunity for men and women of adequate training and capable of real leadership to make themselves effective in the improvement of rural education and the conditions surrounding rural life.

The so-called district system, with its large powers for local control, represents democracy gone to seed, and it stands today as the most serious obstacle in the way of the improvement of rural education. What is needed is larger and more flexible units for the organization of instruction; larger units for taxation, with a resulting more general pooling of both the burdens and the advantages of education; and an administrative organization which will make possible a more rational administration of the education of those who live in the rural districts and small villages of our country. Rural educational progress will be promoted in proportion as the school district is abolished for larger units of organization and control.

While the ultra-conservative nature of the district system makes it a serious obstacle in the way of intelligent educational progress, hardly less important as a hindrance to the improvement of rural education is the political and local nature of the office of county superintendent of schools. In twenty-one of the forty-one American states having such an educational office, the person who ought to be the educational organizer and director of the public-school system of the county is, instead, merely another county political official, selected from among the body of the electorate at the county primary and elected at the county political election, serving but a short period in the office, confined largely to statistical and clerical duties, afraid to assume much responsibility for fear of the enemies he will make in the districts, and with little power to put any educational ideas he might have into effect in the administration of the schools of his county. Generally speaking, the office attracts but few men or women of real training or large capacity for service, and the better trained the superintendent may happen to be the shorter is likely to be his term of service. The office, if we neglect a few well-organized county-unit states, such as Maryland or Utah, offers no educational career to any one, and no premium whatever to any one to make any professional preparation for the organization or administration of rural education. In but few states can a man or woman hope to enter the work of county school supervision—a service of fundamental importance to the children of half our people—on the basis of educational competency, or to retain the office on the basis of efficient educational service. The result is that the office offers but a temporary job to the few local residents willing to consider political candidacy, and that in but few states do we find any county educational organization capable of rendering

any real service in the solution of our increasingly important rural-life problem. In consequence the education of rural children is inadequate and misdirected, intelligent farmers leave the farm for town in order that their children may have proper educational advantages, but little attention is given to preparation for rural service by either our normal schools or our colleges of education, and but few men or women think of trying to make any preparation for the organization or direction of the work of our rural and small village schools.

Passing from the county to the state, we find something of the same conditions prevailing. In nearly three fourths of our states the chief educational office of the state labors under the same political incubus as does that of the county superintendency of schools. Due to the larger area for selection and the enlarged competition, better men are usually secured for the position. As yet, however, but little attention has been given to any serious study of the problems of state educational organization and administration, and the political basis of the selection of the chief educational officer for most of our states places no premium on any other than political preparation. The great improvement in the work of some of our state educational departments within recent years, aside from the states where non-partisan appointment from the nation at large has replaced political nomination and election from the state, has been due either to a state superintendent of superior ability rising above the limitations of his office or to the appointment of a number of state commissioners or agents or specialists, these having been provided for under special laws and given special powers of supervision and inspection. In but few of our states, though, can we as yet be said to have a well-thought-out educational policy which is being followed for the improvement of

education generally throughout the state. To change this condition the obstacle presented by the method now in vogue for choosing the chief state educational officer needs to be eliminated, with a view to opening up to the state a chance to go into the markets of the whole country with the money the state feels able to pay to secure the services of the best prepared person available for the work at hand. The office of state superintendent of public instruction is, potentially at least, a much more important office than that of president of the state university; actually it is far from being so. It is not difficult to imagine what would be the condition of our state universities if we had continually selected the presidents of these institutions from among the residents of the state and by the same methods that have prevailed for so long in the case of the chief educational officer of the school system of the state. An important line of progress for the near future, then, in the case of both state and county superintendencies of education, is the opening up of these offices to educational competition, as is now the case with high-school principalships and city school superintendents. That such a change would give much encouragement to the study of the important larger problems of national welfare which surround the proper organization and administration of state and county systems of public education, there can be little question.

Turning now to the city school district we find much better conditions prevailing in the matter of the selection of educational executives. City superintendencies and high-school and elementary-school principalships have for a long time been on an open competitive basis in all our better managed cities, and in such a prohibitive protective tariff against brains and competency from the outside has not prevailed. The selections by city boards of

education have not always been of the best—frequently otherwise—but the possibilities of a career and a chance for constructive service have in general been kept open, and these have made their appeal to certain types of minds. As a result, it has been the problems of school organization and administration as they relate to cities which have awakened interest and been studied most carefully. An examination of our educational journals will show that it has been the problems of city school organization and administration that have filled their pages, and the announcements of courses in our normal schools and colleges of education show that it is the city problems which are being studied by their students. These are offered everywhere, but the number of institutions offering courses for the study of the principles underlying the proper organization and administration of state and county school systems is limited indeed. The city has offered the prizes for administrative competency and adequate professional preparation, and practically all who have trained for school administrative service have trained with service in the city as the end in view.

Yet even in city educational organization many obstacles to educational progress still remain. The most of these are survivals of the school district or village stage in our educational evolution, or they are obstacles that arise from the lack of any proper conception as to the fundamental principles underlying proper educational organization and administration on the part of the public. The proper organization and administration of a city school system has become a highly expert piece of administrative service, and adequate results are no longer possible if proper administrative procedure is continually interfered with by the well-meaning ignorance or the personal-friendship ideas of

school board members or city officials. It is along these lines that we to-day encounter the greatest obstacle to successful educational administration in our cities. While it would be easy to enumerate a dozen such, I will content myself with a mention of the three which seem to me to be the most important obstacles to intelligent educational progress in the administration of our city school systems.

The first of such obstacles I would enumerate arises where the school superintendency for the city has been made an integral part of the government of the city. The ordinary lawyer, city official or politician finds it hard to understand why students of educational administration object to the apparently perfectly logical position of the schools as a part of the city governmental organization. They regard the school service as on a plane of practical equality with other forms of municipal service, and would place it on the same level as the other city patronage departments of fire, parks, police, streets and public work. Instead, the school is and ought to be regarded as a creation of the state, ranking with the home and the church as an institution for the advancement of the public welfare by the training of the next generation of citizens, and the state must see that it is not reduced to local patronage ends. These other departments represent a municipal corporation, erected to carry out municipal ends; the school is a state corporation to carry out a great state purpose. The experience of our American cities has shown clearly that efficient school administration is promoted by the complete divorce of city government and school control. To make a school board dependent upon the city government for direction and finance, and subject it to the annual scramble for city funds, is to oppose a serious obstacle to proper educational progress and to subordinate the edu-

cation of the children in the city to the exigencies of city government. As the directors of a state corporation, representing the most important interest of every community, the school board should be free to carry on its work and, within certain limits set by state law, to levy the necessary taxes, free from any interference by the mayor, council, or other city officials.

The second obstacle to proper educational progress in city school administration which I would enumerate is the confusion of functions and responsibilities as between the school board, on the one hand, and the executive officers which the board employs to direct the work of the schools, on the other. Such a confusion arises in part as a result of the rapid evolution of cities from school districts and villages, the tendency being to retain functions once exercised, and in part from a lack of any clear understanding, on the part of the representatives of the public, as to what they are elected to do.

Our laws quite generally give all legal authority to the school board. Only in a few recently reorganized cities operating under special charter does the superintendent of schools have any definite powers and responsibilities. Usually the board has everything, and the superintendent only what the board sees fit to grant him. If the board likes him and trusts him they may grant him wide latitude; if they do not they may take from him practically every power that is vital to the successful administration of a system of schools. Such cases have been so frequent in recent years as to preclude the necessity of mentioning them here. School boards in their ignorance or because of pique frequently harass a good superintendent; put the whole city school system into a state of uneasiness and dissatisfaction; and eventually drive the superintendent from office because he has tried to prevent the schools

from being subordinated to local political or personal ends.

School boards of this type interfere with the proper administration of the schools in almost every conceivable way. The writer could give fifty illustrations of the improper exercise of power on the part of city school boards and school-board members which have come to his attention during the past five years, almost all of them being against the best interests of the schools and interfering with their proper administration and development, and more than one good superintendent could be mentioned who has been driven from office by such confusion of functions. Our educational advance is irregular and in spots, and progress is frequently followed by retrogression. The large power of control now exercised by city boards of education, and the lack of any clear definition in our laws as to the rights and functions of the professional expert boards of education are directed by law to employ, is to-day one of the serious hindrances to satisfactory and enduring educational progress. That this condition tends to turn many young men of capacity away from school administration as a career, and certainly drives some of our experienced men into other occupations, can not be doubted. The remedy for this condition lies in legislation that will guarantee to every superintendent of schools a right to be present and be heard when any matter concerning the organization or administration of the schools is under consideration; the clear right of initiative in the selection, promotion and retention of subordinates; and the initiative in many other matters which concern the management of the schools. This will guarantee to the superintendent of schools what may be considered as rights in the interests of the schools, and would in no way interfere with the work of any board of education interested in proper school ad-

ministration. While I have stated elsewhere that, in principle, it is perhaps wiser that the superintendent of schools should not be entitled to a vote, it may nevertheless become necessary, if our school boards are not otherwise controlled in their ignorant interference with the work of a good superintendent, to follow the practise of a number of our corporations and seat the superintendent *ex-officio* as a member of the board of directors, and with a right to a recorded vote on every important action taken.

A third obstacle to proper city educational progress is the short term—usually one year—for which our superintendents of schools are commonly elected. A trial period of one year may in some cases be desirable, but thereafter the period of election should be long enough—four or five year terms—to give the superintendent an opportunity to carry out a constructive educational policy. The present annual election is a splendid means of keeping superintendents in subjection to boards who want to manage affairs, and to eliminate easily all who can not be kept under perfect control. The short term, the uncertain tenure and the lack of power to do much in too many of our cities not only prevents capable men from rendering effective service to the communities which employ them, but also drives from the service men of ability and promise. The lack of any high professional standards, based on education and professional preparation, the want of a form of a professional state certificate for supervision, coupled with the short and uncertain tenure, also enables boards of education to drive good men from office and then fill their places by others of a much lower degree of professional competency.

If public education in the United States is to increase in importance as a great constructive undertaking of our people; if

after the Great War we are to be called upon to play a new part in world affairs calling for larger homogeneity and national purpose on the part of our people; and if we are soon to undertake new educational efforts along agricultural, industrial, technical and political lines, as now seems certain, it is of fundamental importance that we eliminate from the organization and administration of our schools these features which stand as serious obstacles to their development on a thoroughly professional basis. We must also so shape their administration as to offer good inducements to the best of our men and women to make careful preparation for public service as school administrators, and we must assure them entrance to the work on the basis of preparation and competency, a chance to perform useful and unobstructed service, and the possibility of desirable life careers in the work. That this is not the case today in our county and state educational service, or even in our city educational service to the extent that is desired, is largely due to the obstacles to educational progress, chiefly of a political and provincial type, which I have just enumerated.

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THE assumption that all the wild life growing upon the land belongs to all the people, and that any one who can do so is free to take it, is, of course, a direct inheritance from the day when all the game belonged to the king; when the king could do no wrong. We, the people, have succeeded the king. We have acquired his rights and privileges—his right to kill, his right to overrun the fields of the farmer, his right to get something for nothing.

We need now to recognize that the day of wanton exploitation is past, and that we have

¹ Extract from an address recently delivered before an audience of farmers at the New York State College of Agriculture.

entered upon an era of conservation during which we must live on the increase of nature's products that our own hands have secured for us; no longer something for nothing, but everything for care and forethought and the application of science to bettering the conditions of life.

The primary assumption should be that the region where farmers live is an agricultural community—not a howling wilderness or a hunting preserve.

Hunting there must be to satisfy the human craving for sport—sport of a kind that is normal to the growing up of every youth, and that is a legitimate part of a man's recreation. But hunting is, at best, a savage sport that is pursued with dangerous weapons; and it should be pursued in civilized society only in places set aside for the purpose. The farmer should possess his farm in peace. The part of the public that desires to hunt should have proper places provided, and these places should be publicly marked for hunting; and peaceful farms where the wild life is treasured should not have to be marked against it. As there are public waters stocked by the state in which any one may fish, so there should be public game and forest preserves where one may hunt.

The farmers want freedom from the nuisance of the hunters who are merely raiders and economic pirates, and should unite to secure it. Every man's farm should be his own, free from ravage by hunters, free from menace by guns. All its wild products should be in his own keeping, subject only to his neighbor's interests, rights and welfare. The farmer should be free to raise on his farm any kind of plant or animal without permit or license from any source. Such artificial barriers ought not to obstruct the path of forward-looking agricultural enterprises.

The conservation measures that will best secure these ends are those which will protect and preserve the wild life in suitable places and provide hunting for the future; for men will hunt, and many of the farmers themselves desire this sport. The measures already before us that will go farthest toward removing the hunter from the farmer's premises are these: