

American Education Week: What Is Teacher's Role?

Editor's Note — This is another article in a series evaluating our educational system during American Education Week. This one is written by Louis Corrigan, senior English instructor at KUHHS and advisor for the Future Teachers of America organization.

By LOUIS CORRIGAN
The teacher has always been one of the most important mem-

bers of society. In proof of this statement, we need only remind ourselves that the historical figures whom we recall most readily—Socrates, Aristotle, and Martin Luther—were teachers. The teacher enjoys a special eminence in our world for the very obvious reason that he is engaged in the most important task in life—that of instructing the mind and shaping character.

Reflection makes clear the vital significance of character moulding and instruction. Anthropologists state that there have been few if any fundamental changes in Homo sapiens in the past 100,000 years. Whatever differences we may note between prehistoric and modern man can be attributed to training. Thus, were all educative influences—teachers, books, periodicals, etc.—to disappear, modern man would

revert at once to the barbarous state of his forebears. An insect, the life of which is directed by instinct, has no need for training. The instinctive mechanism has reduced him to a robot. On the other hand, the human being, who exhibits little if any instinctive behavior, is completely dependent upon training. In his work of training the student, the teacher, of course, has

help from the parent. But where a parent may train three or four children, one elementary school teacher in a lifetime of teaching will teach at least 1,000 children, perhaps many more, depending on the size of his class. If the teacher has 25 pupils in his class, he will teach 1,000 children during his career. If the same pupil-teacher ratio is applied to the high school teacher, he would teach 5,000 students in his career—the population of a small city! A faculty a little larger than that

of Klamath Union High School would have a direct influence on a half million American citizens. Heavy as the teacher's responsibility has been in the past, it is even heavier today in the space age. There was a time in the United States when the requirements for a teacher's license were soundness of faith and knowledge of Latin, as determined by the local minister, without special inquiry into a teacher's other knowledge. Nowadays standards for certification

are much higher and will continue to rise, provided that the public insists upon competent personnel in its schools. In this era, to demand less than fully qualified teachers would seem most unwise. In return for what it expects from its teachers, the community has certain obligations. It should offer to teachers salaries that are commensurate with their preparation and experience. It should also provide adequate sick leave, freedom to teach facts about contro-

versial issues, a reasonable teaching load, time for planning and time for relaxation. But the ultimate reward for a teacher is the knowledge that he is engaged in one of the truly worthwhile activities in life. As Cicero has said, "What greater service can we render the state than that we should teach and train the youth?"

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