

THE HOME TEACHER IN CALIFORNIA

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THE home teacher has a very definite place in our school system in California. The need of a home teacher developed as our idea of the unity of the family for educational purposes developed.

In the earlier days of immigration to this country we assumed that our only care was the moral and mental development of the child in our schools. We little realized the danger of having an increasing fraction of our people composed of men and women living in colonies as essentially foreign as the countries from which they came, knowing only such English as was forced on them by their labor, of women having no knowledge of the language or of any other feature of the new life, timid and distrustful, bewildered by losing their old surroundings, and dulled by failure to understand the new.¹

But our earlier conception of our duty toward the child has undergone a change. Beginning by considering only the mind, we gradually have taken into consideration the recreation of the child, his health, his home life, and everything about him. Now in our best school systems we have the baby in the nursery while the mother works, the young child in the kindergarten, and the boy who has finished the grade school may be either in the high school or in a "continuation" school. There is the evening school and the civic center for the father. All have been reached but the mother. We perhaps believed her hopeless. Possibly we thought that she could only learn by

¹ Mrs. H. K. W. Bent, "A Manual for Home Teachers," p. 7.

asking of the children in the home. But this gave rise to a serious problem.

Children who have acquired our ways and customs as well as our speech believed themselves superior to their parents. They questioned the authority of their parents, thus breaking the solidarity of the home which indeed is very strong in the native land of their fathers. It has been said that the culture of any nation may be measured by its estimate of the family and that which tends to break down the respect for the parents, tends to root out all reverence.

Seeing the child of the foreign born losing all respect for the home, for law, and the right of others, leaders in educational thought became aroused. Something must be done for the alien woman who must be with her children at night and who, although ignorant, could vote in some states by virtue of her husband having become naturalized. Educators saw that since she could not come to the school, the school must go to her.

At first teachers visited the school neighborhood, taking up various problems in connection with the children. This could not progress to a very great extent but the idea aroused could be developed. This idea developed into the realization of the need of a woman being part of the school to visit the homes and give the foreign mother what she wanted. Thus

we have arrived at the mothers' special instructor, the home teacher. The home teacher thus becomes the direct Americanizing influence in the foreign born.

In California in 1915 the "Home Teacher Act" was passed. The law itself was draughted and proposed by the State Commission of Immigration and Housing. It was endorsed by the Women's Legislative Council. It received the governor's signature on April 10 and became a law on August 8, 1915.

California has by no means invented, as it were, this visiting teacher. Large eastern cities have long had such a one in a modified form. Her duties there have been more as a teacher to follow up problems of discipline, attendance, and sickness. California has, however, given the movement a statewide backing. In California the work is not so much with the child as with the mother of the child. The home teacher being employed by the people and not by a private philanthropic institution lifts her work from the level of one class bestowing kindness upon another to that level of communal possession. By the operation of this law the family of the alien is no longer divided against itself, but becomes a worthy unit in our democracy.

The home teacher then, in California has become a reality. Her work is highly specialized and therefore requires special qualifications. She must clearly and thoroughly understand the object of her work. She must be a woman of patience, of optimism, and of an ability which can turn to good account all the varying circumstances that she will meet. For, indeed, she must enter the foreign homes and try to modify them in her teaching of health, of sanitation, and of American customs and ideals. She must ever respect the rights and dignity of the alien woman in her home. Indeed, unless she

can be a friend and a source of inspiration to them, she should not enter the field.

According to law, she must have a kindergarten, an elementary, or a secondary certificate to teach in the schools of California. But in addition to this legal requirement she must be an experienced teacher possessing good health, for her work is most strenuous.

Another qualification of the home teacher is the ability to speak the language of the largest group of her district. This offers many times an open door into the family. However, there are very successful women in this work who do not speak any foreign language. In gaining her entrance to the home she must use a great deal of tact and ingenuity. She must also adapt all circumstances to the main purpose.

She must be a woman who is incapable of discouragement for her road is a hard and weary one indeed. Most of all she must have a sympathetic attitude toward the alien, which attitude does not take on the form of pity. She must know something of the countries and the conditions from which the alien came. She must know what this country has meant to him.

With these qualifications in mind, the next problem is how to secure the home teacher. There is no regular training of home teachers in the normal schools in California. Therefore each community had to develop its own system of training. Many cities began this training by establishing institutes and home teacher seminars. Most of the leading universities have been giving extension work in this field or have been offering summer courses.

The two most important features of the home teacher's work are her own qualifications and her method. By using a workable and successful method she best performs her function in connection with both the day and evening schools and with the

home and neighborhood classes. Her entrance to the home can best be made in the language of that home, for perhaps their very elemental knowledge of English will be far too meager for the intimate and personal contact needed. From the home the teacher recruits both her evening citizenship classes for men and her neighborhood afternoon classes for women. Her group work in neighborhood classes is, then, the first means of breaking up the isolation of the foreign home and the beginning of some social contact for the foreign woman.

In recruiting the afternoon group the teacher should find a legitimate excuse for visiting the home. This can well be done in connection with some phase of school work in the district. When once the friendly relation is established the alien woman should be invited to the class. Repeated visits to other homes will increase the group as well as will urging those who do come to bring a friend. When once the class is formed the home teacher should make every effort to have the meeting place as attractive as possible. Thus many suggestions will be conveyed to these women for improving their own homes. Every encouragement should be given for the imitation of pleasant and wholesome things. Everything should be done also for the recreation of these women whose lives are often dull and devoid of that satisfaction of the social instinct.

Although the work in the individual homes comes first yet there are many advantages of group teaching. Much time needed can be conserved and later devoted to their individual needs. Furthermore, there is that encouragement in numbers that is not secured in the home itself where there is likelihood of embarrassment. Then, too, there is more enthusiasm with concert work. The woman away from

home also has the advantage of seeing different and better things.

In these neighborhood classes the teaching of English is only one phase of the work of the home teacher. In her double activity of home visiting and group teaching she can be of service to the alien woman in many ways. In the group teaching of English such subjects as sewing, cooking, weaving, arts and crafts, sanitation, care of the baby, and health may be taught. It may be necessary in some cases to get the assistance of special teachers in these fields. Each locality has its special problems and each home teacher must rise to the situation found in her district.

In status the home teacher bears the same relation to the principal as do all supervisors of special work in his district. Therefore she should look to him as her immediate superior. Her work will then fall into two divisions, home visiting and group teaching. To work in close cooperation with the school she should begin her day by reporting at the school at nine o'clock. She can then confer with the principal and teachers concerning any special children whose homes need visiting for various reasons. Thus going with a definite reason as one of the school department she can secure a ready admittance into the home. The forenoon should be passed in making visits. These should not be hurried, for being thus initiated into the home, the home teacher should be ready to hear all the problems and difficulties, even though one visit should take all the morning. The teacher "like the family doctor and pastor should be the real and intimate possession of the home."

In her work of social reconstruction of the family—if it be necessary she should call to her aid the various ameliorative agencies of the community. In matters of juvenile difficulties which she is trying to

settle out of court she should give her undivided attention.

The groups for teaching English should be held in the afternoons. If possible this should be done in a "school cottage" which can be used for domestic science classes in the morning and which can be at the disposal of the teacher in the afternoon.

It would be unreasonable to expect a home teacher to do good work without adequate equipment. The first essential, then, is a school principal thoroughly in sympathy with the plan and ready to cooperate. Suitable rooms furnished for sewing and for cooking as well as for teaching English and citizenship should of course be included in the equipment. Some provision should also be made for the care of babies as well as children. Charts, pictures, and cards as well as books, leaflets, papers, materials, and pencils.

The work of the home teacher needs the cooperation of agencies from outside the school department as well as from within. There are agencies which have long been doing pioneer work in the field of home service, proving its value, as almost all work must be proved by private initiative. Such agencies are the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. C. A., the Council of Jewish Women, the D. A. R., the Mother's Congress and Parent-Teacher Associations, city nurses, school nurses, charities, probation officers, playgrounds, settlements, missions, priests,

clergymen, librarians, editors, counsels, and the Commission of Housing and Immigration.

Since the home-teacher work is merely in its infancy much remains to be done. It must fight for its place in the schools as did the kindergarten and even cooking. No definite plans can be set down. Each teacher, I repeat, must deal with the intrinsic and positive difficulties in her own way. But in spite of the difficulties of pioneer work in this field some tangible results can be expected. These will neither be swift nor spectacular but they will be in wholesome directions and will be results which can not be secured in any other way. Among these results is the restored balance of the family with its control again in the hands of the parents as it is in the native land of the alien. The work will bring a more enlightened response to the demands of society as well as establish better standards of sanitation and health in the alien neighborhoods. To many will come a better understanding of what "America" means and a broader horizon of life. To us native Americans, too, will eventually come a fund of knowledge concerning the foreign born and a "channel for what he and his civilization have to offer us."

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