

APPENDIX C

OPTIMISM, INSPIRATION AND CONSTRUCTIVE SUGGESTION

President's Address to Wisconsin State Teachers' Association

By Charles Coolidge Parlin of Boston

At Milwaukee, November 9, 1912

We, in the school work, should all be optimists, for we live in the midst of a marvelous growth, and where there is growth, there is life and hope. We have lived in the midst of the most remarkable educational revolution in the history of the world and have known it not. In twenty years the enrollment of the common schools has more than doubled; of normal schools, has trebled; of college, nearly quadrupled; and of public high schools has increased sixfold.

How marvelous the growth! How fraught with meaning for the future! The day of universal secondary education has already dawned, and will ere long light with dazzling brilliancy a world vastly wiser, and richer, and more beautiful than man has ever known.

To be an optimist in education is, indeed, easy, but this very growth which, to the observer with a wide vision, fills his heart with hope and optimism, tends only too often to stifle in the souls of the youth that inspiration which is the motive power of all education. For with the handling of vast numbers, organization has tended to replace that vital relation between teacher and pupil that in the last analysis is education. Do not misunderstand me, organization is necessary. Without it the instruction of vast numbers would be impossible, but organizations have multiplied, organizations within organizations, organizations for every conceivable phase of education and life until we need just one more

organization - an organization to prevent further organization. For while organization is useful, while it is necessary, yet organization alone cannot inspire souls; it can only create a vast grinding machine that turns out human bricks, useful but lifeless, usable by an overseer, but incapable of initiative. If you would have for your product not bricks but men, you must have for your educator not a machine, but a soul, a teacher filled with inspiration.

What is inspiration? It is that vibration of the soul that creates in its possessor, noble thoughts and high ideals and which, transmitted by contagion to another, fills him with an ambition to dare and to do. Pardon my humble attempt at original definition; inspiration is undefinable, unknowable; yet it is real. Let me describe it by what it accomplishes. Without it, a teacher may take a class of alert children and deaden their souls and send them out to plod through all a lifetime, if not, indeed, through all eternity, the treadmill of listless, hopeless mediocrity. With it, a teacher takes a dull and listless boy and awakes him to a keen thirst for knowledge and sends him forth to be a doer of deeds and a leader of men. The difference between these two teachers is not ten dollars per month, it is not one hundred dollars per month; it cannot be measured in dollars and cents, it can only be measured in the infinitude of God's eternity.

"I am not much on inspiration, give us constructive suggestion," says a schoolman. Ah, poor blind soul! A maker of bricks shall he be, but never can he inspire the souls of children.

"Optimism, inspiration and constructive suggestion." I am not a preacher; I am no longer a teacher, I am only a business man coldly studying industry, but fresh from my labors of coldly analyzing industry, let me

voice my humble opinion that the greatest of this educational trinity is "inspiration", for inspiration is the force that moves the child to move the world. Do you think me extreme? I submitted the paper to a keen, shrewd business man who has had an unusual opportunity to know men and motives that control the great business interests of the land and asked his criticism. I have just one suggestion to offer, he said, you have not made your paragraph on inspiration emphatic enough. If you could only make the teachers of this nation know as I know, how the power of inspiration and enthusiasm sways the business world, you would transform the school system of the country.

But this greatest of all qualities is not alone for the teacher. How much more should it be possessed by the principal, for to him comes the opportunity to lift an entire school. Of course your successful principal must be strong in organization, but organization is easy; for any responsibility is light which may be fully met by fair intelligence and patient toil; but the responsibility for touching the lives of others with a spark of inspiration, that is a weight that no thoughtful man will lightly assume or easily carry. To control a school is not difficult, but to stand before a great high school and see before you not five hundred mischievous boys and girls, but five hundred souls just unfolding into manhood and womanhood and to think that your words may be an inspiration to lift them to a noble and useful life or a dead weight to drag them down through all eternity, that is a sight to make the strongest soul shudder at his spiritual responsibility.

The rewards of a schoolmaster's life are not dollars and cents, far from it - the great reward of a schoolmaster's life is the pleasure that comes from seeing the stalwart men and women that, in the formative

period of their lives, have been roused by a spark of his own inspiration, to strive for better things. I confess that this pleasure is marred by the lives of other men who, leaving the schoolroom full of hope and ambition, have had the call of ambition drowned in the hum of machinery and now have a vision limited by a hope for two dollars a day? Shall this dwarfing of the soul be for eternity? I hope not. I hope that in some other land, ambition shall again light the eye and the soul shall again have the opportunity to attain that fuller development for which its Creator designed it. But for this world at least the destiny of men and women is moulded in the teens, and to you principals and teachers of high school students and professors of the early years of college comes a tremendous responsibility, but with this responsibility - a glorious opportunity.

But this greatest of all qualities is not alone for the teacher and principal; how much more should it be possessed by the superintendent, for he has an opportunity to uplift an entire school. The superintendent should have a rare combination of qualities, a keen, cool business head to finance the institution; a warm heart that sympathizes with child life; a vivid imagination that creates lofty ideas and inspires others to strive for them, and besides all that a dominant courage that stops at no obstacles, fails at no rebuffs, but pushes fearlessly on to the attainment of an ideal. The superintendent who would have a great educational factory must work out for every teacher what she shall do and how she shall do it, and must have a sufficient number of assistant supervisors to see that his requests are carried out to the letter. Such a superintendent will have a great educational machine, that whether he sleeps or whether he wakes, whether he is at home or far away, will grind out finished product; but that finished product will be only human bricks. If instead of a machine he

desires a school that will turn out men, stamped with individuality and lighted with enthusiasm, he must allow to every teacher sufficient latitude both as to subject matter and as to method, to enable her to display that personality and power of initiative which she should inspire in others.

"Fine theories," says a superintendent, "but impractical. In this age of efficiency organization, impossible."

Do you know that the greatest wholesale and retail establishment in the world is organized on a basis that leaves so much latitude to the heads of departments that they are almost independent merchants? Do you know that the greatest magazine publishing house in the world is organized on a basis of allowing a maximum of individuality to its various employees? Do you know that the necessary and essential quality of any eminently successful organization must be to allow to every employe that measure of individuality and power of initiative that will stimulate the active thought and the enthusiasm of the great mass of employes under the organization?

"But," again says your superintendent, "that is all right for the men who think, but the man at the machine has no power of initiative, he only watches the paper go through the press." That is the trouble with our school organization. We have followed too closely the analogy to industrial organization; we have thought that the teacher was like the man at the machine, but, as a father - I care very little who is the superintendent or the principal; what I want to know is - who is the teacher of my child? The man at the machine is but a part of the machine; if he is absent today, another man takes his place and the work is done just as perfectly. But not only is the teacher not a part of the machine, she is the whole soul and life of her schoolroom. Superintendent and principal exist only for the purpose of inspiring her to do her work.

Constructive suggestion is good; if I give a teacher a constructive suggestion today, tomorrow I will find her dutifully attempting to apply it - but it is not her idea. But if I have inspired that teacher to think out a constructive suggestion for herself, I will find her next day with her eyes aflame with enthusiasm - pouring out to her children a lesson which they will carry with them through all eternity. The chief function of a superintendent is not to organize his school, for organization is easy, nor is it to furnish constructive suggestions, though some constructive suggestions are good. It is to furnish inspiration that shall lead every teacher to strive for the unfolding of her own powers until at last in the fullness of her strength she gives to the service that greatest of all human gifts - a human soul.

But inspiration should not stop with our secondary schools, it should animate our higher institutions of learning. "In our State University we should have eminent scholarship." So I once wrote in a report, but the chairman made a blunder in reading my writing and the printed report read, "In our State University we should have animated scholarship." I thank the chairman for that blunder. "Animated scholarship" is what we need, scholarship that is alive, that touches not only the intellect but the souls of men, that arouses them not only to know things but to do things, a scholarship that shall light the way for the progress of humanity.

Especially in our state supervising officers, our inspectors, and most of all in our state superintendent do we need power of inspiration. Mr. Superintendent, you have a wonderful opportunity. You alone reach the ear of every one. Send to the patrons of our schools a message not of criticism but of encouragement that they may feel pleased with

their past efforts and be willing to make still greater sacrifices for education in the future. Supply every teacher in the state with constructive suggestions, but even more important, fill every teacher with hope and inspiration that will lead her in the fulness of her own soul's power to do her best, and then as the spokesman for the great state of Wisconsin, carry the Wisconsin message of constructive suggestion, of optimism and inspiration to the great educational meetings of the land.

Ladies and Gentlemen, life is serious; life is earnest, life is worth while. You are the teachers of life. Does your part seem humble? No teaching service is humble, for teaching is divine. The teacher of the cross-roads school with but a single lad may be training a man to shape the destinies of nations, while a superintendent with a great city system may but only be making a machine which will perish with him. A wonderful opportunity is yours - courageously assume your responsibility, and with optimism in your heart go boldly forth to do your part, however humble it may seem, to inspire the child to make the world of tomorrow, vastly richer, and nobler, and happier than is the world today.