THE SCHOOL MUST MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE PUBLIC

Written by the chairman of the Board of Education, Niagara Falls, Ontario, this article expresses the point of view of a man who wants action, not mere verbiage, to bridge the chasm between the school and the community. The author is Mr. Harold Bradley, Canadian pianist, who takes an active interest not only in administrative problems of the schools, but also in education itself.

MEMBERS of boards of education, from their position mid-way between professional educators and taxpayers, see aspects of education which are less obvious from a single vantage point either in the school or in the home. One of the first discoveries I made as a member of the school board of Niagara Falls was that various complaints received from dissatisfied parents had a common denominator: in nearly every case the teacher or principal in question was unknown to the parent. This discovery led to further investigation and reflection. I found that these parents with complaints had for the most part never been inside the school their children attended. I recalled with misgiving that I myself had not been inside any school of my native city from the time I had attended these schools as a student up to the time I re-entered them as a member of the board of education.

When I suggested that the parents consult the teacher or principal directly, I learned that there are a thousand and one reasons that parents refuse to do so. They don’t want Johnny to be laughed at by the other boys—and he certainly would be if they knew his mother had gone to school about him. Or perhaps father is never home during school hours, and “it needs a man to tell the old so-and-so where to get off at.” There are other standardized means of escaping the issue: “What’s the use of talking to anyone as unreasonable as that?”—and so on!

The average parent I have talked to looks upon an invitation to visit the school as if it were a subpoena. The school is a place to which he goes only as a last resort in time of trouble. The result is that a great many people (the majority, I believe) know next to nothing about the schools or the school system. Is it their fault? Not entirely, I think.

Let’s face the fact that the teacher needs the support of the home. Plato recognized its influence on education; let us not ignore it. And if we believe, with Huxley, that the great end of life is not knowledge but action, then let’s do something about it.
WANTED—A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

A cause of disruption between the home and the school is reliance on one imperfect means of communication—the pupil. In the majority of cases, the teacher, the school, and the whole educational system are interpreted to the parent by this very worst and most unreliable of all sources of information—the impressions of a child. Is there any teacher who has not, at some time or other, been maligned in this way? Then let us secure some other means of communication.

Need I point out to any professional educator the advantages of having the home co-operate with the school? I think not. But I do think that education generally has devoted its greatest efforts to making and polishing the wheels of pedagogy, which may function beautifully in the classroom, but which generally have no teeth in them to mesh with the thoughts of the public at large. If we want ideal conditions—better schools, better playgrounds, and teachers’ salaries in line with those of other professions—we must do more than merely think that we are worthy of them. We must get out and “sell” education to the public. The way to do that is to bring the public into our confidence and into our schools.

I maintain that every parent should know the teacher of his child and the principal of his school. If the parent and taxpayer had personally to engage a teacher for his child each year, he would insist on knowing whom he was paying. Then why should not the public school system give the parent the same consideration a private school would accord him? The school must go to the people, not sit back and wait for the people to come to it. After all, Mahomet met the problem in the same way, so that the solution should seem neither new nor original.

I have had the argument offered me that home and school associations have been able to draw only a small percentage of parents to the schools. This percentage, of course, varies from school to school, but there is some truth in the assertion. Although we all recognize the splendid work of the home and school organization, I believe there must be a more direct connection between teacher and parent, and that the responsibility rests squarely upon the school itself. Let the home and school association further strengthen the relationship between the teachers and its parent members, but let us not expect it to keep traffic moving back and forth across streams where there is no bridge.

We must get all the people, or at least all parents, inside the schools. If you want a starting point, why not invite parents at the time when they will be most conscious of the school and its problems—when little Mary or Johnny is about to leave the family nest for the first time and go out into a world of strangers?
ACTION IN NIAGARA FALLS

We have a very co-operative principals' group in our community. They, along with the public school inspector and the board administrator, meet every month. In June they experimented with the idea just mentioned. They held a pre-school registration to which the children who were to enter grade I in September were invited, along with their parents. I haven't all the figures available, but in one school where they estimated that twenty-nine pupils might enroll in the class, thirty-two children plus parents appeared. The results were much the same in the other schools. Most of the children stayed the whole afternoon—they liked it! And the parents had an opportunity of seeing what went on in grade I. They all seemed pleased to be able to meet and talk with the grade I teachers and the school principal.

These parents knew before school started the type of person to whom they were committing their child for its first venture into the unknown. And they have a much kindlier picture than they would have had with the traditional birch-rod school in mind. Moreover, the children did not spend the summer worrying about the unknown terrors of the jail to which they were to be sent in the fall.

This June registration was followed up with an Open House in September. I have the figures for this. I give them below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Families Represented</th>
<th>Enrolment, Grade I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barker</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenview</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kitchener</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memorial</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simcoe</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>175</strong></td>
<td><strong>231</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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You will see that the number of families represented is about 76 per cent of the total number of children enrolled. Considering conditions as they are today—with both parents working in many cases, and with other legitimate reasons for failure of parents to attend, you will agree that these figures are just cause for satisfaction.

These steps we have taken are only a beginning. We intend to follow them up in every way we can, and I for one think it necessary to go the whole distance. Take the case of the 24 per cent who for some reason did not attend: the school must go to them, for, like the people who aren't in church to hear the sermon about people who don't attend church, these are the ones who need attention. Whether it is lack of interest, or some unpleasant conditions at home, or the diffidence in some cases of New
Canadians who cannot speak English very well, these are things that the teacher should know about because they concern the child. It may be necessary for the teacher to make a personal call on every parent who has not visited the school. If we are going to bring the home and school together, we cannot make exceptions in the cases where they are furthest apart.

**ALL MUST CO-OPERATE**

This article offers only one or two ideas. There must be hundreds of other and better ideas for solving the problem presented. Let us have the benefit of your suggestions. Let us all work towards making education the most important function of the state in the estimation of its citizens, and let us educate the public to the view that the educational system is their own and their most important possession. Let us make the school the centre of the community and its most powerful influence for good. Let us have the teacher known to the community and respected as a member of the noblest of professions. And let us have teachers who are worthy of that respect.

But let us not just sit back with the smug knowledge that these things should be done. Let's do them!

**FIRST ANNUAL TEXTBOOK EXHIBIT**

The first annual exhibit of textbooks held at the Royal York Hotel on October 28th, 29th, and 30th, under the auspices of the Educational Publishers Association, has been proclaimed a great success by the participating publishing houses. It was attended by between one and two thousand teachers of Toronto and surrounding districts. The exhibit was opened on the afternoon of October 28th by the Premier and Minister of Education for Ontario, Col. George A. Drew. Colonel Drew told the large audience which assembled that afternoon that the publishers, in his opinion, had made one of the greatest contributions to the progress of education in their development of multi-colored techniques and more beautifully and scientifically illustrated books for pupils.

It is understood that this year's joint exhibit will be repeated in future years as a service to the teachers in the elementary schools of the Toronto area. Like the O.E.A. exhibits for out-of-town teachers, it gives the teacher an opportunity to examine all the available supplementary reading material at one time, to make notes, and to purchase copies of recent publications for schools.