

ALWAYS A TEACHER

By A. James Fuller and Keith Brown



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Keith Brown '51

With a spring in his step and a gleam in his eye, his enthusiasm pervades every room he enters. As he speaks, Keith Brown engages his listeners with the skill of a veteran teacher. For this 1951 graduate of Indiana Central College, teaching is more than a job; it is a way of life. In his lengthy career as teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent, Keith dedicated himself to educating and serving others. As he observes, no matter what his particular job title was, he “was always a teacher”.

Keith entered ICC uncertain about his choice of a major study field. He was interested in music, but he found that curriculum had little room for exploration of his other interests. After talking it over with his sister Lucille, a junior student at ICC, he decided to delay his decision on a major and to take required general education courses. Midway in his sophomore year Keith had lunch with his sister Margaret, a 1946 ICC graduate teaching in Indianapolis. By the end of the meal, Keith felt the call to prepare for a career in teaching.



Keith's parents, Willard (1920) and Dorothy Fields Brown, met at ICC during their college years. Keith and his wife, Effie Buchanan (1954), continued this tradition at ICC, as did their eldest son Derek (1979), and his wife, Debbie Scott (1981). Willard and Dorothy, after his seminary graduation, served as home missionaries in Montana with the United Brethren Church for four years before returning to their native state to serve pastorates in southern Indiana.

Keith's mother had also been a teacher before her study at ICC, and his father had taught in Kansas prior to entering seminary. His parents reared their children to believe that serving others was an essential part of life and rooted in one's faith. Both were very hard workers, with Dad growing much of their food and Mother making most of their clothes. Still, nearly everything they did seemed to be for others. They always had something to give and a willingness to help anyone with a need.

An essential ingredient of the preparation for adulthood and a career of service was ICC. Indeed, there was never a question of whether to attend college, nor was there a question of where. Following both parents and two sisters, Keith is now a part of 20 relatives who have graduated from the University of Indianapolis (or ICC or ICU) and together they span four generations. A granddaughter is now a sophomore.

His college experience extended the influence of Keith's family by reinforcing a sense of community and family atmosphere

made possible by its size. Campus traditions such as daily chapel services and the family-style meals in the dining hall helped build that sense of community while making it possible to participate in an enterprise greater than oneself. As he notes, Indiana Central students of his generation were "united in a spirit of service" and worked "for the common good." Active involvement in Alpha Phi Omega, the college service fraternity, provided specific ways of serving the needs of others. The group held infrequent formal meetings, but became involved in several campus and community projects. Led by Professor Roy V. Davis, a revered faculty advisor, the fraternity performed various odd jobs, including lots of landscaping. The work helped instill an awareness in Keith that there is always a need to be filled, and no gesture of service is too small.

It was during Keith's student years that the college formally adopted the motto, "Education for Service," under the leadership of President I. Lynd Esch. The message of the new slogan broadened and clarified the earlier motto, "Whatever Ought to Be Done Can Be Done." Keith believes the new motto "just put a name on a philosophy that was already there. It helped unify and focus the students and faculty."

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Indiana Central curriculum seemed to center on careers of service, such as preaching, teaching, and nursing. Study in other disciplines was certainly an option, but the prevalent student perspective was that one's

career choice was a matter of selecting how one would serve. Service was not an end in itself, but a way of life. Service to others would embody the benefits and the fruits of a Christian life while maintaining an active role in the community and being a positive contributor to society at large.

A career had to wait, however, because Keith had been granted deferments from military service. Since such deferments expired with graduation, Keith awaited the draft rather than seeking a teaching position. Finding Pete in his garden, Keith learned he would be teaching fifth grade at Edgewood Grade School. He later learned that Pete himself was a graduate of ICC (1929). It was his habit to visit the placement office frequently to keep tabs on students and when they would be available for teaching positions. Also, Keith learned later that ICC was a fertile ground for all Perry Township schools to find service-oriented teacher candidates. Many colleagues were found to have similar goals and a system of values clearly oriented toward service to others.

His classroom experience quickly affirmed his inner sense of calling. "I really enjoyed the kids," he recalls, as he relates the joy and challenge of seeing the light of learning come on in those young minds which were so varied in interest and ability. Always a teacher! He felt a kinship with his students and enjoyed knowing how they thought about things. He recalls a story from the dining room, where he always ate with his class. Several girls were giggling and



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obviously trying to decide who would be brave enough to ask the question. Finally, with some encouragement, one ventured forth with the question, “Mr. Brown, you *do* have a book that tells you how to trick kids, don’t you?” Always a teacher!

Meanwhile, now that there was some income, Keith and Effie married just before Christmas during Effie’s senior year at ICC. During their first summer together, Keith began work on his master’s degree and Effie worked at a nearby grocery.

During Keith’s fourth year of teaching, three new elementary schools were being built. Pete had asked about his interest in being a principal someday, and his response was “someday.” Still it was frightening to think of the responsibility and he felt unprepared to tackle leading a new school, so he promptly discarded the idea. Besides, “I really enjoyed the kids,” he recalls.

One day that spring, Pete, his principal and mentor, appeared at the cafeteria door where Keith was eating lunch with his young charges. When Keith responded to Pete’s motion to join him in the hall, he noted that John George, the trustee, was there. It was John (also an ICC grad) who asked if Keith wanted to be a principal. Keith replied, “Someday.” “Someday” became now. A principal for one of the older buildings would be needed that very fall, and the position was offered on the spot. Two days later, the offer was accepted, and preparations were made to “leave teaching

and become an administrator.” Would he no longer be able to “enjoy the kids?”

Early during those ten years as an elementary school principal it became a happy revelation that he was still a teacher. Now, however, he was a teacher of teachers rather than a teacher of kids. Always a teacher! Furthermore, he could still enjoy the kids.

In 1958 the trustee and his advisory board reorganized the school district and began operating as the Metropolitan School District of Perry Township, Marion County, with a superintendent as administrator. Soon after, opening a brand new elementary school gave Keith more challenges. Melded together was a new student body, a new faculty, and a new community of parents, all ready to be served by a young principal who was, after all, always learning and always a teacher!

It was during those years that many hours were spent counseling with teachers, students, and parents, and he realized that he was a teacher of them all. It was also during this time that he began to get feedback from former students. For example, one boy came to his office one late May afternoon, handed him an envelope, asked if Keith remembered him and what he had said when the boy was in grade five. Keith said, “I remember you, Ralph, but I have no idea what I may have said to you.” “Well,” Ralph said, “you told me that if I didn’t shape up I would never get out of high school.” In the envelope was an invitation to Ralph’s graduation ceremony. Always a teacher!

Six years later, after the sudden resignation of a long-time principal on the last day of the school year, Keith was called upon to accept the position of junior high principal. It was a difficult time because of the heavy class load already scheduled for the summer in order to complete the requirements for a life license as school superintendent. It was a new experience, but one where he could still serve traditional groups of personnel while learning, and he would always be a teacher!

Keith had begun to sense that the successor superintendent wanted him in a district office responsibility. Hesitant to leave the building level “where the action was,” and coveting the role of the teacher, it became a difficult decision. The assignment, nevertheless, was accepted and it became part of greater responsibilities to meet with principals regularly, insure that program quality was maintained, insure that laws, rules, and regulations were followed, and insure that standards were maintained for students, teachers, and the community of parents. It finally dawned on him. He was now a teacher of principals, and the ripples reached out in ever-widening circles. Plus, he began to derive great satisfaction from these challenges and the successes of goals reached by others—only now they were adults, most of the time. Always a teacher!

During those years, Keith directed the development of one of the earliest middle school programs in the Midwest. A committee of leaders in the district put together a middle school philosophy, and a building



was designed in which that educational philosophy could be implemented. For some needs, newly designed furniture was required for use in a building that needed to be inexpensive while also unique in design. Personnel were selected and assigned to implement new strategies in new surroundings while working with colleagues that were unfamiliar with each other.

Outside the district, Keith was very active on the board of directors for the Midwest Middle School Association during its infancy, when it made the decision to broaden its scope to a national level and become the National Middle School Association. Continuing on the board, he became the second president of NMSA in 1974-75.

Shortly afterward, he accepted overall responsibility for supportive services, including the transportation and food service programs for Perry Township, which had now grown to become the twelfth largest school district in Indiana. Many changes were instituted because of growth and new regulations. When additional buildings are needed, attendance boundaries usually need to be changed. This causes changes in the lives of students, teachers, and parents. Keith was responsible for the demographic studies and drawing the final attendance areas necessary for a balanced enrollment in the buildings. Eventually, he delegated these responsibilities to directors he was permitted to employ. Always a teacher!

About this time, the district was a participant in the court-ordered desegregation plan for Marion County. Indianapolis Public Schools had been found guilty of operating purposely segregated schools. The federal judge believed the only solution was a one-way busing plan sending thousands of IPS students to six suburban districts for their education. It was the only known desegregation busing plan which did not involve two-way busing. Keith was called upon to serve as the district liaison to all Marion County school districts, law enforcement officials and civil agencies involved in planning for the implementation of the plan. Much information had to be shared between all groups involved. Again, always a teacher!

By visiting IPS schools and speaking to PTA groups, Keith and others were able to demonstrate an empathy with parents who would be required to put their children on a bus each morning to attend a distant school as far away as 15 miles. Keith emphasized to all groups that Perry Township had not practiced segregation and that the turmoil over the plan for school integration was more a matter of perceived fear rather than the result of actual problems. His work on the issue helped to ease the tension as he did his part to insure that busing became a more peaceful means of desegregation than it was in many other cities. A marked migration in the 1990s of black families to Perry Township confirmed this position. Always a teacher!

Other cogent issues of the day included morality and religion. Perry Township, like many other public school districts enjoyed a close relationship with community churches. This cooperation resulted in a program for continuing locally a weekly religious education program that had been county-wide for many years. It allowed grade 4 and 5 students to choose, with parental permission, to leave the school building for one hour each week to attend religious education classes taught at local churches. Keith defended the program which carefully followed the letter of the law in promoting

itself to students and parents. As morality and religion became more sensitive moral issues, a greater number of educators backed away from such collaborative programs, refusing to support anything in public schools

that could be viewed as religious instruction. What began as the 1964 Supreme Court ruling that a school could not mandate public prayer transformed into a platform for arguing that there could be no prayer of any kind in any public school. Brown opposed what he viewed as the decline of morality and religion in public schools, working tirelessly to implement policies that were fair but still permitted religious practice. He bluntly argues that the decline of morality among public school students is often the fault of parents. It is primarily their responsibility to teach their children morals.

Finally in 1980 some administrative assignments were returned to a grade level structure and Keith returned to elementary education, his long-preferred administrative role. He held this position until 1992 when he retired after 39 years of service in education. In 1991, he had been surprised by being named a "Sagamore of the Wabash" by Governor Evan Bayh. Education for service, as a lifestyle, continues in retirement for Keith and Effie. They remain active at their alma mater, their church, and the retirement community where they now live. Effie, for example, donates hundreds of hours per year to the Greenwood Public Library. Keith's service to education continues through his regular columns in *The Spotlight Newspaper* as Education Correspondent. Always a teacher!

The Browns continue to view service as the "bedrock" of a fruitful life and successful career. "We're here to be of benefit to one another, to be of service," he affirmed. In his view, "The motto 'Education for Service' implies that you must do the best you can to be prepared to serve your fellow man." The choice of one's field of study and career path is part of such preparation, but service is an ethic that enters into every part of life because it emerges from an inner commitment to be helpful.

In the 1970s Keith delivered an address to the Perry Meridian High School Honor Society entitled, "What is the Question?". He proposed that the essential question of life is "How can I serve others?" He advises today's students to remember that "learning is a life-long process" and to "learn how to give."

PHOTOGRAPHS

- A Keith Brown (1973) sitting behind the desk in his office, Assistant Superintendent for Middle School Education at the administration building on Epler Avenue in Perry Township. personal photograph used with permission of Keith Brown.
- B Brown family (1940), graduates from Indiana Central College (left to right) Margaret '46, Lucy '49, (father) Willard '20, Keith '51, and (mother) Dorothy Fields Brown. Personal photograph of Keith Brown, used with his permission.
- C Keith Brown, graduation photograph (1951) Indiana Central College; personal photograph used with permission of Keith Brown.
- D Photograph of Alpha Phi Omega Service fraternity membership (1949-50) from the 1950 edition of *The Oracle* yearbook. Keith Brown is third from the right on the first row. Photograph used with permission of the Frederick D. Hill Archives at the University of Indianapolis.
- E Professional photograph of Keith Brown, Assistant Superintendent for elementary education in Perry Township (1986). Personal photograph of Keith Brown, used with his permission.
- F Keith and Effie Brown at their 50th wedding anniversary, personal photograph used with permission of Keith Brown.