

He inspires learning

Dr. Ralph K. Watkins hailed
as 'one of America's finest
classroom teachers'.

The man who has taught more than 25 different courses in the University, worked with 2,500 student teachers over a ten year period, been adviser to nearly 500 students who completed their master's degrees and 50 who completed their doctor's degrees, knows how to inspire learning. He is Dr. Ralph K. Watkins, professor of education.

In view of his background it came as no surprise when he recently received the Science Education Recognition Award of the magazine *Science Education*. This is the official journal of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching, of which Dr. Watkins is a charter member and a past president. In announcing the award to Dr. Watkins in the March issue of *Science Education*, the editor, Dr. Clarence M. Pruitt of the University of Tampa, Florida, describes the recipient as "a noted investigator in methods of teaching science, a distinguished author, and one of America's finest classroom teachers." The editor credits an early background of teaching in the rural schools, the grade schools, and in high school with providing the foundational training and experience "for the excellent student teaching supervision and teaching that have characterized the professional teaching, writing and leadership of Professor Watkins at the college level. His influence has touched directly the lives of many thousands of youngsters using his science textbooks in the junior high school."

Reflecting on some of the changes in the past fifty years, Dr. Watkins finds that the status of today's teacher has been greatly boosted, but that he must make about twice as much preparation for his job as a teacher fifty years ago. Although salaries have been increased, they are still not comparable to those in other skilled occupations; therefore, there will not be enough adequately prepared teachers in the future.

Asked about the closer acquaintance between faculty and students, Dr. Watkins said this is mutually most productive of widening horizons, but difficult in large classes. "Foreign students especially need more contact with the faculty to aid their orientation in a new culture," Dr. Watkins said. "Often a teacher need not even go out of his way unduly in putting a student at ease. A shy and forlorn foreign student sat down on the last row in my class room. I encouraged her to sit closer to the front in order to understand me better. Several years later she reminded me of this minor attention with real appreciation."

On the matter of specialization, Dr. Watkins points out that the College of Education stresses a wide area



Photo by Maggie Morgan

Recipient of the Science Education Recognition Award, Dr. Ralph K. Watkins has been on the teaching staff at the University since 1915.

of courses toward skilled teaching as well as culturally informed teachers. Even physical education majors are required to take courses in the arts. "An educated person is one who knows where to go for information and knowledge, and reading widely is the best continuing education," Dr. Watkins believes.

Dr. Watkins, who was born in Clarence, Mo., is an alumnus of the University of Missouri, from which he received his B.S. degree in 1916, his A.M. in 1918, and his Ph.D. in 1923. He also took graduate work at the University of Chicago, and post-doctoral graduate study at Teachers College, Columbia University. He has been on the University teaching staff since 1915, when he became a teacher in the University Elementary School. He has been a full professor of education since 1931. His written work includes the authorship or co-authorship of several textbooks. The most recent textbook of which he is author is "The Techniques of Secondary School Teaching," published in 1958. Currently he is gathering material for a book on college teaching.

Dr. Watkins married Clara Lois Lhamon of Springfield in 1919. They have no sons, but their two daughters made up this deficiency by presenting them with nine grandsons out of ten grandchildren.

Reading is one of Dr. Watkins' favorite pastimes. He gets his exercise making looms for his wife's weaving hobby and in gardening on the family farm west of town.

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