

TEACHING TEACHERS TO TEACH

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WE ALL are trying to learn more about teaching. The problem of training teachers is so enormous because the art of effective teaching is itself so infinitely complex. Cooperation of both pre-service and in-service supervisors is essential in meeting this problem.

Colleges can help select teachers-to-be and can give them basic knowledges, skills, and attitudes, both culturally and professionally. But students too often emerge inadequate to their teaching responsibilities. When they are still undergraduates, "remote" future needs are an insufficient motivation for thorough learning. Moreover, good teaching requires maturity. It is very difficult for an adolescent to rise above his own pressing problems of adolescence and to focus upon the problems and personalities of children, and most of our pre-service teachers are little more than adolescents. Furthermore, students entering their first teaching positions may be overly susceptible to reactionary teachers who suggest that theories good in college do not work in practice. All of these factors point to the need for a supervisory program which preserves the best of previous learnings while keeping pace with new trends.

A good supervisor must be a good teacher, for it is his responsibility to help teachers discover more effective ways of doing their jobs. C. W. Hunnicutt of Syracuse University tells us that "the greatest need of teachers is a better understanding of children as individuals." He discusses a number of areas of information about children which teachers and supervisors need to explore in order to gain a better understanding and then takes us on to the logical "next step"—that of actually using this information to broaden one's understanding.

What factors enter into effective teaching? Obviously, teachers must have knowledge of content, of sources for materials, and of the many other aspects of teaching. But experience indicates that *the greatest need of teachers is a better understanding of children as individuals*. Of course, it is much easier to teach without knowing the children individually—merely to present content to the group as a whole. But Americans still have the ideal of a teacher on one end of a log and a student on the other.

Shortcuts to Getting Acquainted

In earlier societies it was possible for all members of a village really to know each other with all their strengths and weaknesses. A teacher not only knew each child thoroughly but knew all about his family. Today, a teacher who is with a group long enough may become equally familiar with the children. Usually, however, there is not time. Children are with a teacher for only a few short months and then move on to someone else. Consequently she, like the rest of us, resorts to stereotypes. This little girl has an "inferiority complex." That boy is a "rejected child." Another is a "bully."

Since they don't have time to learn by ordinary observation alone, teachers need some shortcuts to learning. Fortunately, research is providing us with an increasing array of tools to probe into the inner workings of human behavior. With these, a teacher can get acquainted more quickly. But such tools, like airplanes and other scientific instruments, can be used to destroy, as well as to create happiness. The writer once entered a classroom and saw

a chart on the wall beside the door. On it were each child's age, height, weight—and I.Q. The latter ranged from about 75 to 90. A little later the teacher approached and in a stage whisper said, "Now you see why I can't be expected to teach them much." Obviously, that tool was being used to destroy. Teachers must know the limitations as well as the strengths of testing instruments. They should know something of probable errors and, moreover, should recognize and capitalize upon the ability of children to improve.

A Child and His Pals

Several areas of information about children are important. The relations between a child and those around him are of deep concern to him and should be to us. They profoundly affect his happiness, his behavior, and his learning within a group. Sociometry is providing us with insight into some of these relations.

For example, to discover the relative isolation or popularity of children, the teacher asks each child to write down the names of the children in the class with whom he would most like and with whom he would least like to play, or go to the show, or sit beside. The number of children by whom a child is named provides an index to his relative position within the class. The writer¹ has obtained co-efficients of reliability above .90 with this device.

Another useful instrument is the "guess who" technique. It has many variations and possibilities. For example, the teacher will describe a fictitious incident—an incident that illustrates some trait of character and personality. The children are asked to write down the name of the person or persons within the group who they think might have done it. It may be

an unselfish act or one revealing leadership or originality. The important revelation is not whether a child so selected really has that type of personality. The important point is that other children feel that way about him. Children are so greatly influenced by their environment that they tend to become what others think them to be. You have all seen the little red-head or the child with the pugnacious jaw who may innately have had a very mild disposition but who was practically forced to become war-like.

Children's social relations are not fixed and immutable but are always changing. All of the kinds of information mentioned should form a part of the child's permanent record, thereby shortening the time a new teacher requires to become acquainted. But each teacher has the obligation to continue observing and studying each child, revising and supplementing the information.

A Youngster's Opinion of Himself

A second important area of information is the opinion a child has about himself and about his relations to others. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Is he self-confident, or self-doubtful? Does he feel secure or insecure? Is he struggling with problems so great that they are disruptive? There are a number of effective instruments on the market that yield insight into these and other attitudes. For example, the California Test of Personality has been found very useful. In this a child answers "Yes" or "No" to such questions as "Do you think that the boys and girls like you as well as they should?" "Do you think that the children would be happier if the teacher were not so strict?" "Is it easy for you to recite or talk in class?" The answers reveal *not* the situations that actually exist, but what the child *thinks* about the situation. Through such ques-

¹ Unpublished dissertation, Stanford University.

tions one may obtain some clue to a child's feelings in twelve areas within the two general fields of self-adjustment and social adjustment.

Closely allied to these attitudes is the youngster's pattern of interests and purposes. Conversation and discussion among the children, reading choices, hobbies, as well as interest questionnaires or check lists, all of these can be used to explore this important portion of each child. Since interests and purposes are such an important basis of motivation in modern teaching, most teachers have long been alert to their value.

Out of School and Other Years

A third source of understanding lies in knowledge of the life of children outside of school. Home conditions, sibling relations, and parental attitudes all play a part in the way a child will respond in school. Must he share a bed so that when one moves the muscles of the other involuntarily become tense, or is he able to obtain adequate rest and relaxation? Does he have any opportunity for privacy or must he be perpetually reacting to others? Does he have reading materials and an environment encouraging to learning or is his a sterile environment educationally? Does he know that no matter what he does, his parents will continue to love him, or is there a nagging fear of rejection? How many older people are there in the house for him to be bossed by? Is he constantly compared to that smart young sister who reads so well? Does he have decent play facilities in the neighborhood? One could go on and on. This paper will not discuss the dangers and limitations of home visitation, but will only call attention to the value of understanding this part of children's lives.

A fourth area of information important to teachers lies in the past history of a

child's development. Are there any physical handicaps? Did illness or moving cause him to miss any important school experiences? Was he taught a particular skill in a pattern different from other members of the class? For example, did he learn a subtraction process different from the one used in the current class and is he becoming confused? Careful school records can be very helpful in understanding children's backgrounds.

Skills and Knowledges

Finally, there is the diagnostic analysis of each child's academic skills and knowledges, together with his special ways of learning. This academic phase of the school program has received enough attention from test-makers that there are many good diagnostic tests available. His best ways of learning are not so readily discovered objectively. Much depends upon the teacher. The skillful teacher is continuously seeking added information. Again it should be stressed that careful observation recorded objectively through anecdotes is extremely important as a source of insight. Needless to say, as any new evidence helps in understanding a child, it should become a part of his permanent record for use by subsequent teachers.

A major part of teaching teachers to teach, then, is teaching them how to obtain a full and growing understanding of each developing child as expeditiously as possible. An even greater part, however, lies in teaching them how to use such understanding when they have it.

To Praise or to Blame?

Nineteen centuries ago Quintilian observed that children differed greatly in their responses. It is only slightly paraphrasing him when we note that some children profit most from a pat on the

back and others from a little harder pat somewhat lower down. There is not a great deal known objectively about the effects of various kinds of motivation on different kinds of children.

Recently, in a simple little experiment² five classrooms of fifth-graders were given one of the better measures of extroversion and introversion and each room was arbitrarily divided into those above and those below the median. They were then given a simple repetitive task and tried to improve their scores. Some were arbitrarily subjected to praise and others to blame before each subsequent trial.

The interesting and not unexpected results were very striking. Introverted children subjected to repeated praise improved markedly more than introverted children subjected to blame. Conversely, extroverted children given repeated praise improved much less than extroverted children given blame. Extroverted children seemed to need to be challenged, while introverted seemed to require security. Needless to say, the group that had neither praise nor blame, no suggestion about how well they had done, improved least of all.

Helping a Child Set His Goal

A second interesting area of individual differences deals with aspiration levels. What kind of a goal does a child hold up for himself? Some children are delighted or at least satisfied with mediocre results. Others are upset by any achievement less than perfect. What kinds of aspirations result in the greatest progress? Not a great deal is known for sure, but present evidence³ confirms common-sense observa-

tion. People who set their sights too low, who "have no ambition" as it were, make little progress. On the other hand, where goals are set unrealistically high, far beyond reach, discouragement and slow progress result. A part of a teacher's responsibilities appears to be to help each child keep his goals advancing just within the limits of his growing capabilities so that by strenuous effort he can repeatedly achieve success.

The use of individual interests and purposes in helping children learn has been so greatly stressed in the modern program that it is not necessary to elaborate on teachers' use of such information. Nor is it necessary to stress the obvious need to break away from the plan where all are expected to cover the same route at the same pace—the "convoy system." Individualization in promotional practices and in reporting to parents as well as in curriculum content is becoming more feasible with the increasing understanding of how to evaluate progress.

Being One of the Group

More important than any of these practices, though, is the skill teachers need in helping children develop within some of the other and less tangible areas; in their social relations, for example. Throughout the public schools children can be taught to work effectively with each other. The healthy give-and-take of a dynamic school-room builds life-long habits. Thus one of the most important trainings for vocational and civic success and personal satisfaction which schools can give is skill in social relations.

Earlier there were suggested some ways in which information about children's social relations can be obtained. Obviously, if such information becomes mere grist for teachers-meeting gossip or even for helplessness it would be better left unknown.

² Thompson, George, and Hunnicutt, C. W.: "The Effect of Repeated Praise or Blame on the Work Achievement of 'Introverts' and 'Extroverts,'" *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. XXXV, No. 5, pp. 257-266, May 1944.

³ Studies reported, for example, by P. S. Sears and by E. R. Hilgard.

On the other hand, there often are ways teachers can help when they really understand. Children, like other little animals, tend to resent the deviate. Perhaps a different kind of dress or a new hair-do or some other modifications of appearance will mollify the hostility felt toward some little left-out girl. Relatively simple measures sometimes help.

Poise and status within the group are intimately related. The presence or lack of one contributes to the presence or lack of the other. It seems like a hopelessly vicious circle. However, when we further consider that poise or its lack is also intimately dependent upon knowledge and skill in any given situation, hope appears. By helping each child learn the behavior appropriate to such various situations as dancing or playing ball or jumping rope or making committee reports, we offer him a means to achieve group recognition and status.

In the seventh grade a new little boy entered the class. He was very small and frail and rather effeminate. He couldn't do much in baseball or basketball and didn't amount to much in the group. But when marble season came around and he won all the marbles, his stock skyrocketed. Somehow, he had acquired a skill that offered group prestige.

Understanding Unspoken Words

A number of books⁴ and studies not primarily directed to teachers or to classrooms as such offer very useful approaches to helping children meet their difficult problems. The dangers of over-simplification and action based on only partial understanding are very real. However, the implications for teaching are so important that it is worth the risk to touch upon just one insight and to hope that readers

will study the whole approach more fully.

This one point is the importance of a non-directive technique in helping children meet their problems. A child who has a gnawing fear or difficulty that he doesn't quite dare face directly gives clues which an understanding teacher can recognize. Her function then is undramatically and without emotion, with neither condemnation nor praise, to help him recognize this problem and bring it out into the open where he can face it. But she must not attempt to solve it and get him to accept her solution. Rather she must help him to work the thing out for himself. The art lies to a great degree in recognizing and reacting to the feeling behind spoken or unspoken questions.

A simple example of this recognition of feeling may occur when a little 3-year-old girl is standing at your knee aching for attention. Her baby brother crawls in between and would normally steal all notice. As you pick her up you casually say, "Baby brothers are a nuisance sometimes," and with a heartfelt, "Yees," she snuggles against you.

Or consider the harassed mother of a little boy who repeatedly asks, "Mommy, do you love me?" despite her repeated reassurances. Finally, she calmly says, "Sometimes it does seem as if Mommy doesn't love you," and he is satisfied. His fears have been recognized and found to be not unbearable. One step forward has been made.

Interpreting Through Actions

In recent years much publicity has been given to the various projective techniques whereby a child reveals his fears or problems in the things he draws or paints, or through his play, or through the things he sees in the Rorschach file of pictures. Such techniques adapted to the classroom may also be useful in relieving tensions.

⁴ Especially, Rogers, Carl R.: *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Houghton-Mifflin, 1942, 450 pp.

Jay⁵ was a little colored boy with a bad reputation and a very unfavorable attitude toward school. He had a record of truancy even though he was just 7 years old. He was very aggressive and seemed to be able to express himself only with his fists. In this class he deliberately was not antagonized or forced to do those things for which he had neither the ability nor the desire to learn. He was slow of speech, confining most of his verbalism to a guttural yes or no. However, on the way to and from school and on the playground this poverty of language was enriched by some impressive "cuss words."

One day Jay was "tooken to the office" by the patrol boys for disregarding their traffic signals and then "cussin them off the street." As a result, Jay was paddled by the principal. During work period that same day Jay, who had his choice of working with wood, paint, crayons, games, or clay, selected clay for his medium of expression. He modeled a man, put on all the details of his clothing: buttons, a handkerchief in the pocket, a hat on his head that came off.

The teacher in an experimental mood asked, "Who is that?" "Dunno," said Jay. "Maybe it is the principal," said the teacher. "He has a handkerchief in his pocket like that." Jay glared at the clay man. He glanced up at the teacher. "Yes,"

he said. Then, very deliberately, he began to twist the head off and when it came off in his hand he looked up and smiled. "You sometimes feel like twisting his head off, don't you?" said the teacher. "Sometimes, you get so mad at him." Jay twisted off one of the arms. Then he twisted off the other. Then he laid it face down on the table and beat it with his fist. One of the other boys sitting at the same table remarked, "Jay is mad at Mr. Green because he licked him this noon. He wants to tear him to pieces." "Then you must feel lots better now," said the teacher. Jay grinned and began to rebuild Mr. Green.

That evening on the way out of the building Jay spoke to the principal, a thing he had never done before. The principal informed the teacher and said, "You see. I whale the daylights out of them and they like it so well they start speaking to me."

This paper has discussed a few of the problems in the infinitely complex task of effective teaching and has indicated a few of the steps that are being taken toward their solution. Only by study and the continued cooperation of all groups concerned, both pre-training and in-service training personnel, can we really develop poised teachers who don't take out their own frustrations on children, but who are able to guide them to fullest development. Only thus will we help teachers rise to the challenge of teaching; only thus will we really "teach teachers to teach."

⁵ Axline, Virginia Mae: "Morale on the School Front," *Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. XXXVII, March, 1944, pp. 521-533.

Films Interpreting Children and Youth

If audio-visual aids help children to learn, how about trying them on ourselves? "Why not?" said the Committee on Interpreting Children and Youth—and set to work compiling a list of films, film strips, and records which may help adults understand young people. Members of the committee are DSCD, ACE, and Supervisors of Student Teaching. The information gathered by the committee should be helpful for pre-service and in-service education of teachers, for PTA's, clubs, and any group interested in understanding children. This mimeographed pamphlet is now ready for distribution and may be ordered for 15 cents from the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.

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