

what an individual's potential is. In this state of affairs we stand to gain in our purpose to help all children go as far as they can educationally by keeping growth channels open. The ideas discussed here are presented with this goal in mind.

Teaching is a complex process. There is much more to it than carrying through the lesson plans. The teacher's role is much more significant than we often realize. An attempt has been made to show the nature and importance of one fundamental process attending the teach-

ing-learning relationship—the process of building a self picture. This self picture is related not only to the successful mastery of school subjects but also to the development in children of coping powers which equip them to deal effectively with problems that lie ahead. In the interest of supporting what is already being done in this area and of adding to it, it is suggested that a conscious and continuing goal of education be that of fostering in children an enabling concept of self.

ALBERTA MUNKRES

Relating School and Community:

An Exhibit

Three piquant sketches suggest the possible benefits to boys and girls of improved relationships between school and community.

I HAVE set myself the task of drawing, in words, three thumbnail sketches, each representing a little world in itself, in which children, parents and teachers are the chief participants.

These sketches are not synthetic, but genuine in the sense of portraying situations which exist in time and place, and persons who, heir to all the problems and rewards which attend work with human beings, have, through cooperative efforts, made a difference to their schools and their communities.

Each of these situations is unique in the sense of being different from any other imaginable situation, yet holds enough in common with all other situations involving school and community relationships as to prove suggestive of possible goals, procedures and results.

The value of the sketches depends less upon artistic ability in portrayal and more upon their fidelity in capturing reported experiences in words so that all who look may read and understand, even pause to ponder.

Sketch Number One

Mrs. Winona Graham was parents' choice for teacher in a private, cooperative kindergarten before coming into her present position in a public-school kindergarten in the same community.¹ As a result, she has a ten-year background of understanding and friendship to draw upon. This valuable asset, added to a warm and permissive personality, the experiences of motherhood, and wide study in the field of child development, enables her to undertake successfully what a beginning teacher would attempt only with the greatest of caution. However, what she has done can be done by others to the extent of their present abilities. Furthermore, abilities can grow with discriminating practice.

Feeling secure in herself, her status with parents, and her leadership of children, this teacher is able to invite parents, when they come to visit, to participate in the process of teaching and learning in contrast to sitting on the side lines watching procedures. For example, Mrs. A reads to the children the story the teacher had intended to share; Mrs. B sits with a small group doing clay work; Mrs. C does finger painting; Mrs. D associates with the boys and girls in play period.

As a result of this procedure, parents learn to take on the teacher's point of view and to think in terms of all children in the group. Less and less often are heard such expressions as: "But *my* little girl . . ." "*My* child needs . . ." More and more frequently come statements and queries such as: "This group is beginning to . . ." "Why does Mary always respond with . . .?" "How do you handle . . .?" In turn, the teacher not only comes to understand the parent better by seeing him or her in action, but gains added insight into a particular parent's

¹ Englewood, Colorado.

boy or girl and the techniques he has learned to use in adjusting to adults.

Conferences with parents are scheduled, and free time granted the teacher for the interviews. These conferences are built around the friendly sharing of experiences, thinking about what the kindergarten is trying to do and how, and giving consideration to an individual child's abilities, needs and potentialities, approached often by an examination of samples of the child's work, dated and filed, and memos made periodically by the teacher.

This teacher believes that nothing approximates in importance the child and his growing adjustment to the situation. Hence, the major portion of time is spent in consideration of such questions as: What does this child think of himself? What does he think of the new adult (the teacher) who is in charge of this different world? What does he think of his class, new and larger than the neighborhood group of which he has been a part? How secure and happy is he in making all the new adjustments required of him?

Thus does Mrs. Graham work for community of thought about children and what the school is attempting to do for them. Thus do parents learn to think not alone about their own children but about all children, and to enter, through active participation, into the teaching-learning process. Thus do children reap the reward of a united world in which they learn increasingly to take their places.

Sketch Number Two

It started in Student Teaching. Edward White had the good fortune to work with a supervising teacher² who believes that knowing the parents of his pupils and keeping them informed as to

² Wilbur Thompson, Denver Public Schools.

what is happening in school are important and who, furthermore, puts his belief into practice.

See, now, this beginning teacher, in spite of the multitude of learnings which attend first days, starting at once his contacts with parents. His first calls were merely friendly chats prompted by a desire to see pupils and parents in their home settings and the hope of gaining understandings which would aid him in developing unity in a group of 35 sixth grade pupils who had become somewhat disorganized under the consecutive leadership of three teachers from September to January of that year—the proverbial “ounce of prevention” technique!

From then to now, three-and-a-half years later, stretches a long road—from one brief call to several a year, the number determined by need; from surprise if not concern of parents, trepidation of teacher, wonderment of children, to anticipation on the part of all three participants; from anxious queries such as, “What’s he done?” to “When will we be seeing you again, Mr. White?”

The first call remains mostly a friendly, “How do you do?” but is more than a warming-up period. It represents the beginning of understanding and friendships with persons of varying racial groups—Oriental, Negro, Caucasian—cherished especially by this teacher because of the expanding experience it has proved to be.

A closer look at the later calls shows the teacher armed with results of test scores, samples of work done, memoranda of experiences which might possibly be significant. Conversation among the teacher, parents and child goes forward in the interest of understanding reasonable expectations for progress, means of making evaluated judgment, the present as related to the immediate future, namely Junior High, and like issues.

Not content with personal visitation, Mr. White has fostered inter-visitation of families. Two or three times a year he and his class have some kind of community experience together—this in spite of the fact that he lives across town from the school community. For instance, they go from house to house singing carols at Christmas time, stopping afterwards at one of the homes to which other parents of the community are likewise invited.

The results? For all the times when this teacher felt he failed to achieve all he desired, there have been an overbalancing number of occasions when results seemed on the positive side. There was, to be sure, the case of the boy, in whose home one of the very first visits was made, who absented himself for three days following and, although ostensibly a “model citizen” for the remainder of the year, carried with him an I’m-scared-to-do-anything-else attitude. On the other hand, there were the twins, equally capable physically and mentally but unhappily bound by a tie of dominance and submission who achieved the type of adjustment which made going on to Junior High together a possibility. Furthermore, there was the host of boys and girls doing well, very well, whose praise in front of parents and suggestions of further possible achievement were not without their reward.

Is it any wonder that the school is part of the community and the teacher one of its leaders? Is it a matter of surprise that the community is part of the school as demonstrated by the attendance of parents at school functions?

Mr. White likes this situation and wishes to stay on, believing that years of

ALBERTA MUNKRES is professor emeritus of education at the University of Denver, Denver, Colorado.

living and growing in a specific school and its community setting bring increasingly rich rewards.

Sketch Number Three

Mrs. Jean McLaughlin, once a teacher of children, then a coordinator whose job was that of helping probationary teachers, now holds a position as principal in a city elementary school.³ Her belief in the value of an informed public is equaled only by her effectiveness in doing something about it.

Let us take a look at the great, all-day ingathering at the opening of the school year—students in classrooms at regular work; teachers at their desks during school hours but free at coffee break and lunch for chats with parents; guests coming and going, some hundreds of them during the day—yes, two men from nearby filling stations in work clothes because “We’ve got a couple of kids, here”; the principal here, there and everywhere being all things to all people.

Who planned and executed this gigantic undertaking? A so-called “lay advisory committee” with representation selected by different functioning units—parents, faculty, PTA group, the community (professional and business men and women).

What was the day to mean? Not merely draughts of coffee (though they were refreshing); not alone the tasty luncheon served by the PTA; not just idle, though pleasant, chatter and wandering about the building, but a better understanding of what the school is trying to do for the children who fill its classrooms.

Members of the student council and the lay advisory group acted as hosts and hostesses, conducting tours and making explanations of exhibits to the end that visitors would leave better informed than

when they arrived as to the curriculum of the school, daily plans of procedure, services performed to community organizations (Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, First Aid, Preschool) by the building, the type of teaching which the children have.

In addition to this day-long gathering, many other activities are fostered by the lay advisory committee—mothers’ study groups which give serious thought to self-selected problems; activities which culminate a unit of classroom work and offer explanations to visitors; individual conferences interpreting growth charts and giving consideration to an individual’s expected achievement.

In a situation like this where information flows two ways through wide-open channels of communication, fear and suspicion cannot live, rumors die a-borning, propaganda withers.

Of each school-community situation in the world a thumbnail sketch might be drawn. And what an exhibit the collection would make!—some dark and somber, some grayish in tone, others shining and fair.

Darkest are those which picture teachers cowed to a “Yes, yes” attitude or turned aggressive in their defense of what they believe to be right; parents swayed by propaganda, fearful and suspicious; children caught between the two forces, rebellious and insecure.

Fairest of all (and there are many) shine those which portray parents and teachers, in mutual confidence, growing together in the achievement of a common goal—the most effective type of life for boys and girls, now, personal and social as well as academic, and increasingly abundant living for all—parents, teachers and children—for the days which lie ahead.

³ Denver Public Schools.

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