

The Teacher as a Representative of Maturity

in working with youth

AS part of his teaching role, a teacher helps adolescents gain a picture of what it is like to operate in a mature fashion. To perform this function the teacher needs to be a person who is in control of his emotions, must be able to accept and live with difference, must see himself in a "relating to" rather than a "controlling" role, must focus his attention on how to help the other person grow rather than on how to win an advantage, must judge the immediate situation in terms of long-range goals, must have his actions controlled by the values to which he gives allegiance and must seek constantly to increase his own maturity.

The adult is one who has learned to control his emotions to fit the situation in which he finds himself. A baby reacts in terms of his feelings to new stimuli. As he grows older, he learns to recognize situations in which certain types of actions are appropriate and others in which they are not. Adolescents typically adapt their emotions to the situation part of the time and the remainder of the time allow their emotions to control their behavior. The teacher who works with adolescents has as his primary task helping teen-agers move to a stage where for a greater portion of the time they are in control of

their emotions. To perform this role, the teacher must be a person who does not lose his temper, who does not react to adolescent behavior as though it were a personal insult to him, who constantly weighs more factors in his decision-making than the immediate comment or action. He cannot afford the luxury of being out of control.

Accepting Difference

A part of growing up is being able to accept difference. Young children put their own problems and feelings first. As we grow older we learn to accept as valid the feelings and problems of those who are like us, persons who are in our family and persons of whom we have become fond. The next stage in maturity involves being able to accept as equally significant the aspirations, hopes and points of view of those who are different. An immature person is threatened by difference. A mature person recognizes that, when people accept each other, difference can contribute to increased insight as people explore their difference honestly.

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estly and with an attempt to see how they can support and help each other. This phase of maturity is hard to attain.

Teachers find themselves beset by this same problem of being mature. They find it easy to accept and work with youngsters who are like themselves, who have similar backgrounds and values and hold purposes that the teacher deems worthy. They find it much harder to work with students who use a different language, who come from a different socioeconomic background and who ignore or belittle the life purposes that the teacher considers important. Many teachers find it hard to accept the values of cultures other than their own or those that have been given emphasis in their preparation for teaching. But if a teacher is to help teen-agers become more mature, he must constantly seek to increase his acceptance of difference and to become better informed about people and cultures that vary from the ones to which he has been accustomed.

Teachers are employed to help youngsters grow. One way this can be done is for the teacher to establish in his mind a pattern of what pupil growth should be and then attempt to control youngsters so that they will develop into this pattern. Such an approach is doomed to failure if youngsters have strong purposes and integrity. They will insist on developing in their own directions and in terms of their own purposes. Conflict will result between pupils and teacher and the teacher will be effective in helping those who accept his purposes and his pattern of growth but will be ineffective with those who resist.

Instead of attempting to control, a teacher who is mature recognizes the variety of purposes that are socially acceptable and seeks to relate to youngsters in a way that will help them grow in the

direction of those purposes they hold that are socially acceptable. This means that within one class the teacher will accept a number of socially acceptable purposes. Such an understanding affects lesson planning and the operation of classes. Relating to a person means that you give him support, that you value him, that you explore with him his purposes and the implications of these purposes for society and for his happiness, that primarily you seek to understand him, not to have him understand you, that you encourage him to set up his own plan of work with all the help that you can give, that you encourage him to make judgments about his progress and to use your judgments also as data in the process of reaching his own decision. Fundamentally the teacher who sees himself in a relating role seeks constantly to increase the amount of self-direction of the learner.

Attaining Discipline

A teacher who seeks to increase the maturity of youngsters does not judge a situation by whether or not he controls or wins. Sometimes it is better to lose. When a teacher feels so insecure that he is constantly afraid of losing face with a group of pupils or an individual, he is not a mature teacher or a mature adult. As a beginning teacher starts to work with a class this situation may prevail but as he progresses throughout the year and in his career he should develop the skills that make organizing and operating an efficient group situation an easy task.

The matter of securing and maintaining discipline should become routine and perfunctory. After the professional teacher has gained this proficiency he then is free to deal with each situation in terms of what is best for a given young-

ster. If the teacher has the respect of the class and if the situation is well-organized, it is entirely possible for the teacher to accept one student's saying, "I will not do this," without saying, "You must." The important consideration in each situation that arises is, "What will help this student and his classmates grow most?" The teacher needs constantly to ask himself, "Will the action that I am about to take keep the channels of communication open so that I can help this individual grow more or will it close the channels?" It is better not to secure the immediate step the teacher wishes but to keep the channels of communication open than it is to win the immediate conflict and close the channels of communication so that the teacher is not able to continue to help the pupil grow.

Important to remember in working with pupils at this level of maturity is never to issue a direct command to an individual pupil. If a teacher says, "John, close the window," and John does not, the teacher is in a position in which he feels he must defend his authority. He has only one course of action left, to take punitive measures against John. If, on the other hand, the teacher wishes to have the window closed, he says, "John, will you please close the window?" and John says, "No," the nature of the situation puts John in the aggressor role. This affects the attitude of the class toward John and the teacher and makes it possible for the teacher to choose a number of courses of action. The teacher did not lay his authority on the line by issuing a command. The importance of choice of words and attitude cannot be overemphasized. If a teacher is belligerent, aggressive, demanding and challenging, he puts himself in a situation in which he has to attempt to win. If he plays a coordinating, supporting, helpful, executive

role, his very actions make clear to the group that he is there to help them execute the policy and program that they deem helpful to themselves.

Setting Goals

Another phase of the maturity role of the teacher is making judgments on the basis of long-range goals rather than of the immediate situation. Children often make decisions in terms of their immediate wishes and needs. A mature person, however, judges the immediate courses of action that are open to him not only in terms of his present desires but in terms of his long-range purposes. A teacher of adolescents who is mature helps adolescents increase in their understanding of this type of behavior. He himself demonstrates mature behavior as the teacher and the group plan together. The teacher counsels in such a way that students begin to identify goals further and further in the future and to be able to categorize immediate goals, short-term goals, and long-range goals so that they can use these in making decisions about what to study, when to study and what is of primary importance.

Another major difference between a mature and an immature person is that a mature person has clarified his values and established in his mind some order of priority which he uses in choosing the action he will take. Almost all people in the American culture have immediate conflicting values. Most decisions are choices among values that are held by the individual. If he does not have the conflict within himself a decision is not difficult. He knows what to do. But many of the values the individual holds are in some conflict with other values. To be an effective force, the individual needs to

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have clear understanding of the importance that he assigns to each value and to establish his actions in terms of this rank order of his values. Helping students to recognize the conflict in their values and to begin to clarify the importance assigned to each is a process of helping the student become more mature. Simply asking, "What do you believe?"—the place where many teachers stop—is not enough. The important question is, "Of the things you believe, to which do you give priority and what does that priority mean for your course of action in the present dilemma?" To help adolescents develop this skill, the teacher will need to demonstrate the way he uses his own values in making decisions.

Any teacher who pretends to an adolescent that he has reached maturity will be less effective in helping young people become mature. No one achieves complete maturity. Each person finds some occasion when he reflects immature behavior. He needs to recognize this and to help adolescents recognize it, too. A part of this contribution by the adult to adolescents is to be able to say honestly to them that he has made a mistake and to apologize. Adults do not lose face when they apologize for an evident mistake. They lose face when they pretend to adolescents that they never make a mistake and are never wrong.

A major aspect of gaining maturity is the recognition that maturity is always in the future, something for which you unceasingly strive but never expect to attain fully. The 16-year-old will feel very mature if he constantly compares himself to the 12-year-old. But if he looks at 20-year-olds, 25-year-olds, 35-year-olds, he will see that maturity at 16 is still not maturity. The important thing to remem-

ber is that as long as the attainment of maturity is in the future, the opportunity for increased perfection is constantly with us. Once maturity has been obtained, if it could be, the possibility of perfectibility is gone. Our hope lies in the open door to adults to attain greater maturity. The adult who performs his mature role with the class keeps this idea constantly before him and before his pupils in the thinking process, in the discipline situation, and in evaluation.

Editorial

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ogists, social psychologists, biologists, cultural anthropologists and others.

What, then, is teaching? At present, teaching is many things to many people, and there is a need for a more adequate concept of the meaning of the term. In seeking to clarify this concept, perhaps a definition appropriate for the present emerges. Perhaps teaching is the application of the best known principles of human behavior in efforts to promote the highest possible achievement of personal adequacy through learning. In addition it involves the teacher in continuous study to discover new knowledge concerning the nature of personal adequacy in our society, and the processes involved in the achievement of such adequacy. As such knowledge is learned, teaching—both as to objectives and techniques—changes, somewhat as the "practice of medicine" changes with the discovery of new knowledge and the development of new techniques appropriate to this new knowledge.

Perhaps through such study we can progressively achieve a more valid concept of the appropriate structure and dynamics of teaching for our age.

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