

The Teacher as a Person

What qualities are needed?

IT is readily recognized, by educators and lay citizens alike, that the role of the school is ever-broadening, ever-increasing. The school of today is responsible for educating the child as a person; preparing the whole child to function as an intelligent, competent citizen in a complex world. Further, the school is charged with the responsibility for preparing the child to live productively and creatively in a world which we do not know, which we cannot know. The only certainty for which we can prepare children is for change itself. At no time in history has change been so rapid and ever-present a facet of man's life.

The teacher's role has broadened in direct relationship to the expanding function of the school itself. No longer is it sufficient for the teacher to be able to train children in the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. No longer does it suffice for the teacher to be able to transfer knowledge from his head or from a book to the heads of children. These skills are still important to teachers and children. Yet much more than this remains to be done. The scope of the school's responsibilities has become

much wider than this. The needs of the child are greater than this.

The teacher's role has now become one of guiding the growth of children; of directing them as they: (a) acquire the skills necessary for gaining knowledge and understandings; (b) develop an understanding of themselves, the world around them, and their place in that world; (c) develop the understandings and relationships which will form the basis for their actions, reactions and interactions in the world in which they will live as adults.

Coupled with these goals, of necessity, are: (a) developing attitudes which will be favorable to further desire to learn, and increasing ability to learn; and (b) developing appreciations which will be conducive to happiness and satisfaction in one's life. These aspects of the child's life are so integrated into his daily living that they must be considered along with the major goals of the school.

As the acceptance of responsibility for more diverse development of the child has been taken into account in the curriculum of the school, the importance of the teacher as a person has become expanded. Defining the teacher's role as one of "guiding children" implies not only involvement of the total child,

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but also the involvement of the "total teacher"—of the teacher as a person. Gone are the days when the local teacher was an individual apart, to be feared and, whenever possible, avoided. Rather, the teacher today is a person who is an integral part of the life of the child. Just as the child cannot be separated into small pieces for purposes of education, neither can the teacher be divided into small separate segments. He may play many roles, but each will be affected by the person that he is.

Relating to Others

If more must be considered than the knowledge and skills which served the teacher of the past, then what more is required of the teacher of today as a person?

Two major aspects of personality are of supreme importance to any healthy, productive, creative individual: (a) understanding of, and sensitivity to, others, based on a realistic self-concept, and translated into meaningful, satisfying relationships; and (b) personal competencies through which one gains satisfactions in one's own life.

Whatever position an individual may hold in society, he must be able to relate effectively to others. As civilization becomes more highly developed, interpersonal relations become more complex and, proportionately, more important to the welfare of society. In the age in which we live, mankind is more highly interdependent than at any other time in the world's history. This interdependence is likely to become even more complex.

Relating effectively to others is particularly important to the teacher. He must have a strong relationship with his group of learners. He must be accepted

as a part of that group. He must indeed be, without doubt, the leader of that group. This is necessary if he is to foster within the members of the group the desire to learn, the inquisitiveness, the favorable attitudes and appreciations which are so vital for future learnings. The teacher must develop strong rapport with the group, as a group, and with the individual members of the group.

The teacher is also under obligation to the community in which he serves as a leader of youngsters. He has an obligation to uphold the values and goals of the educational world. He has an opportunity to educate the community in the purposes and practices of his educational system, and to gain the support of his community in achieving these. Aside from this, the teacher, as a person, gains satisfaction and stature from taking his place as an active citizen of his community. Every person needs to feel worthy as the person he is, apart from the worthiness he feels for the work he does. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher not only to establish himself as a teacher in the school, but also to make a place for himself as a person in the community in which he lives.

Being accepted by children is important to the teacher, but this is not enough. The teacher is an adult. Therefore, he has the adult need of being accepted as a person by other adults.

How does one build effective relationships with others? Rapport is built of mutual understanding and acceptance. It is extremely important to the teacher to see each member of his group of learners as an individual. This comes from viewing each individual, as objectively as possible, in as many situations as possible: the child in the classroom,

the child on the playground, the child as a member of his neighborhood group, the child as a member of his family—the same child in many different roles.

Guiding the Young

Seeing the child in many situations leads to a more complete understanding of the child as a person, and probably to a stronger relationship with the child. Seeing his own role as a part of the classroom group, the teacher helps to build an understanding of the structure of that group, and to further reciprocal understanding of the child as a person. This suggests to the teacher some interpretation of the goals set for the learners, and some basic suggestions for structuring the means for achieving those goals.

Relating effectively to children and adults is important to the teacher not only for the personal satisfactions one receives, but also as a means of building one's self-concept. Do children look to the teacher for guidance in their intellectual endeavors? Do they come to him voluntarily when they need help? Is the teacher accepted socially by other adults? Does he have sustaining, satisfying relationships with other adults, who are interested in and important to him? Is he pleased with the many roles which he is called on to play? Does he recognize his weaknesses—working to improve those which can be improved, ignoring those that are unimportant, and living healthily with those over which he has no control?

With a happy acceptance of one's self and of one's role comes the confidence to stand by those convictions for which one has support. Also with this acceptance comes the flexibility to question, where questioning is called for, and to

change when the best available evidence suggests a change.

The teacher, as a person, develops understandings for others, understandings of himself, and satisfying relationships through perceptive interaction with others in many situations. He grows by becoming aware of the strengths, weaknesses, needs and desires of others. In the light of this awareness, he examines his own strengths, weaknesses, needs and desires; the ways in which he can put his strengths to best use, overcome his weaknesses, and improve his effectiveness in satisfying his needs.

Improving in the Profession

The teacher, as a professional person, is strengthened by improving: (a) his knowledge of subject matter, the techniques and the processes of inquiry in which he guides his learners; (b) his knowledge of the learning process; and (c) his knowledge of teaching techniques.

The latter can be easily disposed of. Techniques, in and of themselves, are useless. They are productive only when they are the product of the synthesis of: first, an understanding of the goals toward which one is working; second, an understanding of the matter to be taught; and third, an understanding of the learning process and its relationship to the learners involved.

Techniques of teaching can be handed down from teacher to teacher, but are most effective when they are the product of one's own experiences and thinking. As other understandings are gained, techniques develop naturally.

Knowledge of the materials to be taught can be extended by in-service courses, seminars, summer classes.

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In order to educate teachers to assist pupils, we need to know which behaviors are which. As we learn this, teaching, supervision, and teacher education will become more of a science and less of an art.

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Another means of gaining knowledge of the materials to be taught is the personal adventure into that material. Many teachers are required to teach many subjects. Whether the teacher is a specialist in one subject, or a teacher of many subjects, his knowledge and understanding must span broad areas. He should clearly see and utilize the interrelationship between subjects. New vistas can be opened to the teacher by adventuring into art, music, dramatics, history, foreign languages—by drawing and painting, by singing or by playing an instrument, by acting in a play or helping with production, by delving into history, by learning to speak a new language—in short, by being, himself, an inquisitive, ever-learning person.

By these adventures one does gain in one's knowledge. Of just as much importance, though, are one's experiences with the learning process, becoming aware of its frustrations, its challenges and its rewards. Knowledge of the learning process can be gained through the writings of psychologists and educators. A real understanding of the process can best be gained by experiencing it.

This very experience is probably the key to developing the personal qualities of a teacher. He becomes first a person: meeting new challenges, moving into new experiences, learning through a desire to know in order to live more effectively. He then becomes a true example to youngsters; a worthy leader of their classroom group, and a functioning member of the community in which he lives.

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