

First Monday After Labor Day

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WHEN I BOUGHT my first car, I thought I could drive—although I had never driven. I knew the principle of the clutch, the gears, and brakes. I had watched carefully as others drove. So I told the former owner of the car just to park the little black coupe in the backyard. After he had left, I decided to try it out alone without advice or onlookers. Unfortunately, there was one bit of information which had slipped my attention (the dents in the garage and a certain maple tree still bear the evidences of my ignorance). I did not know that you released the clutch slowly; therefore, I literally plunged forward and backward between the maple tree and the garage until I had completely shaken my confidence in driving this terrible black monster. Humbly I went to seek advice.

Our graduates usually leave us full of enthusiasm for teaching. They have notebooks full of outlines, lists of materials, and firm convictions on methods.

Frances K. Martin has found that watching the reactions of beginning teachers to the life-sized problems they face on their first job provides a good criterion for appraising her own work in Central Michigan College of Education, Mount Pleasant. Here she discusses the problems brought to her by former students and suggests how teachers in training may be better prepared for the difficulties that lie ahead.

They have studied the child at the age level they plan to teach. But what they need is the "feel of the clutch" which comes with the total experience. I am sure we will never build an effective professional group until we recognize that the beginning teacher, fresh out of college, needs at least half a year of apprenticeship, that she cannot be expected to assume the total job of leading thirty-five to forty-five children on the first Monday after Labor Day.

The college homecoming is a special time of evaluation. While we admire the new clothes and listen to the stories, we study the beginner to see whether she is happy, relaxed, and enthusiastic. We also have a beginning-teachers' conference in October or November. We ask the superintendents to send the first-year teachers to us for a day to be spent in the laboratory school and for conferences. We want to know how we can help them, but we also ask them to appraise us. What materials have they used? What do they need? What has been hard to do because they had no preparation? We also send questionnaires to superintendents and to alumni asking for an evaluation of our program.

We try to visit beginners who are having trouble, if they request help through the administration of their school. Some of the recurring general

suggestions obtained from these contacts I have included in this article. Of course, many of the problems arise around the particular personality of the beginner or of the specific situation in which she works. These I will not discuss here other than to say that we are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of keeping the school environment in mind in selecting a person to teach and that there are a few situations so difficult that we should not tolerate them and should advise our graduates against locating where they exist.

One of the most universal reactions of beginners is that teaching is such hard work. They report with surprise that they are "just dead by night." They have not been used to the same schedule day after day. In college most of them know how to plan for days only partially filled. But as teachers they face an "eight-o'clock" every day of the week. Added to that, the young teacher uses more energy in everything than is necessary. She is under emotional tensions of all sorts. Principals and older teachers forget how difficult it once was to do what to them now seems simple and routine. The young teacher should be encouraged through these first hard weeks in every possible way. She should not be encumbered with an observer who is allowed to "sit and watch and take notes." Surely supervisors and principals know that this unfortunate procedure imposes needless mental strain upon a young teacher.

We try to help new teachers prepare for this strenuous period by suggesting that they spend the summer resting, playing, and collecting teaching materials. When they come back for advice, we try to help them think through

the emotional tensions and plan an attack upon their own fears. Often this means the beginner must go to the principal or supervisor who is making her "so nervous I can't think" and ask for help, admitting the fear.

A second problem which is raised frequently is that of organizing children for an entire day's work. The beginner feels confident that she knows how to conduct a reading group—how to lead children in a unit—but she finds that she cannot get them sufficiently well organized to do the teaching. The group techniques used by the teachers in the laboratory school do not seem to work in a "real" situation. In our college we have felt that we are to blame for part of this complaint. The student sees a group of children who are effectively organized by an experienced teacher, and it all looks simple and easy. It is often a very real shock to the beginning teacher to find that she cannot manage a group of children—that she somehow has no leadership. A partial answer to this problem has been to place students in public schools for six-week externships. They are quite sure that this has been of great value. For here they get an opportunity to work with large groups and with limited books and materials.

The beginning teacher needs real help on the job with the problem of organization. She needs to be reminded of the importance of planning with the children. She needs more crafts materials now than she will need later. She needs to plan her day's schedule with someone—perhaps the principal or an experienced teacher. If laboratory teachers could be freed it would be fine for them to follow the students "into

the field"—not to observe and evaluate but to "talk things over."

One of our students started her teaching in the public schools of this town. At the end of the first day she called on me and asked me more questions than she had in all the education classes we had had together. She asked me many things I thought she should know, for "we had had them in class." I have learned from my beginners that I do not teach what I think I teach.

Each year we have a few beginners who come back worried because they cannot keep the children quiet. "My principal wants every child silent unless he is reciting." "We are supposed to build houses but with silent hammers." We have tried to help our students plan for "quiet activities" which will be worthwhile and not just "busy work." We try to send them out realizing that they are "transitionists."

We believe it's silly to worship silence and teach children not to talk and then wonder why so few adults can express themselves in a group. However, we insist that our beginner start where the community and school is and do a good job of running a "whispering" school, if that is what the community respects. This does not mean that she cannot allow the children to make decisions, that she cannot give them opportunities for responsibilities. In a thousand ways she can provide for the use of individual intelligence, group tolerance, sympathetic understanding, all of which are essential in young citizens of this world.

Other beginners tell us that we should teach our present students how to "bawl a child out"—that they have trouble with discipline and do not know what to do when a child is impudent, cheats,

steals, is obscene, or fights. They have seen no situations of this type in the laboratory school. We are trying to meet this problem by giving more time in our psychology and education sequences to actually studying children. We let them in on as many real problems as we can. We practice analyzing problem situations and "problem children." We discuss the state resources for children who deviate sharply from the average. We also try to help the young teacher develop her own emotional nature. So far we have not felt that we needed to teach them how to "bawl the children out," though we do discuss punishment, rewards, and motivation in relation to specific cases.

Some of the beginners report the awful loneliness they feel on first going into a new community. One of them wrote me a very firm letter denouncing me for suggesting that she go to the community a week before school started to study its resources. She was nearly ready to leave the profession after that week and got a very lasting dislike for the community. We can give the beginner suggestions about where and how to live, about getting acquainted and helping with community projects, and can instill in them an enthusiasm for becoming a useful member of the community. However, this is also a school and community problem, one which communities would do well to face, since teachers can choose the place where they will work. I will not advise a student to go to a community if I have had consistent reports from other teachers about lack of interest and even coldness of the school administration or community toward its teachers. I want to see these young teachers suc-

ceed, and I know that part of that success will depend on the zest and vigor with which they live. I always ask—"Are you having fun?"

There are other practical hints the beginning teachers have given. I have described only a few. To really give newcomers the kind of preparation they

need would take a new kind of college. Perhaps among all the upheavals ahead we can hope that some of the present collegiate chains of conservatism will be snapped. In the meantime we watch for opportunities for increased service and pray for wisdom to use them when they appear.



The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards.—Anatole France, *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*.

Man's Eternal Search

"ONCE AGAIN, in the cycle through which civilization rotates, voices are crying out for fixed values. . . .

". . . The Middle Ages made such a demand and values were fixed. Political patterns, personal conduct and the question of individual freedom were settled presumably for all times. The French Revolution and other revolutions fixed values which were handed down or transmitted into the early days of many of us and right becomes right and wrong, wrong, without question.

"Life, however, does not conform to such a clean-cut pattern. The unfinished business of life is life itself and constitutes its essence. When unfinished business ends, life dies. This is true both for societies and for individuals. We are confused and baffled by the shattered conditions of the society in which we live. Many of the things which we took for granted and have assumed were settled have returned for reconsideration. The danger is that these new problems will either not be faced frankly or that they will be met with cynicism, even bitterness. The danger is that we will lose hope or, worse, lose faith.

"The concept of democracy tends to make one opposed to the fixing of values. It assumes not that all individuals are taken into the plan, but rather, that all are taken into the planning itself. Not only the leaders but all citizens must have a part in the planning."—From "Should Values Be Fixed?" by Dr. Jay B. Nash, New York University. Address at opening session of National War Fitness Conference, American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Cincinnati, Ohio, April, 1943.

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