

The Importance of People

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Teachers ARE People

... And they are probably being TREATED like people in schools where:

Teachers and administrators are peers as personalities

This means that neither the teachers nor the administrators kick one another around. The teachers are not guilty of this very often although the existence of a strong union with a vindictive orientation is a dangerous temptation. In schools where everyone is respected as a person, the administrators and teachers think of each other as equals. This is a difficult attitude to learn, especially for the administrator because his duties as an executive so frequently make it easy for him to believe he is superior *as a person*. Superintendents and principals and supervisors who strive for personality equality insist that their views and arguments be considered on their merits. They speak *ex officio* as rarely as possible. They feel that there is no more justification for an administrator to scold and humiliate a teacher than there is for a teacher to scold and humiliate an administrator.

Teachers help choose their colleagues

When teachers participate in the choice of a colleague they tend to accept responsibility for the success and happiness of the new teacher. There is no single factor that can do more to make a new teacher do a good job than knowing that the other teachers in the building or in the school system are eager to have and to help her succeed. When teachers are appointed as a consequence of the judgment of administrators only, the implication is that the views of the teachers in the classrooms regarding the effectiveness of a prospective colleague are of little value. Teachers are quick to sense this implication—maybe unconsciously. In any event, if their judgments in this situation are not valued, why should they accept much responsibility for the classroom success of the new teacher, to say nothing of helping her find her way about socially in out-of-school activities?

Teachers and administrators work cooperatively on school problems

There are roughly speaking these three ways of getting the work of the school done: the method of administrative fiat, the method of *laissez faire*, and the method of cooperative group work. The last method recognizes that the school is an organism and that what goes on in one part of the organism affects the entire enterprise. This means that it is desirable for everyone to assume some

responsibility for the planning and success of the whole school program. Too, when all of the persons who are involved in an enterprise have a voice in policy determination, and in the evaluation of policies, there is apt to be the sort of fundamental understanding of the functions and purposes of a school program that makes for maximum articulation and unity. Children are too often expected to put together into a meaningful whole what they have learned here and there in a school, while their teachers have only the vaguest idea of what is going on in other classrooms, or in the corridors, or in the alley after school.

Teachers have a chance to come to know one another as people

The relationships among teachers are structured entirely differently if on the one hand they know one another only as teachers and on the other hand know one another as teachers *and* people. Under the latter circumstance discussions of professional problems infrequently result in hostility and hurt feelings. Two teachers who know and like one another as people dispute professionally without feeling that each is attacking the only thing she knows about the other. Many teachers, of course, are not too interested in knowing their colleagues personally. Insecurity is one reason for impersonal relations. Friendly personal relations mean that the bars are down. Guns have been left at the hotel desk. By implication an agreement has been reached not to hurt. Such an atmosphere is not apt to be created in a competitive school. One cannot trust an adversary.

The existence of personal as well as professional problems is recognized

The way teachers feel about their work has a great deal to do with their success—and these feelings result from complex and oftentimes subtle influences. Poor health, economic worries, unhappy extra-school social experiences, family conflict and many other circumstances have an intimate bearing upon the more professional aspects of the teacher's work. To deny this is to flee from reality. To do something about it is unusual. Psychological counseling is one partial solution but there are serious limitations to "appointing" a counselor for teachers. The position is more often earned than created. Helpful counseling can rarely be provided by an administrator or any other "line" officer—and helpful counseling is rarely of the "telling" variety.

Motivation is positive

Some people who are responsible for the maintenance of fine instruction in a school go about their duties in either one of two ways. The negative approach—and this for some queer reason seems to be the easier or at least the more popular method—is to identify and try to eliminate faults. Teachers then have their attention called to the things that they do not do well and specific suggestions are made for their improvement. A second method—and one that contributes to a sense of well-being and security and results, in the judgment of this writer, in much more rapid and more permanent progress—involves concentrating upon those things that the teacher already does well and of which

she is proud and then helping her realize that in the degree that all of her teaching practices are consistent with her best ones she is professionally superior.

All of these practices imply a concept of educational leadership that is probably widely accepted in theory by the readers of this journal. But even in theory there are many difficulties. The question of leadership within any organization where resourcefulness and ingenuity and the assumption of responsibility by everyone are important has always plagued administrators. Under any circumstance leadership is too apt to become dictatorship or at least benevolent paternalism unless the administrative leader is constantly aware of the dangers inherent in his office.

The principal or superintendent or supervisor who insists upon functioning as a "leader" rather than a "director" recognizes the importance of having those with whom he works secure and adventuresome and familiar with and responsible for the entire educational program. He recognizes that the sum total of the ideas of all of the teachers as they think about education is a much more impressive and fruitful aggregate than the sum total of the ideas of a few administrators.

Such a leader's chief concern is in improving the schools. He cares very little for a reputation as the fellow who has all of the inspirations and is aggressive in putting them into practice. Because this latter role, however, is the one most people think a successful school administrator or supervisor must play, the leader will find the going rough. He will be tempted again and again to *tell* people what to do because the alternative takes time and requires patience.

Altogether apart from any sentimental notions about democracy, the chief difficulty when teachers are told what to do is that the directions can not ever be sufficiently explicit because teaching by its very nature requires much individual initiative and resourcefulness. A second difficulty is that the followers of directions are chronically unable to accept personal responsibility for the success of the activity. A third difficulty is that people who are constantly following administrative directives lose something as persons. They tend, like cogs in a machine—or automaton on an assembly line—to become *things* rather than people.



NOMINATIONS ARE NOW IN ORDER for members of the Board of Directors for 1945-46. Send your nominations to any member of the Nominating Committee: Lelia Ann Taggart, Office of County Superintendent of Schools, Santa Barbara, Calif., *chairman*; W. Virgil Smith, Board of Education, Seattle, Wash.; William E. Young, State Education Department, Albany, N. Y. The slate of fifteen names from which five will be elected will be presented to the membership for mail vote early next fall.

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