

No Ceiling on Praise

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Giving credit for good work is such a simple thing to do, according to Melvin C. Wilson, principal, Rigler Elementary School, Portland, Ore., who indicates that a word of praise now and then to adults as well as to children will hardly fall on deaf ears. Mr. Wilson pleads for the kind of supervision which commends rather than condemns.

THE PROBLEM of teacher supervision is more than just the sum of its parts. In the process of helping the teacher to do her job better, mere help with methods and materials is not enough. If a teacher is to be an effective leader in the learning process for children, she must have a feeling of security and success. Moreover, she must know that her difficulties are sympathetically understood and above all that the things she does well are recognized. The needs for success, security, and recognition are common to all persons. These things have long been understood as essential to a wholesome situation with children. It is a paradox, however, that these rather obvious truths often are not followed in work with adults.

There can be little doubt that even a teacher who is doing a rather poor job will, in some things, be performing in a superior or effective way. A principal or supervisor should be aware of this and use those good things as starting points on which to build. Nearly all persons respond to praise, and a teacher who knows that a good piece of work will be recognized, often will begin on her own to search for ways to do the job better. When she receives praise and recognition for this better job, she then redoubles her efforts on other tasks. Since financial returns from teach-

ing are at best small enough, it becomes doubly important that teachers have feelings of satisfaction in their work if they are to continue to be effective persons.

Recognition for Good Work

It follows, then, that one important task of a principal or supervisor should be to find ways and means of giving a teacher praise and recognition for things that have been done well. This is vital to the building of teacher morale for unless the morale of a teaching staff can be kept high, the learning situation will deteriorate, and there is real danger that the teachers, who find it possible, will move to other jobs where they at least have hope that their efforts may be appreciated. At the same time those teachers who remain are liable to regard their job as a place in which to spend a required number of hours. They will have little if any desire to experiment or attempt anything new. Too often such persons who have had their initiative stifled might have become superior teachers if given encouragement.

More Attention to Morale

Does it not seem probable that administrators have not given nearly enough attention to the matter of teacher morale? Is it not also possible that one way to determine to a great

degree the type of supervision that has taken place in a given building would be to appraise the spirit and enthusiasm of the teachers? One might reasonably ask how such an appraisal could be made. After observing teachers in several different buildings, the writer is convinced that there are many readily recognized indexes to teaching spirit. For the purpose of clarifying this point a few of them will be mentioned here.

A real index to this problem is of course the happiness of children in the school. It would seem that high spirit on the part of the teaching staff would be reflected in the pupils themselves. Teachers who are praised for good work and given recognition for initiative are far more likely to carry these practices into their classrooms than are those teachers who never receive credit for a good job. They will encourage initiative and resourcefulness in the pupils. Teachers who are happy and secure are likely to have a classroom where pupils reflect a similar feeling of happiness and security.

A principal might also observe the manner in which teachers enter and leave the school building. Do teachers linger in the school office when they arrive in the morning or when they leave in the afternoon? Do they linger at such times to visit with other teachers, the secretary, or the principal? Is there any laughter at these times or is there a strained tense atmosphere?

In further appraising the spirit of the staff, one might well observe the teachers' lunchroom. How many of the staff have lunch together? Do any of them eat alone? What is discussed at such times?

Still another index to teacher morale

might be the number of times that they meet in a social way and the extent of participation at such times. The writer knows of one staff who always plans several such gatherings each year. These teachers participate because they are happy together and enjoy the company of those with whom they work.

Approval Stimulates Success

The matter of giving teachers credit for the good work which they have done should be of highest importance to anyone concerned with supervision. The teacher, as everyone else, repeats those things which have been successful, and one way she has of measuring her success is the approval that she receives. Let us look at the sources from which teachers may receive approval for good work.

One very good source for such approval should be the administration. This includes principals, supervisors, directors, and superintendents. The writer knows of several supervisors and directors who have made a practice of writing a letter of commendation to teachers who have done a good piece of work. It is a very simple thing to do and it shows results. Teachers receiving such commendation know that good work and extra effort are not necessarily taken for granted. Moreover, the principal should attempt to become more sensitive to those things which have been done that require added effort. Merely noticing and commenting on extra work may serve to compensate for the effort entailed. A particularly good piece of work might merit a special letter of commendation written to the superintendent and placed in the

teacher's folder in the personnel office. It is also desirable to encourage teachers to write for professional magazines about those things that they have done well.

Parents Can Encourage Teachers

Every teacher likes to know that the parents of the children whom she teaches are pleased with the work that she is doing. Too often the teacher hears from only a very small minority who may have a complaint to make, and the large number of parents who might praise her either don't think or don't bother to tell her how they feel. The principal is in a position to contact parents and to encourage them to let the teacher know when they are pleased. He will often find it possible to pass on a word of praise or a compliment which a parent has given a teacher. Doing this may give a tired teacher just the lift needed.

Often other teachers offer praise or commendation when they have seen something well done by another. This can be encouraged by a principal. He will find many opportunities to pass on such praise to a deserving teacher.

One of the most satisfying experiences that a teacher may have is to see or hear of the development taking place in children under her direction. A principal who observes such development, should point this out to the teacher. Often incidents will occur after a pupil has left a teacher's room or sometimes even after a child has left school. Some-



*Courtesy N. Y. State Teachers College, Albany
Don't withhold approval*

times such incidents may be traced directly to the work done by a certain teacher. The writer recalls the case of a pupil who had left the elementary school and enrolled in high school, where he showed exceptionally high qualities of leadership. This was directly traceable to work done with him by several teachers in the elementary school, and they received a great deal of satisfaction from hearing about it.

In the foregoing paragraphs the writer has attempted to point out that teachers are people, that they respond to praise and approval, that the job of supervision is something more than assisting with methods and materials, and that the problems of teacher happiness and morale are crucial to good teaching.

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