

These Are Our Concerns

Beginning teachers—and those of limited experience—from widely-scattered parts of the country—Connecticut, California, Illinois, Kansas, New York, Michigan, and Pennsylvania—wrote for us their problems as they started working with children and youth. To those responsible for the improvement of instruction they serve as guides in planning for in-service growth.

What are the major concerns which beginning teachers bring to their early teaching situations?

How are these problems different from—or similar to—the problems faced by experienced teachers?

To what extent do the problems we assume beginning teachers have agree with their own statements of needs?

In what ways are in-service experiences actually meeting the needs of beginning teachers?

Are we helping the beginning teacher at the place where she is? In other words, do we use the same principles of learning that we suggest she use with children?

These and similar questions are pertinent to the planning of in-service programs which will meet the needs of beginning teachers in those areas where problems actually exist. In many of our schools individuals charged with leadership in the improvement of school programs and in the planning of an in-service program for teachers are at present faced with the yearly influx of teachers new to the system. The problem of meeting the needs of these new teachers—many of whom are teaching for the first time—is fundamental to the organization of an in-service program which will serve them as they work with children in the classroom.

In an effort to determine some of the problems on which young teachers wish help, we obtained from a number of them statements of the areas in which they felt the greatest need for guidance. Beginning teachers from all

parts of the country gave us leads concerning the kinds of problems they faced as they began their work with children. We believe that they are representative of the kinds of statements which might be made by a group of young teachers in any one part of or throughout the entire country. They have implications, certainly, for the kind of in-service programs of education which are being planned. And as one reads them there are implications also for the institutions responsible for the education of teachers—in more adequately preparing the future teachers for whom they are responsible.

What Shall We Do About Discipline?

It is not a surprise, certainly, that one finds repeated over and over again the term “discipline,” as beginning teachers indicate the areas in which

they most need help. A sampling of statements is included to indicate the varied points of view from which the problem is approached. One young teacher points up the need of specific help when she says, "I would appreciate consultation and actual experience in methods of handling discipline problems. Psychology books are too general."

That many of these young teachers are thinking of discipline in terms of specific situations—which they may have met as teachers or which they may recall from their own experiences as pupils—is indicated in a number of statements. The feeling that discipline is a matter of keeping order, of having children behave, of maintaining a "quiet" classroom, of teacher "authority" is often reflected.



☛ I believe that the beginning teachers should have more assistance in the handling of the junior high school students—especially the seventh and eighth graders. Discipline is difficult here for they are

rather young to reason with, and this is their first freedom and adjustment to the high school procedures. Their main thoughts are "fun" and they run away with this new "freedom" that befalls them. The adjustment a new teacher must make to these youngsters is much different from the one she makes to the high school pupils. It is an entirely different teaching situation.

☛ The most disturbing problem to me at this time is that of discipline. To be quite blunt and to the point—I would be interested in knowing what a teacher does when some of the children are not bothered in the least by having to stay in after school as a form of punishment. Everyone tells you to use psychology, but after a while this technique no longer works. And when the afore-mentioned punishment is tried, it seems to have no effect, particularly where the repeaters are concerned. These repeaters are, through little fault of their own, bored with the same work over and over—especially during the review period. These children more or less act as agitators to the rest of the class; and when the entire class has caught on to the idea, it's hard to break the habit. Therefore, I would appreciate suggestions as to types of discipline used to aid in cases of too much talking and fussing in the classroom.

☛ Is it better for the beginning teacher to be severe at first and then ease up? Are there any special methods of keeping the classes' attention? How can the teacher prevent one pupil from disrupting the class without aiding him in doing so by calling too much attention to him? Should the teacher compliment her pupils on good behavior or only correct poor behavior?

The relationship of the teacher as an individual to a group of pupils is another concern as young teachers view the question of "discipline."

¶ First of all comes the matter of winning the students' respect and of maintaining discipline. The past few days I've been busy learning the girls' names and a little about each of them in the foods class. As I gradually shoulder more responsibility in actual class teaching, I do feel the need of advice in winning the girls' respect for me as a teacher while still remaining their co-worker and friend—being only two or three years older than most of them.

¶ I think I am going to need help in my relationship with the students. Sometimes I feel so close to them it is hard not to become one of them. At this point I feel I need help in making up my mind just what it is we should teach these students—what is most important and valuable for them to know. I can visualize myself carrying on lively and interesting discussions which would, in themselves, be valuable perhaps; but I'm afraid in doing so of overlooking some important skill or facts they need to know, information which I as a teacher am under obligation to teach. I don't want my classroom to be formal, and yet I wonder if a certain degree of formality is not necessary.

Other comments reflect a growing understanding of discipline as a part of group living and as closely related to the entire problem of learning.

¶ One of the most trying problems which has faced some of my teacher friends has been the handling of social problems in the classroom, how to meet the needs of the children along that line, give them the freedom rightfully theirs, and at the same time conduct an orderly classroom. Being a prospective junior high school teacher, this seems a special problem for me.

¶ Discipline, how to obtain it and yet make it educative in your own classroom, is my main worry. What I want to do with my pupils will be to help them know that by sharing in aims and activities of the

group they will gain self-control and achieve goals significant to them. What are the procedures you begin with or how do you handle yourself to obtain confidence from the children, as well as poise, balance, and perspective for yourself?

¶ In the classroom it seems that a teacher should be interested in being on good terms with students and having their co-operation. It seems that these things would be necessary before any learning could take place.

¶ Classroom management and understanding students are inseparable. In my class of mixed chorus there is a wide variety of students ranging from those who are good musicians and those who are interested in singing to those who are in the class merely for the units. A thorough understanding of the expectations and desires of the pupils is necessary before successful classroom management can be obtained.

¶ One problem which looms on my third day of teaching is that of correctly combining sixty strange names with sixty stranger children in our kindergarten. Doubtless the enormity of this problem will diminish considerably within the week, but I fear that a more concrete problem will baffle me occasionally for years to come. At what point should a teacher step into an argument or scuffle among members of her class? This question arose today when one of the more aggressive children tried to take a toy from a rather retiring child who lacks self-confidence. Just what is the teacher's role in such a situation? Does she stand by and let the children handle the problem in their own way? Does she intervene when the argument descends to the physical level? Or does she protect the weaker child and see that the aggressor leaves him alone? None of these alternatives seem particularly good for they do little more than iron out surface difficulties and they fail to get at the root of the problem. I realize that there is no perfect formula

which indicates at what point the teacher should step into a difficult situation, but I should certainly welcome a few suggestions on the subject.



In a consideration of their particular needs and the way in which they were met teachers of limited experience indicate that discipline, too, was their problem. The solutions suggested by some of them may have pertinence to the statements of beginning teachers and indicate guidance in the solving of problems.

☛ I found that keeping a child interested and busy allows discipline to take care of itself. That is quite a load off the teacher's shoulders. From one interest came another. Those interests were followed and a sense of accomplishment was present.

☛ Such noise! Such an uninterested, unwholesome attitude here in my classroom! Practice teaching was never like this!

My needs, during my first year of teaching, were met through supervision and learning from other teachers. I did not know how to correlate social studies or science with activities and busy work.

Practice teaching gave me experience in teaching each separate subject—reading, music, number work. But as I started teaching I couldn't find interesting and challenging activities for my children while I had a separate group for some special subject. One of the most valuable experiences was getting the chance to observe other teachers after a few months of teaching experience. My supervisor helped me originate interesting work for my children to do independently.

We Want to Know Boys and Girls

The frequency with which statements concerning a need for knowledge concerning the youngsters with whom they work is found in the statements of young teachers indicates a realization of the importance of knowing children and its relation to planning desirable learning experiences for a particular group of children. These teachers also recognize sources for obtaining such information.

☛ I would appreciate information as to the extent of training the boys and girls who were in my classes had accomplished in the elementary schools. I would appreciate an opportunity to speak with their teachers, and in this way gain insight as to the advisable approach to their problems.

I should appreciate consultation and help in understanding the background of preparation the children have had for my course so that I will know where to start teaching and I won't be too advanced or too slow and far behind.

☛ I should like help in acquiring facts about the families and backgrounds of the individual pupils. In my opinion this is of great importance and an aid to effective teaching. The economic status of the community would be vital knowledge for a teacher unfamiliar with the town and

would be invaluable in planning the best way to deal with students.

¶ I should like to know what sort of clubs there are in the school and what type of social activities are carried on throughout the school year. A great deal of the teacher-pupil relationship depends on these things. Through clubs and other extra curricular activities a teacher can discover some of the hidden talents (hidden in the classroom, that is) a student may have.

What About the Slow-Learner?

The teacher who is concerned about knowing individual children is apt to be concerned as well with providing for them the kinds of learning experiences best suited to their individual needs. One finds among beginning teachers an awareness of this factor. It is true, however, that in most instances concern relates to providing for the needs of the very slow or the very bright pupil. One beginning teacher asks for help "in preparing material for the class that will provide a challenge to the brightest students but remain within the ability of those not-so-bright or average students." Another would "like to know more about arranging for those who need extra help and those who need a more enriched program." Still a third says she does not "feel it is fair to keep slower people after school for help," and would like "aid in conducting remedial work in the classroom along with the regular work." Still others ask questions concerning the guidance of learning activities for children with varied abilities in terms of the particular classes or groups of children for which they are responsible.

¶ I felt that I knew how to teach reading but now that I am faced with a fourth

grade that has reading levels of from 2.4 to 6.7 I don't know how to organize the program to provide for the wide range of individual differences.

¶ As the units of work progress I know I will need a guide for fair appraisal of each girl's contribution to the class. Intelligence and initiative vary with each girl. Some of them have had a richer background in the subject while others are taking this foods course without having any previous work in the field. All of the girls need an adequate foundation of basic facts, and for some this probably means repetition of some material. The problem arises of presenting the lecture material in ways that will prove worthwhile and interesting to all the class members.*

¶ The principle of providing for individual differences is stressed in all education courses in college. However, there is quite a difference between learning the words of a principle and in learning how to apply it. If a slow child is having trouble with subtraction, he is the one who needs the extra work which you may put on the board. But the children who have time to do the extra work are the ones who have no trouble with subtraction—the slow child doesn't have time because he has to keep up with his group in other things. Grouping doesn't solve the problem entirely. Even then, some children will not have their subtraction finished. Should they neglect other work to finish, or should they hand in unfinished papers? How *can you* help every child with his problem when there are only five hours of school five days a week?

How Do Children Learn?

Two future teachers who are having their first experience in the student-teaching situation ask questions about learning as it relates to the question of individual and group needs.

¶ My next problem is how to recognize learning and, by the same token, how to

recognize a lack of learning. I can remember situations in which I was not really learning but only pretending, merely because I was too bashful to raise any question. This I don't want to happen in my own classroom; and, therefore, would like to know when the children have grasped the idea and can use the knowledge in their own practice.

¶ How does a teacher meet and recognize individual as well as group needs in the learning process? How can she be certain true learning is going on all the time? Since all learning is really an individual matter, how can a teacher recognize specific abilities, needs, deficiencies, and achievements of each child? A teacher has to see that each group grows and learns so much in a school year, but how can she make them grow individually within their own group?

What Are Good Teaching Procedures?

From these beginning teachers also come questions and comments suggesting a need for guidance in what is commonly termed "methods of teaching." These deal with varied aspects of the teaching-learning process. In many instances the request for help focuses upon the technique; in others there is evidence of the realization of the relationships between good methods of teaching and the needs and learning of children.

Several requests are for guidance in the area of evaluation. One beginning teacher wants to know "how to evaluate in the fairest and most impartial way children's work so that I may see how well my goals have been attained." A second asks for guidance "in evaluating a child's needs and development." Still another says she "would be quite relieved to know how I am to evaluate or grade or classify my students before I have delved too deeply into the

semester's work." A fourth asks how to construct good tests.

High school teachers ask for suggestions about "integrating my particular field with the rest of the curriculum," "correlating my teaching with all other learning experiences and with other subject matter in courses taught in the school," and "coordination of classroom study and laboratory periods in the science field."

One beginning teacher brings up another problem when she says, "I will probably need help and advice from my administrator in promoting good student classroom participation. The teacher should direct classroom activity but not monopolize it." We wonder if the teacher of a year's experience would say it in exactly the same way. One of them, in stating ways in which she might have had help during her first year, says, "A supervisor might have helped me plan for social living so that each child could be an integral part of the social group."

And finally, from a student teacher in California comes a summary statement that we believe adequately sums up the many aspects of teaching with which our young teachers are concerned.

¶ As I attempt to anticipate the experiences ahead it seems to me that I should appreciate consultation and help in the following areas: how to recognize and understand the needs and desires of each of my students and in what ways I can make my subject of more lasting value to them; how to present the material in a manner which will attract and hold their attention and yet be so clearly and simply demonstrated that they can understand

and master the task as easily as possible; how to judge the value and difficulty of a textbook and any certain type of activity or drill; how to plan the work for the semester, unit, and day and yet give the students as much of a share in planning their program as is possible and practical; how to help them form and understand the goals they wish to attain in the class; how to make each period a satisfying experience for each pupil as well as a means of self-expression; how to avoid as much as possible the necessity of using negative external control, and when situations requiring firm measures arise, the best method of coping with them; how to solve individual discipline problems; how to appraise the growth of the individual through his learning and applying of the subject matter to daily living; how to stay calm, unruffled, enthusiastic, and patient!

May We Experiment?

A number of beginning teachers are concerned about the degree of freedom to carry out their own original ideas. One says that she would like to "have enough freedom to be able to put what I learned and believe into practice or experiment with my ideas." Another states, "I would like some freedom in using my own ideas or other's ideas that appear good." A teacher from Kansas asks, "To what extent should a new teacher (or any teacher, for that matter) be required to follow 'set' and formalized procedure and techniques dictated from above, and how much freedom should he be allowed to try any new ideas he might himself possess"; and from Connecticut comes the question of "whether experimentation with classroom procedure is tolerated."

We Want to Know Materials

The role of the supervisor as a resource person and one who knows where to find materials of instruction

for teacher use is indicated by several statements. A music teacher asks for help in the "selection of instrumental and vocal music for the students of a small high school." A science teacher wants assistance in the appraisal and selection of textbooks, laboratory materials, visual aids, and reference materials for the classroom and the school library. Two beginning teachers ask for guidance in selecting and easy access to professional books, magazines, and pamphlets. A physical education teacher also has a need for help in knowing where to get the best materials; and one beginning teacher says she would like to know "how much money I may spend on supplies and what special supplies the school has that are available, as well as the procedure for obtaining the supplies within the school. These would include visual aids, maps, reference books, records and phonograph, library books, and a radio."

What About the Adults?

Beginning teachers are concerned, also, about relations with the various adults with whom they will associate daily. Many remark about relationships with other teachers. Some show concern about the quality of these relationships in terms of the attitudes of older teachers toward them; many, however, indicate that they should appreciate suggestions which experienced teachers can give them—particularly in reference to teaching procedures. One teacher who has taught for a year says that "group meetings of the teachers with group discussions on the nature of children and the nature of the curriculum would have greatly increased my insight."

Not many of these young teachers refer directly to relationships with supervisors. Perhaps this is because a large percent of them begin their teaching in situations where supervisory help—so designated by name, at least—is not available to them. A number, however, remark on the kind of help which they would like to have from administrative officers and refer particularly to the principal. Says one of these beginning teachers:

☞ I would like to feel that the leader of the school—the principal—had some interest in me and my work. He might accomplish this by dropping into the classroom and offering his services or suggestions. Often to the new teacher the principal seems quite distant and disinterested. A few words of friendliness might help in my adjustment to an entirely new situation and make me feel I was as important a part of the staff as teachers who had been there for many years.

Relationships with the community generally, and parents specifically, is also a concern. There is, in general, a realization of the importance of a knowledge of the community and a close working relationship with its citizens. Many comments give evidence of a desire for this type of guidance.

☞ I should value information concerning parent-teacher relations, and an idea of the extent to which parents participate and cooperate in the educational program in my particular city.

☞ A teacher must become a part of the community in which he is teaching. Therefore, I think we need instruction in this field. What is expected of a teacher in regard to community activities?

☞ I should appreciate consultation and

help in the following areas: a supervised tour of the school, the community, and places of interest around the community; and a planned meeting with members of the board of education, community officials, and other members of the community.

☞ The type of people in the community are important, too. I should like to know if they are cooperative and willing to accept new ideas and make changes in their already established programs. Another important thing is whether or not the people of the community accept strangers readily. Some communities are friendly and help strangers get acquainted while others are almost hostile to new people and it takes months or years before a person feels wanted. I should like to know what sort of community I would be in.

Help Us Cut Red Tape

Many an experienced person has found the adjustment to a new job extremely difficult because of a lack of knowledge of policies as they affected routine matters and the general procedures in operation in the situation in which he is working. Such obstacles to effective working are true in professional as well as business situations. Beginning teachers show concern for this matter of routine and policy as they point to various matters on which they should like specific help in becoming adjusted to their new positions. One teacher of a year's experience, for example, says that her job would have been materially easier if she had only known the procedure for sending books from one building to another. Another says that she had no guidance in obtaining supplies and books. A new teacher of physical education lists this as one of her particular areas of needed guidance—in understanding, she says, "the routine red

tape of the school so that it will not take time from my teaching."

Beginning high school teachers say that early they should like help in setting up a home room, knowledge of how courses are scheduled, length of semesters, the extent of extra-curricular activities, an acquaintance with the physical aspects of the school building, and the general policies of specific departments.

We've Had Some Experience

From these statements of need by young people who are beginning their teaching of children in our schools this fall, we turn to the testimonies of some who have taught for a limited period of time as beginning or "emergency" teachers. Their comments, too, indicate the problems on which they needed and still need guidance. They parallel, in many instances, the statements of those just beginning. It is interesting, however, to see how their important needs were met by those responsible for their guidance in the improvement of learning for children.

There are those who feel that their needs definitely were not met. One notes, in the following statements, the implication by the teachers that needs might have been more adequately met if closer guidance had been available to them.

☐ As a beginning teacher I feel I could have been greatly helped by closer supervision. Even though the rural primary supervisor was helpful and most cooperative, her visits were so infrequent—due to the large territory she had to cover—that I felt her help was not enough. If at intervals of two weeks or so someone could come in and observe the teaching of the beginning teacher, with the purpose in

mind of criticizing favorably and unfavorably and talking over the problems of the teacher, many difficulties would be eliminated.

Another thing which would be helpful would be access to professional books and magazines which the teacher herself would not have to purchase but would be available when needed.

☐ In September, 1946, I had my first regular teaching job in twenty-five years. All the textbooks were strangers to me. I had never heard of a basal series. Very brief lesson plans were left. Nearly all the children were reading at the frustration level. I had no modern knowledge of teaching reading. I made a personal call on a teacher of reading at the State Teachers College for advice. She told me to start the children at a level or two below what they were reading; read aloud to them often from their own books, overdramatizing the stories so that they might get the idea of expression in good oral reading. My supervisor heartily approved of the idea. But outside of this, I got little help. When I asked any of the other teachers in the other one-room rural schools how they tackled a lesson, they'd answer, "Just do the best you can with the books you've got."

Others point out those experiences which were of most aid to them in adjusting to the teaching situation—guidance in finding materials; help in understanding children; opportunity to see demonstration lessons; aid in planning learning experiences; frequent visits and consultation with supervisors, principals, and other teachers; opportunities to know parents; pointers on desirable teaching procedures; in-service meetings; and workshops. And throughout them all one sees the importance of good working relationships between teachers, principals, community members, and all adults in the professional situation.

¶ I am an emergency teacher. When I came back to "help out" I dreaded teaching social studies. I loathed geography textbooks ten or more years behind the times. I had heard so much about reading readiness and remedial reading that I even dreaded teaching reading. Science scared me, too, and all in all I realized I needed help. Where could I get it?

To my great surprise and satisfaction I discovered social studies now covered the world field with great stress on understanding world neighbors. Through audio-visual aids, multiple texts, and resource materials I soon found social studies the thing I wanted most to teach. The same was true of reading. There were many, many books to be used for pleasure reading and research graded to fit each child's needs.

I received much valuable help from consultants in social studies, arithmetic, language arts, and science, who came to us for Saturday conferences. The building principal was a forward-looking person who helped plan with the children and me ways in which we could practice community citizenship rights and responsibilities.

¶ When I received my first teaching assignment—that of first and second grades—just two years ago I was frightened. Frightened because I had had no experience whatsoever in observing or working with second grade children or in a "combination" room. I felt insecure, inadequate, and incompetent. How shall I teach arithmetic—spelling? What are the needs, the interests, the attitudes of second grade children? What kind of program will I have in a "combination" room? In short, those questions formulated my immediate needs.

One of the greatest helps in meeting my needs was the opportunity given to me to observe a second grade in another school at work for half a day. Although I was more aware of my weaknesses after that

half day, I went back to my school with new enthusiasm, new ideas, and new methods, all of which naturally were not successful or suitable in my own room—but many of which helped me in setting up a more smoothly running program—one which included the children's plans as much as mine.

Another great help to me was the sincere understanding on the part of my supervisor, principal, and some of my co-workers who remembered their own feelings of inadequateness their first year. This created an atmosphere in which I felt free to seek advice and help from them, free from fear of criticism or seeming ignorance. Nothing is of any more help than a word of encouragement or praise which gives the new teacher new heights of enthusiasm for better teaching and greater diligence.

In-service meetings on science, reading, pupil-planning, grade problems, and reports to parents helped to answer immediate questions and to further my interest and information.

These, then, are the problems which new teachers voice—

Give us guidance in what to do about discipline.

Help us to know children and provide for their individual and group needs.

Show us how the teaching-learning situation may be more effective.

Help us to locate materials of instruction.

Give us leads in working with other adults.

Tell us about the routines.

It may well be assumed that in-service programs based on such suggestions will do much to help beginning teachers grow on the job.

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