

The Changing World

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WHAT MAKES FOR HIGH TEACHER MORALE?

CONFRONTED, as we are, by a crisis situation in which an approximate one-third of the public school teachers have "deserted" their profession, it behooves us to ask "why?" Thanks to newspaper editors, radio comics, public spirited advertisers, and to the efforts of the organized profession itself, nearly everybody today realizes that teaching is a critically underpaid occupation.

That salary is undoubtedly *the* most crucial factor in teacher morale, I have little doubt. A public that desires a decently adequate education for its children must remedy this situation, and that very quickly.

But salary considerations by no means constitute the sole ingredient of high teacher morale; and since so many of these other components lie largely if not entirely within the control of the profession itself, it is important that they be identified.

Some knowledge of what these other ingredients probably are is afforded by a recently (1947) concluded study of teacher morale in a mid-western city of about 60,000 population. This study was completely anonymous in character and involved virtually every classroom teacher in the system.

Of the nearly 400 teachers in this study, slightly over half said that their morale was "high" or "very high." These we shall refer to as the "high morale" group. Conversely, about one-tenth rated their morale as "low" or "very low." These we shall call the "low morale" group. The remainder reported that their morale was "so-so"—i.e., neither particularly high nor low. These we shall leave out of account in the paragraphs that follow.

Only a few of the findings can be noted here. The ones to which we shall call attention are those associated with situations over which supervisors and principals have a large measure of control.

Eight out of every ten teachers in the high morale group felt that they were "one of the gang" in their respective faculties—that they were "wanted" and "counted for something." Conversely, over half of the low morale aggregation either said that they definitely did not "belong" in this sense, or expressed doubts on this score.

Two out of every three of the high morale teachers said that they were sufficiently consulted regarding school policies which affected them. Three-fifths of the low morale group either reported that they were never so consulted, or said that this was done no oftener than half the time.

Well over four out of every five persons in the high morale category said that they were definitely satisfied with the way their supervisors treated them. Two-fifths of the low morale teachers indicated either very substantial or complete dissatisfaction in this regard.

Of the high morale group, eight out of ten reported that they felt completely free to employ the teaching methods and materials they believed to be most fruitful. Two-fifths of the other group said that they were under either "some" or a "considerable" number of restrictions in these respects.

Being obliged to spend their own money for teaching materials seems not to sit well with teachers. About four times as great a proportion of the high morale group said that they never had to do so. Twice as

many, relatively, of the low morale teachers said that they often felt obliged to spend their own money for such materials.

Percentagewise, the number of high morale teachers who felt that they were getting all the help they needed from their supervisors was seven times that of the low morale persons who so reported. Proportionately, well over twice as many of the latter group said that very little of this needed assistance was being received.

More than twice as great a proportion of the high morale aggregation said they were getting all the help from the administration that they needed in reference to disciplinary problems. Relatively, nearly three times as many of the other group complained that very little of this needed help was forthcoming.

A very much greater proportion of the high morale teachers felt that the total work load was equitably divided in their respective schools, and vice versa. Fractionally, twice as many of the low morale group said that they were among the most heavily worked teachers in their buildings.

Relatively, three times as many of the low morale persons reported that they could seldom find time enough to prepare for their teaching. Two out of every three teachers in the high morale group said that they could usually or always find sufficient time to do so—a response given by far less than half of those who placed themselves in the low morale category.

Well over half again as many of the low morale group said that they knew but half or fewer of their pupils as well as they should. A much larger proportion of the high morale teachers felt that they thus knew most or all of their pupils. Percentagewise, about twice as many of

the high morale group said that they were able to give their pupils the help they needed in resolving their personal problems.

Twice as great a proportion of the low morale teachers reported that there were "several things" that their pupils should be learning now which their schools did not offer. A far greater relative number of the high morale group said that the curricula of their schools were reasonably adequate in this regard.

Principals and supervisors certainly have much to do with making a teacher feel that he either does or does not "belong." Operating as they do at the policy level, they are in a position to see to it that teachers are either brought into or excluded from this process. They can treat teachers either considerately and decently, or the opposite. They may grant freedom or impose restrictions in reference to teaching methods and materials. They can either see to it that the needed teaching materials are supplied, or leave the teacher to shift for himself. They can either give or withhold the supervisory and other "front office" help that teachers need. They can apportion the work load either fairly or inequitably. They can so arrange schedules that teachers either do or do not have adequate time to prepare. They can make it either easier or more difficult for teachers really to know their pupils. They can either assist or hinder the teacher who is desirous of helping his pupils resolve their personal perplexities. And they can work either for or against the evolution of a curriculum geared to the needs of children and youth. They can, in short, do much to make either better or worse the situations which seem so linked to teacher morale.



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