

The Importance of People

Dorothy J Hayes

THE NEED TO BE NEEDED

DEAR MARY: Two things happened recently in one of my classes (a class in Human Development) that I know will interest you.

In the first instance, we had been discussing the necessity for having our classroom staffed with teachers who have understanding and concern for the *feelings* of children. One of the students made this comment: "Don't you think you're too idealistic, Mrs. Hayes? All the way through elementary school and high school I never had a teacher who seemed to care anything about the things that were happening to me personally."

As he talked I kept thinking, "This boy's experience must be unique. How he has been cheated! He feels he has not had even one understanding teacher." Then, as if he were reading my thoughts, he went on: "And I'll wager that if you ask other members of the class you'll see that there are others who have had the same experience. Aren't teachers there to teach anyway? Why do we have to worry about their having understanding of individuals?"

And, Mary, it was shocking to me to see how many hands went up to corroborate his statement! These students who have either never had or think they have never had an understanding teacher are college students who are in training to become teachers.

Several questions come to my mind: Are their present feelings of lack of concern for understanding, or, as in some cases, resentment against their teachers, likely to prevent the development of understanding of the needs of children? Have these young people already been so conditioned that the teacher training program comes too late in their lives to

affect their own attitudes? Can the program provide the kind of therapy that will enable teachers in training to understand the possible causes of their attitudes and help them to reeducate their feelings?

A partial answer to my questions came from another of the students a few weeks later. We were discussing "Basic Human Needs" and this is the comment, as nearly as I can remember it, of one of the veteran students:

"I think the most basic of the Basic Human Needs is the need to feel that as a person you are contributing something to society—that what you are doing is important and worthwhile to other human beings. Without this feeling I believe life is purposeless. While I was in the Air Force I felt needed. I felt as if the welfare of others was dependent on me—I felt a part of a much larger whole.

"But for a long time after I came out of the service this feeling was gone. I felt completely lost—the things I did seemed pointless and un-needed, and for a time I felt I would have to go back into service to render a service that was really needed. Even when I decided to come to this college, I wasn't sure I wanted to become a teacher. I wasn't sure what abilities a teacher in training had to acquire, and I was skeptical whether I could acquire them—whatever they were.

"During this training program something has been happening to my feelings—I already feel that the teaching profession may supply the feeling of worthwhileness for which I have been searching. From the classroom observations I have made I am beginning to see how important teachers are in the personality development of the child. I am beginning to see that everything the teacher does and

says in some way affects the child; I see that the teacher has within her grasp the opportunity to contribute markedly toward helping the child develop a concept of himself as an important and needed person.

"With my growing awareness of the way the teacher can help meet (or can unknowingly block) the emotional needs of children, there has come an increased appreciation of teaching. For me, personally, there has come a feeling of satisfaction that I have found the right profession; my life is again taking on meaning and purpose."

That's what we have to help more young people attain, Mary. We not only need to recruit into the teacher training institutions a large number of capable young men and women, but we have to explore the kinds of learning experiences that will give them insights into the feelings of children and into the satisfactions that can come with teaching. For those who haven't had satisfying experiences in their own educational backgrounds (too often in sub-

ject matter rather than child-centered programs), we have to provide opportunity for these teachers-to-be to see why those experiences were not satisfying—and, further, we have to help them work through to feelings of inner-satisfaction so that they won't constantly revert to the kind of teacher-pupil relationships they knew as children. In order to increase their own awareness of children's reactions and the meanings behind them, we need to capitalize on the feelings they have bottled up within themselves. What a challenge to increase students' "inner-standing" of children!

Dorothy

P. S. I still like the use of the term *inner-standing*—defined in my last letter somewhat as follows: being able to put yourself so completely into another person's frame of reference that you temporarily lose your own perspective and feel the reactions of the other person to the world as he sees it.

A Graduate Program for Leaders

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range for them through the Curriculum Center at the University. He has a good opportunity to serve as a leader or chairman in conferences and workshops sponsored by the University or the New England Regional ASCD. He may also learn more about the group process by serving as an observer in a discussion group in these conferences. He may participate in school surveys and study communities first hand, contacting community organizations and spending time working with them. He may obtain experience in talking to community groups and writing for professional journals. He makes independent studies, gathering and interpreting

data, and defends a point of view before groups of graduate students and faculty.

These are but a few of the activities of the candidate in a newly organized program of doctoral study. They are intended to supplement the courses, the dissertation, and the examinations. Some of them are included within courses that are taught in such a manner that the student may participate in cooperative planning and evaluation. The doctoral program at the University of Connecticut is a flexible one that is planned by a committee of advisers, as members of the Graduate School, and the candidate—to meet *his* needs.

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