

# The Importance of People

Dorothy J. Hayes

## CREATIVE LEADERSHIP: PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

DEAR MARY: I have been thinking about our recent correspondence concerning "Teachers in Transition"<sup>1</sup> and particularly about some of your comments. Aren't we having fun "letting off steam" and thinking we can solve many of the educational problems? But, seriously, Mary, I do agree with you that in addition to exploring ways of helping teachers "who are in transition" build a philosophy of education that is consistent with the best we know about the way children learn, we need also to explore ways of helping teachers who have built (or who are in the process of building) such a philosophy to hang on to it?

Recently I overheard two teachers discussing their respective school situations. One of them said, "Teaching in our school is a thrilling and challenging experience. I have a feeling that as a staff we are continually growing in our understanding of children. I think the clue to it all lies in our principal. Although he doesn't stress titles, it is not hard for us to remember how to spell the end of his title—'pal.'

"He seems to have confidence in us and makes us feel that we have the ability to find ways of meeting children's needs. Sometimes I suspect that we often think we are getting him to let us experiment with some 'new idea' when all the while he had the idea long before we did but was smart enough to wait until we were ready to think it was our idea and ask to have it put into practice. Even when the staff differs with him, individually or as a group, he doesn't seem to mind—and it's seldom hard to settle the differences because we have mutual respect and con-

sideration. No seminar course that I have ever taken has been quite as exciting as some of our staff meetings. We often are oblivious to the passage of time; a few times a meeting that started with tea right after school has extended through the dinner hour into the evening."

The other teacher said, "Well, I hope you know how lucky you are. I'm frankly confused about our principal. It's not that he doesn't believe in the principles underlying modern education. He talks about consideration for the feelings of children and about the necessity for providing creative opportunities as an integral part of the total school program. But the staff doesn't seem to have much fun trying to carry out his suggestions. We ask for equipment; he makes promises that aren't kept or he informs us that our requests are ridiculous. He keeps berating us for not providing a better program for children; and half the time I simply don't feel capable of providing one more thing than I do. How I wish that just a few times he could be pleased with something we are doing. I'm willing to take suggestions, but I don't like somebody getting mad at me on the slightest provocation and shouting and pounding on the table.

"I used to like the things he said about the fundamental needs of human beings and how we must all work together in our school, but I'm beginning to wonder why he doesn't practice what he preaches. I've often wondered what was the matter with teachers who were so sensitive as to cry when they were criticized, for many tears have been shed in our teachers' room after the teacher has had 'a talk' with the principal. I have a greater understanding of those teachers now because many

<sup>1</sup> See "The Importance of People" *Educational Leadership*, January, 1949.

things have come up during the past few days which have been called to my attention in no uncertain terms, and I could hardly keep back the tears until I got to the teachers' room.

"Why does he ask us for suggestions and then get so bothered when we tell him frankly how we feel? I think he feels we are criticizing his administration of *his* school. Sometimes, too, he's so overly sweet to me it's sickening. We're coming to expect sweetness after an outburst."

Mary, I think the contrast in the human relationships in the schools described by these two teachers and the second teacher's comment about the importance of having a principal "practice what he preaches" point up the generalization we both have been hesitant to make—that some school administrators not only do not help but may even retard the efforts of teachers who are trying to do a creative job with boys and girls. Despite the present-day emphasis on "mental health in the classroom," administrators may not agree that acceptance of individuals and varied opportunity for creativeness are foundations of good mental health. Even if they think this is important for children, they may not agree that teachers do their best at doing these things when they themselves feel accepted as individuals and feel capable of creating something! Or they may say, "Well, those teachers should find satisfaction in their job; I'm not going to praise them; con-

tinually for everything they do. By gad, it's about time they grew up!"

An inconsistent administrator is likely to have uneasy feelings, too, because he may have either conscious or unconscious recognition of his inadequacy to carry through something in which he really believes. Instead of becoming more aware of the causes for the teachers' feelings of frustration, he may be forced into more and more aggressive behavior by "feeling threatened" because the staff fails to give him the respect he feels is due him. He may have a concept of himself as a truly creative leader but is prevented from living up to this concept by his own relationships with the staff.

Do I sound antagonistic to administrators? Would I be willing to take over the hard job of keeping a school running efficiently? Would I suggest an "administratorless" school? Not a bit of it. We need administrators like the one the first teacher described. What I am suggesting is that administrators be trained as we are trying to train teachers today (both before and on the job) to be concerned with feelings, to know that you do not become more capable by being made to feel less capable, and to have a functional concept of the role of human relationships in learning. I am suggesting that their training include an understanding of the emotional climate in which creativity is most likely to flourish.

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