

## Educators Have the Data

If education cannot interpret the needs of all children, who can? The school sees children as they come daily from their homes. It sees the effects of rest or fatigue, good or poor nutrition, emotional strain or relaxed exuberant spirit in children. The school hears accounts of children's everyday activities, their interests, their likes and dislikes. It hears about their parents and friends. The school is the repository of most of the information about children which they themselves divulge unthinkingly. Because it is information given gratui-

tously, the school has an obligation to treat it scientifically, and not personally. Teachers have a wealth of crucial data at hand about children.

## Can They Use It?

If the school can reach its maturity in interpreting children's needs it will assume a role in which other professions will have confidence. Educators seem to be going in this direction slowly but they do need to feel the pulse of modern life, to know what young persons are experiencing, and to be realistic in their relationships with adults.

# *Wanted: Mentally Healthy Teachers—*

C. R. McRAE

It is imperative, certainly, that the teacher of children—or the teacher of teachers—be actively concerned with the mental health of children and youth. Of equal importance is an objective assessment of his own personality as a teacher and as a person. In this third of a series of articles from fellow educators in other countries, C. R. McRae, professor of education, University of Sydney, discusses likenesses and differences in the work of teachers in Australia and in the United States and draws conclusions concerning their mental health applicable on both sides of the Pacific. Mr. McRae was a member of the staff of the UNESCO Seminar on The Education and Training of Teachers held in England in 1948.

SOME YEARS AGO W. C. Trow contributed to *The Journal of Educational Sociology* an article entitled "A Child Who Feared Teachers." This was a long-term study, from first grade to adult life, of a girl's social and educational development. The story took the girl through primary, secondary, and college education to responsibility

for a one-teacher school. What the reader saw was a shy and sensitive child made hesitant, nervous, and finally incompetent by a succession of rebuffs from unsuitable and unsympathetic teachers.

No doubt that girl was more than ordinarily unfortunate. Nevertheless, her story illustrated, in extreme form,

the harm that may be done when unstable people are in charge of classrooms. It is highly important, for the sake of boys and girls, that teachers should be both proud of their work and happy in it.

### Contrasts Across the Pacific

The most systematic study I have seen of the factors affecting the mental health of teachers is in an issue of the *Research Bulletin* of the NEA on "The Status of the Teaching Profession." It may be interesting to discuss a few of the factors as they affect Australian teachers. The discussion will reveal both differences and similarities between conditions here and those in the United States.

First, let us notice briefly some differences. Among factors contributing to personal maladjustment, the NEA *Research Bulletin* lists low salaries, insecurity of tenure, and restrictions on out-of-school activities. It would appear that these apply much less to Australians than to some Americans at least. In these parts, rewards for educators are by no means princely, and the professional organizations are pressing strongly for their improvement. However, it seems clear that no Australian teachers are subject to the financial worry and strain which harass their counterparts in some of the less prosperous American states. Certainly teachers hereabouts are not worried by insecurity of tenure; in some cases, indeed, their tenure seems altogether too secure. And Australian teachers, responsible only to the centralized authority in the capital city of their state, know nothing of the galling restrictions on personal freedom which, if we can be-

lieve what we read, may be very distressing to Americans in rural areas and small towns.

### A Look at Common Problems

However, Australians do not escape all the restrictions and other disadvantages which conduce to worry, annoyance, and dissatisfaction in the minds of many American teachers. Probably even more than their American brothers (or should I say "sisters"?) they suffer frustration through unwieldy classes and lack of essential equipment. It is most discouraging to have good educational ideas, to leave college with a mind full of splendid plans, only to be prevented by conditions of work—bad buildings, heavy class loads, lack of books and materials—from putting the ideas into operation.

Again, over-pressure of routine work affects Australian teachers no less. True, many a man in the street believes that the teacher's life is easy. He cites the short official hours, no work on Saturdays, the long vacations. And let it be confessed that some teachers here, as perhaps even in the United States, do take the job easily. But taken seriously, as by most teachers, it is hard work. There is need of unremitting attention and unflagging enthusiasm all through the school day; there is a multiplicity of tasks to be done out of school hours. Any honest teacher really needs those holidays.

### Leadership for Mental Health

Another factor which operates on both sides of the Pacific is that of inept administration and supervision. Some school principals, for example, are dictatorial and arbitrary in the direction of

work. Jealous of their authority, they fail to delegate responsibility. They interfere unduly with teachers, refusing to allow them to do their own thinking. The principal's job is to see that things are done, not to attempt the impossible feat of doing everything himself. His task can be difficult sometimes, as he sees important work botched or cherished projects unnecessarily delayed. The principal is sorely tempted to say, "Look, Miss So-and-So. Here is a plan; here is a program. Work that!" What he should do, rather, is ever so patiently to provide encouragement and stimulation, helping and allowing teachers to shoulder responsibility.

Back in 1933 there was an article in the *English Journal of Education* on "The Gentle Art of Headmastering," in which the author drew a splendid picture of the dictator principal. "Like some alarming and over-poweringly efficient spider he sits in the middle of a web of type-written notices, timetables, and academic regulations. 'L'école, c'est moi,' he might well growl, if this mass of detail ever gave him time

to adapt an epigram. He is invariably busy, for he makes everything depend directly on himself . . . He is Head indeed, though not necessarily Heart, and still less Soul. Yet the good school, like the good man, requires a subtle blend of all three, and the weakness of these all-pervading personalities is that their limitations pervade no less than their virtues . . . They would make magnificent captains of industry, but you do not want a Morris-Cowley type of education."

A good principal, in short, knows how to delegate. He passes on authority, sees that all is set fair, then steps aside, giving guidance when it becomes necessary, and a measure of praise when praise is due. The praise, by the way, can be, very frequently, rather more important than the guidance.



Courtesy Child Care Center, Springfield, Mass.

*There's fun in teaching for the mentally healthy*

Of course, a principal may make the error precisely opposite to that of being too autocratic. That is to say, his directive effort may be altogether too feeble, or even absent. Obviously there can be under-direction of a school. A principal can be too passive, letting things go so long as they go unobtrusively. I know several administrators who are perfectly satisfied that all is well, provided they do not hear about it. Clearly such an attitude in a school principal is good neither for the school nor for the mental health of the teachers on the staff.

### Are Teachers People?

Still another factor which makes teaching less attractive than it might otherwise be is a certain aloofness on the part of the general public, a tendency to regard teachers as not quite human. I wonder whether American teachers, away on holidays, ever conceal their vocation. Certainly I have heard Australians, returning from a vacation, complain that "the place was full of teachers." And all of us have heard the gibe—"You can always tell a teacher." "Yes, but you can't tell him much."

That sort of attitude, part suspicious, part jealous, part patronizing, is disappearing, but a little of it remains. One good result of wars is that they raise the popular judgment of teachers, who make such good officers. In England, during World War II, both the teachers who stayed on the job and those who joined the services performed so magnificently that the whole profession enjoyed a tremendous lift in public esteem. Though the opportunities were not as dramatic as in England, something similar happened in Australia.

### The Fun in Teaching

We have examined briefly some elements in the teaching situation which are neither attractive nor conducive to mental health. Like those in other countries, Australian teachers grumble, and quite rightly, about certain aspects of their work. But very few of them abandon it for other vocations. There is, then, another side to the story, as indeed every teacher worth his salt knows full well.

Many features of the job help to keep any real teacher happy and mentally healthy. His work is socially useful, and if there is anything in Adler's therapy, to have socially useful work is the surest preserver of sanity. There need be nothing monotonous about it. On the contrary, it presents a continuous series of challenging new problems. Done properly, it is never soul-deadening or drearily repetitive. There is no better fun than to see boys and girls successfully overcoming their difficulties. Though some bad buildings remain, the conditions of work are relatively pleasant. The teacher has the joy of daily association with the buoyancy and enthusiasm of youth.

Compare our work, in that last respect, with the work of the average physician or lawyer. Recently, a distinguished and successful surgeon was wishing to me that he had a job like mine, creative work associated with youth and health. Not long since, a prosperous lawyer came to me inquiring how he could secure training as a teacher, and so escape from a drudgery of which he was sick and tired to work which he could regard as worthwhile. All real teachers can easily appreciate

the point of view of those two men.

Teaching, let me repeat, is work to be done proudly. My own bitter quarrel with some teachers is that they neither take nor show a proper pride, thus doing injury both to their pupils and to their own mental health. That is part of what I meant when I wrote that the tenure of some teachers seems altogether too secure.

#### **Insurance for Satisfaction**

To sum up, there are factors in the teaching situation which are not conducive to happiness and mental health. One thing we should do is to admit to training only such young people as show promise of developing a cheerful, stable, and resilient personality. As for what teachers in service can do for themselves, there are several things.

They can work through their own organization for the removal of all unnecessary restrictions. They should take proper care of their physical health, always an important basis for mental health. They should take full advantage of the recreational facilities of the community in which they work. To play a regular game is a splendid safeguard of sanity. There is something in the

argument that nervous illness comes from doing things three times—in fearful anticipation, in fact, and in useless retrospect. Thoroughly healthy attention is attention to the present situation. To play a game compels such healthy attention; you must “keep your eye on the ball.”

Another thing teachers can do is to plan carefully their daily tasks, and their lives, setting standards which are high, but not too high. Much failure and much unhappiness are due simply to failure to plan.

Finally, we should remember that it is almost impossible to be worried into ill health or unhappiness if we identify ourselves with the welfare of others. Teaching offers incomparable opportunities for such identification. I know some nervous, worried, unstable teachers who are thorough nuisances to themselves and the pupils whom they teach. For them, the work of teaching is a source of mental ill health. But I know ever so many others who really like their job, who are wrapped up in it, and who think not so much about themselves as about the children in their charge. These are quite the sanest people I know.

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