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 gratuitously, 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 un-
stable people are in charge of class-
rooms. 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 con-
ditions here and those in the United
States.

First, let us notice briefly some differ-
ences. Among factors contributing to
personal maladjustment, the NEA Re-
search Bulletin lists low salaries, inse-
curity of tenure, and restrictions on out-
of-school activities. It would appear
that these apply much less to Austral-
ians than to some Americans at least.

In these parts, rewards for educators
are by no means princely, and the pro-
fessional organizations are pressing
strongly for their improvement. How-
ever, it seems clear that no Australian
teachers are subject to the financial
worry and strain which harass their
counterparts in some of the less pros-
erous American states. Certainly
teachers hereabouts are not worried by
insecurity of tenure; in some cases, in-
deed, their tenure seems altogether too
secure. And Australian teachers, respon-
sible 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 dis-
tressing to Americans in rural areas and
small towns.

A Look at Common Problems

However, Australians do not escape
all the restrictions and other disadvant-
ages which conduce to worry, annoy-
ance, and dissatisfaction in the minds
of many American teachers. Probably
even more than their American broth-
ers (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 Satur-
days, 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 dic-
tatorial 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.
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 alto-
gether too secure.

Insurance for Satisfaction

To sum up, there are factors in the
teaching situation which are not con-
ducive 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 cheer-
ful, 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 com-
munity 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 fear-
ful anticipation, in fact, and in useless
retrospect. Thoroughly healthy atten-
tion 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 oppor-
tunities for such identification. I know
some nervous, worried, unstable teachers
who are thorough nuisances to them-
selves 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 peo-
ple I know.