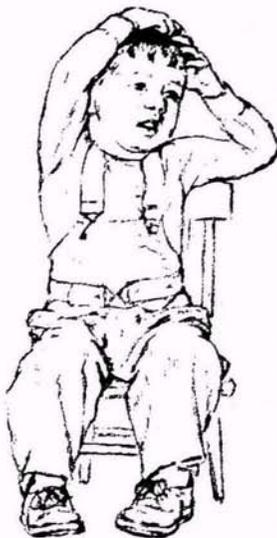


Can teachers alone really meet the needs of children and youth? Roma Gans, professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, asks this question and comes up with the suggestion that teachers must have the active cooperation of professional workers from other specialized fields—health, welfare, medicine—in carrying out their responsibilities.

"GIVE ME A GOOD TEACHER and youngsters will have a profitable school experience, no matter what the condition of the building, the equipment, the textbooks, the leadership." This statement was true years ago when the main purpose of education was to get pupils to master the basic skills and a defined body of facts. It is even more true today, and those of us who agree with it would probably agree on what abilities contribute to good teaching.

## Establishing Rapport with Children

High in the scale of important abilities in good teaching is that complex, subtle ability to establish good personal relationships with youngsters. It was evidently this power which inspired Thomas Wolfe to write of his teacher, Mrs. J. M. Roberts, that she "exercised an influence that is inestimable on almost every particular of my



life and thought," and that made him consider the relationship of a teacher to pupils "just below the relation of a mother to a son."

Good personal relationships between teachers and pupils perhaps were always taken for granted. Now, however, serious study is given to this important matter by educators, pediatricians, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and other specialists whose work touches upon the needs of children and youth. And fortunately, as we face this important area of study, members from the fields of health, education, and welfare are discovering one another and are learning to share information and to work together. Examples of such sharing of information are to be seen in the literature. The article by Dr. Mabel Ross, a psychiatrist, in the May issue of *Educational Leadership*<sup>1</sup> is a good example; another is the book for children, *A Baby Is Born: How Life Begins*,<sup>2</sup> by Dr. Milton I. Levine, a pediatrician, and Jean H. Seligmann, a nursery school teacher.

It is only natural that some with a flare for pat phrases, seize upon such expressions as "be democratic" and

<sup>1</sup> *Educational Leadership*, May, 1949. Vol. VI, No. 8, ASCD, NEA.

<sup>2</sup> Levine, Milton I. and Seligmann, Jean H., *A Baby Is Born: How Life Begins*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1949.

"have good group processes" and, without further thought, cruise on in practice pretty much as before. The majority of teachers, however, are aware of the fact that human personality has many facets and that profound study is needed to guide a teacher in maintaining good relationships in teaching. They also realize what genuine personal satisfaction each teacher can achieve and what new heights the profession of teaching can reach through serious and effective efforts in this direction. Children and youth will, of course, grow in skills and knowledge. But they will also be guided in living happily with themselves while living constructively with others. What a promise for today's rising generations!

#### A Challenging Job

But what a job! To begin with, no two children are alike, as every one acknowledges. But all too often we forget this means that a teacher must react to as many personalities, each with his varying background and varying moods, as he has pupils. To react intelligently is to know a child in terms of what motives propel him, what deep yearnings are unmet, and what strong feelings of adequacy and inadequacy are aroused by certain situations. Furthermore, a teacher must understand what he can do to help each youngster meet all the problems of today with the personal satisfaction that assures him of a growing tomorrow.

#### Behavior Is Caused

Guiding the day by day growth of a youngster, therefore, demands getting below the surface of the overt and the more obvious behavior to the real

causes. Here is where the alert teacher comes to realize how enormous is his responsibility. Many a competent teacher realized, even before Robinson<sup>3</sup> reported her findings on children's failure in reading, that conditions in the home may so upset children that they come to school unfit to tackle any work. Some, too, recognized that school efforts were deflected by the powerful socio-economic class influences on elementary school children and more obviously on youth as has been clearly described by Stendler<sup>4</sup> and Hollingshead<sup>5</sup> in their recent significant studies.



In other words, the sensitive and observant teacher discovered that the child is a whole person and that he is affected by all aspects of his environment. Anyone who aims to help him must know much about the world in which he lives, how this world affects him, and how he tries to get along in it. Then such pat phrases as "meeting the needs of the whole child" and "the

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, Helen M., *Why Pupils Fail in Reading*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Stendler, Celia B., *Children of Brasstown*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 1949.

<sup>5</sup> Hollingshead, August B., *Elmtown's Youth*. New York: Wiley, 1949.

child interacts with his environment” take on more meaning.

### Planning to Meet Children’s Needs

*The full meaning, however, develops as a teacher attempts to follow up the understanding of a pupil’s needs with appropriate plans for meeting them.* At this follow-up stage, new problems arise. At a recent meeting, teachers were criticized for making careful studies of children’s needs and then failing to use these studies in their subsequent work. The following reports from interviews with teachers may throw some light on why teachers often seem to fail to use knowledge acquired from careful studies of pupils.

#### *Eddie can’t study*

► Miss M. teaches a fourth grade in a northern state. Her school is in a good neighborhood. She made a visit to the home of each of her thirty-three pupils, started a file of information concerning each one, planned many informal contacts with children individually and in small groups, and in a few months felt close to the youngsters and knew each one rather personally. “But then my worries began,” she continued. “What could I do about Eddie whose mother and father were not getting along and Eddie never knew when he went home whether his mother had gone away again or not. Eddie tried to get interested in work but he really is so afraid his mother will leave one of these days and never return that nothing in school really interests him.” Then Miss M. continued “What can I do, in addition to trying my best to help him find some challenging experiences at school? Perhaps some one could help his father and mother, but I would hardly know where to begin on that job.”

Exactly. Eddie’s problem stems from a family situation in which a family case

worker, not a teacher, is the specialist needed. Yet, Miss M. carries a feeling of concern and a sense of unmet responsibility because she has accepted completely the theory that a child’s needs must be met. This has been the motif of the song in college courses she has recently taken, and also the theme in much of her professional reading.

#### *Educational philosophy needs testing in action*

► The chief concern of Miss McL. comes from a different problem. She is a member of a curriculum planning committee for the primary grades. They have been at work for over three years on curriculum revision. The committee, with the help and final approval of all the primary teachers and principals, wrote a statement of their philosophy for their work with young children which included this point: “Each child will be placed in an age group best suited to his social needs. Failure in a grade because of low achievement is not consistent with our philosophy.” However, each year standard tests in reading are given and youngsters in the first grade who make zero scores, even if, according to the teacher, they made observable growth in beginning reading, are retained in the first grade. “We call it ‘adjustment’ not failure,” said Miss McL., “yet parents, children, and even we teachers realize it is failure and a denial of what we know is best for these young children.”

Here we see illustrated a common shortcoming in programs of curriculum improvement—the inability to slough off old practices when they are no longer appropriate to a considered concept of the needs of pupils. Again and again teachers find themselves in situations similar to Miss McL.’s when they attempt to put into practice what they and their co-workers have accepted verbally.

### *Whose problem is it?*

► The chief concern of Mr. V. struck a different note. Mr. V. taught Harry in seventh grade social studies. Harry was quick, eager, bright, and quite popular with his classmates. His record, however, was filled with escapades, none serious, yet when summed up they seemed serious to Mr. V. Harry would be on good behavior for weeks; then for no apparent reason he would take something and sell it—a bicycle, leather jacket, tire gauge, and last—a typewriter from the principal's office.

Mr. V. knew that Harry needed help, not of a punitive kind, but of an expert counseling variety. Yet there was no one in the school or the community equipped to offer assistance. Mr. V.'s comment, "He passed social studies, yet here I am worrying over what's going to happen to that kid," gives one pause.

### *Children who come to school hungry*

► Then there are all those teachers in our poorest neighborhoods trying to teach children who come to school hungry and grow wearier and more listless as the day goes on. In spite of the availability of lunch through the federal lunch program, many schools do not serve mid-day meals and a large number of youngsters are physically waning and coming to school daily unfit to learn. These conditions are prevalent in many Negro schools of the South.

In one such school, the parents and teachers studied what facilities were needed to provide a hot lunch daily and presented a request to the board of education that these needs be met. The board summoned the principal and reminded him that he was not to permit his community "to get out of hand like this." No lunch has been provided to date.

### WHY THE DILEMMA?

Instance after instance might be presented to show how slum housing, exploiting employers, disturbed parents, and careless authorities jeopardize a

child's right to decent conditions for living and learning. And in almost every such instance there is a teacher who is aware of the child's need but is almost completely unable to cope with the factors which create the problems for the child.

Why this dilemma? Do we actually mean that a teacher must somehow meet the mental, physical, social, and emotional needs of each child? Or do we fail to appreciate the problem this poses for the teacher because we are unaware of the realities? Or are we proceeding by stages, first accepting the logic of the integrated personality and the need to deal with all phases of personality growth, then proceeding to change our practices to accommodate our broader vision—but slowly?

To many of our most professional teachers these are not rhetorical questions. A teacher is in the key position to test out educational theory. All too often we have belittled the teacher's plea, "Please be practical." Spelled out, the teacher might be saying to her supervisor or principal, "Advocate only what you are willing to act upon." Many simple-sounding ideas become very complex when they are tested out in the realities of a classroom too full of children working together in days too crowded for time.

### The "Introverted" Curriculum

The dilemma, if there is one—and from sensitive and alert teachers there comes evidence that there is—may be an outcome of two common causes. The first is our "introverted" curriculum. For too long we have paid little or no attention to the family, the neighborhood, and broader community

from which education should have drawn its direction and much of its content. For years we taught children from Maine to New Mexico, from farm to city, and from decade to decade practically the same content with only minor variations. Education became merely schooling. In war or peace, winter or spring, plenty or depression, we "kept school" in quite the same fashion. The environment which exerted such powerful influence on the child was considered—but to be sealed off, not to be used. "Tend to your lessons" was the professional expression which meant "Keep your blinders on lest you deal with something outside of school."

Examples of abstract learning which ignore the child's environment are easy to call to mind. A most conspicuous one in recent years is the common attempt to educate for better understanding of racial, religious, and ethnic groups by studying about people via books—not by meeting them, working with them, and building genuine bonds of understanding and personal concern.

This in-school engrossment is reflected in the lack of social participation by teachers and educators in general. Or rather, it might be more accurate to turn this about and say *lack of social participation on the part of teachers and others in education leads to a curriculum unrelated to problems of living.*

With little social concern and experience, an existing curriculum could not be challenged by the here-and-now, and by the imperative needs of children. Therefore, children's problems and needs, nested as they are in the broader complex of living, cannot readily be analyzed and understood in terms of

constructive action, by teachers inexperienced in social action. No, a whole new outlook with corresponding action is needed. Yet, before such social growth on the part of teachers has made more than a beginning, a theory of teaching and guiding children and youth has gained wide acceptance which actually demands competent social understanding and action on the part of teachers. No wonder that teachers who care about children, and who want to be good teachers, feel frustrated.

### Remoteness From Classroom

The second reason for the dilemma may come from the remoteness of too many who have influence in education from the daily minute details that make up teaching. It is easy to forget the problem of getting forty-two five-year-olds dressed to go home on a rainy day; it is easy to forget the cost of an interruption just at the high point in discussion to sign another notice being circulated in the building; it is easy to forget the quality of emotional fatigue felt after a satisfying but busy day with two core groups in junior high school. Along with such forgetting may also come a more detached feeling toward individual children and a feeling of less urgency about their problems.

### Whose Responsibility?

We are at the threshold of exerting tremendous influence by our teaching, not only on the lives of children but also upon the thousands of communities in which they live and we work. Our recognition of the crucial importance of the child's family status upon his behavior and outlook is sound. Our

growth in observing the impact of this changing, challenging world upon children is gratifying. Our scholarly studies of individual children and their behavior in groups are aids in developing more adequate instructional programs. Our vision of what teaching can become as we deepen our insights is exciting. *But all this can eventually add up to frustration, unless we take a careful look at what is to be done and study carefully not only what is to be done but also who is to share in doing it.*

Obviously the follow-up of such needs as described in the four cases previously described cannot rest with teachers alone. Some needs go completely beyond the responsibility of the school. To continue to study child and youth needs without going carefully and constructively into ways of meeting them can become an assignment for frustration of teachers and all so engaged. The very sincerity of our concern should urge us on to the next steps which are long over-due. And in these next steps we must overcome the

deficiencies of our introverted concept of education and our lack of experience in broader community action.

#### Action on Some Fronts

Many excellent examples of action in behalf of children's needs are on record. We have not been at a standstill. But the development of widely accepted know-how to go along with our educational prescription of "meeting the needs of the whole child," is still to be achieved.

Stimulation of cooperative effort or the multi-discipline approach to meeting child and youth needs is becoming policy in various fields. Excellent examples are found in the fields of early childhood education and family living. Commissions meeting before the International Congress on Mental Hygiene in London in 1948 made as one of their prerequisites for organizing their meetings that members from at least three disciplines cooperate.

The Citizens Committee on Children of New York City, Inc., in organizing to help New York City serve its children and youth better, held it imperative that specialists from a variety of fields be brought together in planning their program—not only to be sure that all important needs were adequately met, but also that overlapping, duplication, and waste were prevented.



From *Education for All American Children*

## Where To Begin in Planning Cooperative Programs

In planning programs of curriculum improvement it would seem essential that teachers, curriculum specialists, parents, and administrators examine carefully the kinds of services the school is capable of providing and which services require specialists from other fields. Specific cases where family counselors, case workers, clinical psychologists, pediatricians, and psychiatrists are needed should be described and discussed. Specialists from these fields should be brought in to help define their functions and to clarify at what point their services should be sought. Agencies which offer special services to children and families also need to describe their functions to the school staff.

In a great many communities it may be that overlapping of agency programs and omissions of important areas will come to light. At this point the school can make an invaluable contribution to the improvement of the community. For years we have been adding agencies, specialists, and services. We jest about taking a child "to the five places before we got him all seen." Now, wisely, specialists from the fields of health, welfare, and education are beginning to work in teams. Bringing together, on a functional problem-solving basis, specialists in clinics and centers is a crucial step which school leaders should foster.

Every community, no matter what size, should aspire to have a center where a family or teacher might take a child for careful mental and physical examination. Unfortunately, there are far too many small communities where

no special services are available. Here the school personnel's task might appropriately be stimulating awareness of such need and making arrangements for services from accessible localities or establishing new agencies staffed by specialists for the administrative area, be it township, district, or county.

In many areas, more funds and legislation to meet the most urgent needs will be necessary. Some teachers, with new insights in understanding children, can be effective in working with community organizations to raise funds or to draw up and secure needed legislation. Those who can serve children's needs by such activity should not only be permitted but encouraged to do so. Local, state, and national educational organizations, too, need to become far more active along these lines. Many teachers may not be ready to extend their activities into community organizations and legislation. Not all teachers need to. Respect for differences among teachers and each teacher's way of making a contribution must be maintained.

## Meeting New Responsibilities

Teachers have come to think of themselves as the community thought of them. This is culturally what one should expect. However, it is imperative now for us as a profession to follow where our educational theory about children leads us, and to test out its true meaning. In so doing we may remake the concept of teaching. Teachers, as they look ahead, will regard themselves not as growing to meet new responsibilities in a static society, but rather as growing to meet new responsibilities, one of which is to help improve the society in which they live.

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