

What Child Do You See?

E. T. McSWAIN

It is important for teachers to understand, writes E. T. McSwain, dean of the University College, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, that each student interacts with his "private" classroom which he creates out of his accepted purposes, ideas, and feelings. Likewise, the child the teacher sees and interacts with is a psychological creation existing only in the mind of the teacher. The implications of this point of view are discussed here by Mr. McSwain.

THE ARCHITECTS of a modern school building aim to construct for children a useful, healthful, and attractive physical environment in which to work. Administrators have the opportunity to select equipment and instructional supplies designed to facilitate improvement in teaching-learning.

Beyond the Physical Plant

The core of a school, however, is a dynamic, living process. This salient feature is more difficult to see and to interpret. In the current period when the need for buildings is urgent, equal emphasis should be given to planning and to maintaining adequate psychological environments. The first criterion of a good school is the quality of living and learning experienced daily by children.

A person who desires to appraise the true value of a school is obligated to see beyond the physical features. He must make a careful observation and interpretation of the communicative behavior of children and teachers. The educative reality of a school exists only in the psychological behaving of each individual. Professional competence and sufficient time are required to interpret what the classroom experiences really

mean in the purposing, thinking, and feeling responses of each pupil. Children may be observed as a group, yet the reality of a school has its meaning and function only in the "under-the-skin" experiencing of each child.

Interpreting Children's Behavior

One of the leadership opportunities of the principal or supervisor is to help teachers improve their understanding of the psychological development of children. The mental interpretation that a teacher makes in response to the child's overt behaving influences his communicative relations toward the learner. It is important that teachers understand that each pupil attends and interacts with the "private" classroom that he creates daily out of his accepted purposes, ideas, and feelings.

In addition, every teacher should recognize the difference between his mental interpretation of a child and the child as a unique human being. The child that a teacher sees and interacts with is a psychological creation that exists only in the mind of the teacher. Only by careful observing and attentive listening is a teacher able to create a mental interpretation that resembles or is an

understanding likeness of the psychological behavior of each individual member of the class. Much information about the pupil's past and present living must be secured if valid diagnosis is to be made of needs and progress.

What the Child Sees

In a similar way, each pupil creates his own interpretation of the teacher. He is guided in his responding by what he hears the teacher say and by what he interprets the teacher to think and to feel about him. The teacher that the pupil interacts with is a mental creation. Unless there is a friendly and mutually helpful relationship between teacher and pupil, each may create faulty or inaccurate responses to the communicative behavior of the other person.

Meaningful, cooperative relations emerge only when teacher and pupil create and act on similar purposes, understandings, and feelings. Barriers to creative teaching and learning can be prevented when teachers take time to assist pupils in understanding the basic elements involved in pupil-teacher interaction.

The classroom group is an abstract concept. Each pupil creates and acts on his interpretative responses to the expressive communication of classmates. Cooperative interaction should be a directive goal for all members of the group. Learning how to take into account the probable difference between one's interpretation of the behavior of another person and that person as a unique human being is an ability that teachers should strive to help pupils develop and apply at all times.

Frequent opportunity should be provided for discussion and appraisal of

the psychological factors essential in co-operative community living. Group-mindedness or cooperative action emerges as each pupil creates purposes, meanings, and values to action that are similar to those created by other members of the group. Many classroom activities are needed in which pupils learn to identify themselves as contributors to a common goal and group welfare.

Climate of the Classroom

Development in personal and group behavior is influenced in a striking manner by the mental hygiene climate of the classroom. Good mental health is a learned way of thinking and feeling about one's interpretation of his success in coping with the cultural requirements encountered in the classroom, in the home, and in various community situations. How the pupil thinks and feels about his adequacy in dealing with external conditions should receive as much attention from the teacher as his progress in any curriculum subject.

Unless pupils develop a sense of adequacy and experience some success in living in their "private" or psychological school, they may find it difficult to discover meaning and interest in their school work and may experience difficulty in living cooperatively with other persons. Teachers should observe carefully the overt behavior of pupils to discover emerging symptoms of inadequacy and insecurity that are the contributing causes to inattentiveness, faulty study habits, and mental illness.

A Program Which Serves Psychological Needs

Good mental health, like living and learning, is a unique experience for every

child. The school program, therefore, should be selected and organized to serve the psychological needs of each young citizen. Administrators and teachers fortified by a better understanding of child development are obligated to examine the probable psychological consequences on individual behaving of such school practices as uniform curriculum content and requirements, emphasis on ability grouping, annual promotion, grade system classification, stress on teacher's marks, textbook-centered instruction, departmental programs, authoritarian discipline, and paper-pencil tests.

A more wholesome school program would offer children the opportunity to live in a social group, to work with a competent teacher, and to share in planning curriculum experiences, in formulating directive goals for learning, in selecting standards to appraise individual achievement, in planning the daily program, and in preparing regulations to govern the civic life of the class. The test of all school practices depends upon their usefulness in improving the "under-the-skin" living and learning of all children.

Experiencing Two Curriculums

The external curriculum such as books, teacher instruction, and reference material can be easily seen. The "living" curriculum is more difficult to interpret. Each pupil discovers and organizes the meanings and functional content of his "private" curriculum. The methods used in learning and the kind of materials studied condition the personal and social value of the curriculum for the pupil. The quality of the "how" in learning appears, there-

fore, more important than the quantity of subjects in the curriculum.

Improvement in the "how" techniques of learning can be facilitated by reducing the speed and scope of the curriculum. Teachers and pupils in many schools are kept so busy trying to meet curriculum requirements that little time remains for individual guidance and creative learning. Administrators can render a significant professional service to teachers and pupils by taking definite steps to effect a reduction in the psychological load of the classroom curriculum. Adequate time for securing improvement in the quality of teaching and of learning needs to be substituted for the unsound emphasis on the speed and scope of the curriculum.

Readiness for Learning

Teachers should be encouraged to devote more time to helping pupils create a psychological readiness for each curriculum experience. Pupils should be stimulated to raise questions, to express tentative ideas, to venture guesses, and to voice anticipated findings. The goals and methods for each learning situation must be clearly understood if pupils are to gain meaningful ideas and information about the subject that is to be studied. Pupils will be assisted in making desired improvement in the "how" and "what" of each learning situation as they are encouraged to give attention to critical listening, meaningful reading, critical thinking, and self-evaluation. This kind of teaching and learning takes time; it cannot be hurried.

Learning from Life Experiences

Creative, functional learning requires the acquisition of meanings. When a

pupil is expected to learn something that is not meaningful, he is forced to rely on the authority of the teacher or textbook and must employ memory to carry out the assignment. Faulty learning habits and misunderstandings arise when the subject is too abstract or too far removed from the life experiences of children. The ability to express words or to compute figures does not signify always the possession of meanings. More emphasis in the classroom should be given to discussion, to illustrations, and to proof to show the meaning and validity of what has been learned. It is the teacher's duty to take time to determine whether or not the learning experience has been psychologically meaningful for every pupil.

Teachers and pupils need to be encouraged to make the work of the classroom more interesting and meaningful by taking time for work with concrete materials, for purposeful excursions, for constructive use of audio-visual learning aids, and for purposeful reference study. It is suggested that the faculty of each elementary school undertake a cooperative study to find out the amount of the curriculum content prescribed for each grade that is too abstract or that offers little social meaning for the pupils. The elimination of such material would constitute one way to reduce the psychological load experienced by teachers and pupils.

Successful personal and community living in the cultural period 1950-2000 calls for emotional maturity, effective tools of learning, ability to solve problems, a readiness to deal with new situations, a sense of responsibility for the general welfare of individuals, and the ability to make decisions based on ethi-

cal values. These abilities are a significant part of the elementary curriculum. They can be discovered and can be developed only through meaningful experiences under the guidance of competent teachers. Their meaning and application arise in the psychological behaving of each pupil. Their value to each individual may be appraised only by observing carefully his communicative behavior.

The Teacher's Roles

It appears reasonable to assume that each teacher must accept the following roles as he strives to offer leadership and experiences that may assist pupils in making continuous improvement in the psychological world in which each lives from day to day.

First, the teacher must be an *educational psychologist* if he is to interpret correctly the psychological needs and progress of the child. His major attention will be given to teaching the child rather than teaching subjects. Examination will be made of curriculum requirements and instructional methods to diagnose their effect on psychological adequacy of every pupil.

The second role is that of a *social engineer*. The teacher seeks to envisage the cultural conditions that may be presented in the next several decades. He then attempts to provide curriculum experiences and materials that may help pupils to acquire meaningful ideas, understandings, information, and attitudes that will contribute to cooperative and productive living in a rapidly changing society. Textbooks and other materials will be selected and appraised in relation to their meaning for present and future citizenship.

Serving as an *interpreter of the characteristics of a good school to parents* is the third role that teachers have the opportunity to perform. Parents see only the school that they create in their psychological behavior. Unless they understand child development, the meaning of creative learning, the psychology of the so-called tools of learning, and the reasons supporting newer instructional methods, they may find it easier to express criticism than to give cooperative support to the leadership of teachers. Parents should be encouraged to visit the classroom to observe teacher and pupils at work. Group meetings should be provided that enable parents to create a better understanding of the purposes and enabling

activities of the school. In the degree that teachers and parents create similar goals for children, unity in educational leadership will emerge.

What School Do You See?

Each individual sees the school of his own psychological creation. Through cooperative study and discussion, there can arise similar criteria for designing and for evaluating a school program appropriate to the psychological needs of all children and to the cultural requirements of a complex society. Unity in educational leadership depends upon the schools we see and the goals we seek to achieve in providing improved living and learning opportunities for tomorrow's citizens.

Continuity in Growth

NELLE WRIGHT

Nelle Wright, director of instruction in the Waynesboro Public Schools, Virginia, describes a study in which elementary teachers moved along with the same group of children to facilitate planning for continuity in growth.

FOR SEVEN YEARS a group of teachers in an elementary school has been experimenting with a plan of having pupils remain with the same teacher for more than one school year. For elementary schools the plan seems possible, reasonable, and desirable. In this twenty-two teacher elementary school, eight teachers moved along at various grade levels with the same group of children. The purpose was to give teachers additional help in understanding and deal-

ing effectively with children. To do this, direct experiences with children of as many age levels as possible seemed necessary.

A Workable Plan

Two types of "shifts" were employed in operating this plan—one within the division such as primary, intermediate, or upper grades, and the other between the divisions such as from primary to intermediate. The longest period of

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