

Mental Health Implications for In-Service Programs

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Full use of the resources represented in any in-service group will be possible only through application of principles of good mental hygiene, according to W. Carson Ryan, Kenan professor of education, School of Education, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

"SHE ought not to teach a course in mental hygiene. She's too insecure herself." This pronouncement, made recently by a teacher on a university summer school campus, may quite possibly have been both inaccurate and unjust. Nevertheless it suggests one of the most important factors in an in-service program, whether in a course dealing directly with mental health and education or in any other professional or cultural course: *The person who conducts the program must himself or herself exemplify good mental health, and must be a well-adjusted human being, able to develop from the start a good human relations situation.*

Putting What We Know Into Practice

Most of the principles of good teaching in the elementary school apply likewise to work with teachers, school administrators and other adult educational workers. We know that friendliness, understanding, respect for personality, are some of these principles. Indispensable also is the necessity for genuine participation by all members of the group. Lecture and recitation methods have little place in in-service courses for teachers, administrators and other school adults. These people come to a university course, study group or other in-service enterprise with a va-

riety of experiences, some good, some bad, but all of them important.

They represent every level of information, interest and understanding. But by the same token they are themselves resource persons whose points of view and varied experiences are assets of highest value in the process of group learning, or can be if they are wisely utilized.

It is important not only to utilize to the full these varied resources we find in in-service groups, but especially to develop in each participant, through the use of these resources, a sense of security that comes from the realization that each has something to contribute as well as to learn.

WEALTH OF MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE

What we are concerned with, of course, is a reasonable achievement in securing positive good mental health—not emphasis on the things that are wrong so much as help in making and keeping things right.

Learning about good mental health and ways of achieving it has been made immeasurably easier in the past few years by the wealth of material that has become available, both in the mental hygiene literature itself and in other writings on education. Where formerly

one had to search high and low for helpful information in non-technical language, such information is now at hand in almost every conceivable form—in excellent, practical books like Redl and Wattenberg's *Mental Hygiene in Teaching* and the ASCD 1950 year-book, *Fostering Mental Health in Our Schools*; in numerous pamphlets and monographs of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, Science Research Associates, Teachers College of Columbia University, the Federal Office of Education, the Public Affairs Committee, National Forum, the Hogg Foundation, the World Federation for Mental Health, and various state and local mental health organizations; in films, radio scripts, recordings; in drama form through the cooperation of the National Association for Mental Health and the American Theater Wing; and even in the "comics," where "Blondie" illustrates the possibilities in the use of an additional medium for getting important principles across to those not technically expert.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE PROCEDURE

Let us illustrate how this kind of material can be used in a present-day program. The course described is one in "Mental Hygiene in Teaching" that has been given some twenty or twenty-five times in the past dozen years in university summer sessions, Saturday and evening classes, off-campus extension, and in the regular academic year—for students ("graduate" and "undergraduate") who are teachers, school administrators, guidance workers and others engaged in education. Although the course bears the mental hygiene

label, there are, it is believed, elements in it that could readily be applied in other courses and other study programs. Needless to say the program is offered in no sense as an ideal one, but merely as suggestive of the possibilities.

► Considerable attention is given to getting off to a right start. Wherever possible the seating arrangement is such as to facilitate free discussion, though in actual practice it has more often than not been necessary to utilize the ordinary seating arrangements with as much informality as is possible. To start things off, each member of the group is asked to state briefly who he is, where he is from, what his work is. Then the instructor gives a brief statement of the significance of mental health in the world today, with some reference to the extent of mental ill-health, but with emphasis on the possibilities for better human relations and the part education and educational people can play in the program.

► Each member of the group next receives a mimeographed statement designed to give some idea of the way in which the course is conducted and the first tasks to be attempted. This statement includes a list of books and pamphlets: Two books for everybody to have in his possession, not as texts but as resource works; eight or ten other books that may or may not deal directly with mental health by title but are valuable for their point of view and application to various fields—for example, Lucy Sprague Mitchell's *Our Children and Our Schools* and the Rennie and Woodward *Mental Health in Modern Society*; samples of the pamphlet material already referred to—

such as *The Making of a Healthy Personality* (White House Conference), James L. Hymes on *Discipline* (one of the Teachers College monographs), the Hogg Foundation's *Profiles for Community Action*, *Mental Health Is a Family Affair* (a Public Affairs Pamphlet), and *Emotional Problems of Growing Up* (Science Research Associates); several of the journals dealing regularly with mental health. This mimeographed statement describes three tasks to be done immediately: (a) What do you understand by the term "mental hygiene"? (b) Write a brief description of an educational situation or episode within your own knowledge that seems to involve some type of "emotional difficulty" or other problem involving "mental health." (c) Indicate what your own work is and any special reasons you have for wishing help from this course.

► At the very first meeting various members of the group are given short articles and reports to be summarized orally the next day or so for the rest of the class. Participation is insisted upon, and there is usually plenty of discussion of these reports.

► When sufficient time has elapsed to have the first "episodes" written up and turned in, the instructor begins reading some of these to the group. There is usually considerable discussion of these cases. Obviously if the group is a large one it is not possible to read all the "episodes," but because of their value as actual cases it has been found desirable to read as many as possible. These and the reports on articles go along together for some meetings. In the meantime there is no required

reading as such, but members of the group are asked to do certain things to familiarize themselves with the contents of the required book. For example, they are asked to select the case in Redl that they consider most significant and tell why; similarly with the longer case descriptions in the 1950 ASCD yearbook.

► While these various reports of articles are being made and the episodes read and discussed, members of the group are trying to come to a decision as to what special topics they wish to explore as members of a committee. The instructor also makes suggestions of possible topics. He injects into the proceedings from time to time statements on mental health that have been issued by various organizations or individuals—e.g., the list of principles developed in the Commonwealth Fund study of 1938, the Prescott formulation in the Teacher Education Commission's *Helping Teachers Understand Children*, the National Association's brief *Mental Health Is 1-2-3*, and similar pronouncements. These are mimeographed for the use of students, as are also brief historical statements of mental health in education as reported annually in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

► Gradually committees are formed to look into the various aspects of mental health and education. Sometimes a committee of one is necessary for a particular topic; but usually the committees will range from two to ten or twelve, with four or five as the more usual number.

► It is at this point, of course, that the instructor has his heaviest burden of work. In this procedure, whether in a

specifically labeled course in mental hygiene or in any other university study, the instructor has to have available all kinds of resources. Some committees will get to their task with comparatively little assistance; others will need a great deal—especially if the topic happens to be one on which not much has been written. The instructor tries to anticipate the committee selections by having pamphlets, reports and references available, at least for a start.

The final reports are made in various forms. Wherever possible (and it usually is) a two- or three-page summary is prepared and mimeographed in numbers sufficient for all class members.

►Presentation of the reports usually takes a third or more of the total time available. The schedule is always something of a problem—the later reports tend to have less time than the earlier ones. The method of presenting the committee reports varies considerably. Some of the committees will have each of its members report on a part of their findings and conclusions; others will depend upon having the chairman make most of the report. Still others will do very little reading of the report, pre-

ferring to conduct a discussion of the major points with the whole group asking questions.

OBJECT: TO ADVANCE MENTAL HEALTH

Obviously in this type of procedure in in-service education some of the rules in the traditional academic game do not operate. There are no "tests" or "recitations" in the ordinary sense. Participants in the group are not asked to throw back in a formal examination the words of wisdom uttered by the lecturer. The only real evaluation for this kind of procedure is what happens afterward in the schools or colleges or other situations in which they work. But it is possible, if the university requirements demand it, even to have an "examination" in addition to the committee reports and other evidences of successful effort to learn. This examination, however, is keyed to the actual situation in which the individual works. He is asked to measure his own school or community in terms of the standards mental hygienists have set up; or to work out a program designed to advance the mental health of his own school or community.

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