Teaching never consists in a mere transplanting, or indoctrination of ideas. The whole life of the community aims in fact at awakening the intellectual powers and at giving concrete answers to the persisting questioning of the pupils. In due time, the order of knowledge which official programs so constantly pursue will come of itself, the goal of the process which the children have followed in all its various phases.

Curriculum Research

Column Editor: C. W. Hunnicutt
Contributor: Paul W. Eberman

Personal Relationships: One Key to Instructional Improvement

THE CONCEPT of "teacher acceptance" has long been regarded in educational literature as being an important factor in the learning and development of children in school. Discussions of this concept, however, emphasize different things. For some, the emphasis is on "group dynamics" and on roles played by group participants;[1] others play up the importance of patterns of interaction and differentiate them on such bases as the degree to which teachers exhibit democratic or autocratic practices in the classroom.[2]

Three objections may be raised to most studies of this kind: (a) They tend to concentrate on a single factor affecting classroom climate and to deal with it in isolation from other equally important factors; (b) too often the definition of the factor under scrutiny is a highly abstract one, making it difficult to translate conclusions into concrete directives for actual behavior on the part of those directly concerned with instructional programs. The study here described[3] is an attempt to meet these objections to some degree.

The point of view taken is that teacher acceptance of children is primarily the product of the personal-social relationships involved; that classroom relationships are primarily those which have to do with the interaction of teacher with pupils and of pupils with pupils; and that the quality of such relationships is best seen in terms of actual behaviors, with such behaviors being examined in relation to each other. Teacher acceptance is defined, therefore, as a pattern of behavior in dealing with children in which there is a predominance of positive and supportive action. Teacher rejection is defined as the reverse of this condition.

To make this definition concrete, large numbers of items describing both positive and negative teacher behavior in dealing with children were collected through direct analysis of many class-

[1] R. B. Haas, *Psychodrama and Sociodrama in American Education.* New York: Beacon House. 1949.
[2] Ronald Lippitt and Ralph White, "The Social Climate of Children's Groups," *Child Behavior and Development*, R. G. Barker, pp. 485-508. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1943.
Ruth Cunningham and others, *Understanding Group Behavior of Boys and Girls.* New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951.

[3] P. W. Eberman, "The Application of Q-technique to One Aspect of Teaching Competency". Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Education, University of Chicago, 1950.

room experiences. These constituted a pattern or a *trait universe* of acceptant-rejective behavior on the part of teachers. Such items as the following appeared in this behavioral definition:

• Finds it difficult to admit mistakes to her group when they are pointed out by children.

• Feels that humorous remarks are out of place in the classroom.

• Accepts spontaneous outbursts of enjoyment by children as being perfectly natural and shares their enjoyment.

• Does not feel that absolute quiet is necessary for useful thinking to take place in the classroom.

Most people would agree that the first two items tend to be negative and non-supportive behaviors, while the latter two items are positive in nature. A sampling of 115 items of this sort, roughly divided between positive and negative behaviors, served as the instrument used to examine patterns of teacher behavior in classroom situations.

Descriptions of Teacher Behavior

Two groups of teachers were picked in such a way as to represent general competence and general incompetence respectively. Each teacher in both groups was asked to sort the 115 items into eleven categories according to a pattern approximating a normal distribution. Those placed at one extreme would be items which she felt to be most descriptive of her own behavior in the classroom; those appearing at the other extreme were items felt to be least like her own behavior. Categories between extremes represented varying degrees of likeness to or difference from her usual behavior. Descriptions of best and worst teachers and of each teacher by the qualified observer were obtained in the same way, except that the person being described was not one's self.

Distinct advantages accrue from obtaining descriptions in this manner. First, a finished distribution represents a pattern of behavior rather than an assessment of each item separately. Assessment is made by comparing the relative significance of each item to all other items for the individual concerned. Thus, there is no dependence on an arbitrary outside criterion for the making of judgments. Second, it is possible to compare two or more descriptions through the use of simple correlation techniques. This correlation of persons on large numbers of items is the reverse of the usual procedure of correlating tests for large numbers of persons. This process in conjunction with a method of inverse factor analysis has been called Q-technique. The technical aspects of the statistical procedures will not be described here.

Through manipulation of the various statistical descriptions obtained, it is possible to examine several questions:

• To what extent are teachers aware of the nature of their own behavior in dealing with children?

• Is there any relationship between what teachers think their behavior pattern is and what they believe to be best behavior in dealing with children?

• Are teacher definitions of best and worst behavior consistent with like definitions made by experts?

• Is it possible to identify particular kinds of behavior which discriminate between competent and incompetent teacher groups?

Some Conclusions of the Study

Several conclusions regarding the above questions resulted from analyses made of the statistical descriptions:

• Teachers involved seemed unable to separate their conception of their own behavior from their conception of ideal behavior in dealing with children.

Thus, it appears that many teachers are unaware of much of their particular classroom behavior. This lack of insight has considerable significance since it seems true that desirable behavior changes are easiest to produce when awareness of the necessity for change precedes attempts to change.

• Teacher and "expert" groups showed close agreement on best and worst patterns of teacher acceptance-rejection.

This conclusion coupled with the first suggests a considerable gap between knowing what to do and actually practicing what is known. The problem in working with teachers becomes one of how best to help them to bridge this gap.

• Some of the behavior items appeared to discriminate clearly between the competent and the incompetent teacher groups included in the study.

Descriptions for the two groups resulting from observations of these teachers in action were examined. Fifty-four items were found to differ significantly in their placement in the descriptions of the two groups. An analysis of these items indicated that the acceptant, competent teacher would be characterized by such behavior as:

A high degree of awareness of child behavior in the classroom (particularly of less obvious sorts of behavior).
Tendency to focus on the child rather than on work for work's sake.
Flexible standards of expectancy adapted to the individual differences found in the child group.
Non-dependence on inflexible, arbitrary rules for control in learning experiences.
Ability to give and receive support and affection.
Ability to accept children uncondi-

tionally despite individual differences.
Ability to find real enjoyment in working with youngsters.
Ability to react positively to aggressive behavior among children (teacher not directly involved).
Ability to involve pupils realistically in the planning and materials aspects of the learning situation.

Non-acceptant, incompetent teachers might be characterized by the reverse of the kinds of behaviors listed. This suggests some points to look for in attempting to determine teacher competence.

Suggestions for Use

Many school staffs have made the study of individual children a major endeavor in their efforts to improve instructional programs. The concept of acceptance-rejection, the means developed for describing teacher patterns of behavior, and the method of analysis called Q-technique might be useful in child study programs in the following ways:

• The process of describing one's own behavior seems to aid the teacher toward greater insight and awareness of the factors involved in dealing with children.

• Intensive analyses of staff beliefs about the relative importance of particular kinds of behavior in dealing with children might provide useful clues to areas where teacher understanding is limited.

• Periodic descriptions of individual teachers might serve as one basis for evaluating changes in behavior resulting from participation in child study.
—*Paul W. Eberman,* assistant professor of education, University of Wisconsin, Madison.