

The Teacher Works with the Specialist

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The teacher is always the key person in the school life of the child. It is clear however that services of specialists can be of inestimable value both to the teacher and to the child.

MISS Craig, a first grade teacher, watched Billy with a worried, puzzled frown. What was she going to do about that boy? Here they were in the fourth week of school and, in spite of all she could do, Billy was still presenting a tremendous problem in her classroom. Right this minute, he was disregarding her instructions at the easel and deliberately hitting little Eddie for no real reason at all. She put a restraining hand on him, spoke quietly to him and had him sit very close to her. He was quiet for just a minute and then became extremely restless again.

She wished she knew more about his parents. She had not yet had a chance to ask Billy's mother or father to come in for a conference. She must do that soon. She wondered whether it might not be a better idea to have a specialist from the Psychological Services Department come in and have a look at Billy first. He was such an unusual little fellow that he probably needed very special help. She had better see that he got it.

Mrs. Wright, one of the specialists, came promptly to the classroom and ob-

served Billy for a half-hour, watching his characteristic behavior and taking anecdotal notes. Then, at recess time, she observed him on the playground with the other youngsters. During that time, he knocked one little girl down, bit another little boy and pulled a little girl off the bench, hurting her quite badly. The worker, of course, had noticed this kind of behavior in other children who had presented problems, but Billy seemed so resentful and so completely unhappy.

Realizing that the child was probably full of hostility for some very understandable reason, the worker felt she should confer with the parents.

Using the data that the teacher and counselor had gathered and having a little play session with the child gave the worker a fuller picture of Billy and his problem. Then a home call was scheduled.

In the interview, the mother indicated that the boy's father often criticized and punished him severely and that the youngster was very resentful of punishment. Neither would the father allow the child to cry when he was punished which added greatly to Billy's resentment. It was also revealed that Billy had a younger sister of whom he was extremely jealous.

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The worker scheduled another interview when she would be able to talk to both the mother and father. At this time, she worked very hard to help the parents see the importance of releasing pressures from Billy and of helping him to feel adequate and accepted by them. The parents had not realized that their demands on the child had been severe enough to create such a problem. Neither had they known that their very efforts to make him more perfect were only adding to the problem. They agreed to try to follow the worker's recommendation.

Teacher and Worker Plan Together

The teacher and worker together made a plan whereby Billy would get praise and attention for any worthwhile contribution he made to the class. It was decided, too, that any time he became angry and destructive, he would be given clay to play with or papers to tear that needed to be destroyed anyway.

It was also agreed that he should be held to limits in not hurting children, but that in so doing the teacher would

reassure him that she liked him and wanted the other children to like him.

While the worker herself would see Billy once a week in a play therapy situation, she assured Miss Craig that it really was the teacher's feeling for the child, her warmth for him and the way she worked with him that would really make the difference in improving his behavior.

In the play therapy situation, Billy was extremely aggressive. Time and again he would pound his clay figures unmercifully until they became shapeless, flat masses. With the dart gun, he shot everything in sight (including the worker once when she wasn't looking).

Gradually, however, as the parents released their pressures and became less exacting with Billy; as Billy himself was able to express his hostility in the play therapy situation and still be completely accepted, and as he grew more and more secure in his feelings with the teacher, he became less aggressive and considerably happier.

One day, in the play therapy situation, he built a crane with the Erector set. The worker, knowing that the class was having a unit on the railroad, let Billy take the crane in to his class so that it could be used in the unit. Billy was in! The other youngsters were really quite agog at what Billy had produced. The teacher made the most of it, giving him a great deal of much needed attention and praise for it. Billy began to feel that he belonged, that he was important, that the other children liked him. He began to believe that adults thought he was pretty fine too. What a different world this! He no longer needed to hurt other children. He no longer needed to be the

essence of perfection at home. He no longer felt sullen nor so alone and unhappy. His progress in school was stepped up immeasurably. He was able to follow the teacher's directions, to sit at his work for longer periods of time and to make real contributions to the class, but, perhaps, best of all, he was learning to play happily with the other children.

Combined Efforts Bring Results

The happy ending to little Billy's story is not an unusual one. Thousands of youngsters are being helped all over the country through the combined efforts of the teacher and the specialist. Teachers who have the resources which the specialist represents are fortunate.

They are fortunate, however, only if the specialist is the kind of person who realizes that the major responsibility for the children lies with the teacher and that she, the specialist, only supplements the efforts of the teacher. It should always be a shared kind of thing where teacher and specialist make plans together for the benefit of the child.

Many times, before the specialist is called in on a case, the teacher may have done everything that was possible with and for the child. Anything the specialist recommends may have already been tried to no avail. Possibly the individual work done by the specialist with the child had had no results. Even so, the fact that someone is definitely trying to help the teacher, accepting her feelings about the whole situation, giving her support in her own efforts, often gives her the additional courage needed to carry through. She is able to accept the fact that all children can-

not be helped and that sometimes we just have to live with them, accept them and do the best we can.

Perhaps one of the greatest contributions of the specialist to the teacher is helping her to perceive a child in a little different light. With a room full of some thirty-five or forty youngsters all with their own special demands, it is sometimes hard for a teacher to accept a youngster who tends to upset the class day in and day out. He becomes a kind of demon in her eyes—and why not? Isn't it hard enough to teach that many youngsters without having one or two constantly upsetting the room and throwing all into turmoil? Most certainly it is.

The thing that often happens, though, is that when the specialist goes in to work with this said young demon, the teacher begins to get a little different understanding of the child. The specialist, in interpreting the child's problem to the teacher, helps her to see that here is a child who has tremendous needs and is lashing out at a hostile world. The fact that the specialist is willing to share the responsibility of helping the child to overcome his problems, the fact that the teacher is so anxious for the child to improve helps her to look at him in just a little different light. In so doing, her attitude toward him has a good chance of changing. Perhaps she can be more accepting and by that very thing help him to grow.

The quiet, withdrawn child also can receive immeasurable help from the combined efforts of teacher and specialist. Making a plan together which will help the child in the classroom situation, the specialist's work in the

play-therapy room and the help that the specialist is able to give the parents many times can help the withdrawn child to achieve good mental health. The very fact that this child has an adult coming to see just *him* once a week, that he has a very special friend may give him a sense of importance and a feeling that he *must* be somebody! Many times, too, the specialist is able to uncover the real reason for the child's having become withdrawn and so is able, together with the teacher, to work in such a way as to help the child to cope with his situation.

A Preventive Approach

There are various kinds of specialists who may be working with the teacher. Many school systems are beginning to become aware of the great need to use a preventive approach to the problems presented in the schools. These systems, in addition to helping the teachers do a still better job, are employing counselors at the elementary level to work with the children before the problem becomes so acute that psychological or psychiatric help is needed. In Long Beach, California, the counselors in the elementary schools have made unnecessary the referral of literally hundreds of children to the Office of Psychological Services. This they do by coming to the teacher's aid immediately when the latter sees a youngster beginning to experience difficulty. The counselor is able to work with the child individually, make special arrangements with and for him, give him an extra boost when he needs help in his academic work, etc., etc. Many times, while the counselor assists a teacher with a youngster in her

class, she can also tactfully help the teacher to grow in her understanding of other children and in her techniques, thus helping to upgrade the instructional program in the whole school. The counselors, too, can often give extra tests to these youngsters in an attempt to analyze their academic difficulties. So often a single test will not begin to tell the whole story about a child—particularly one who may be having some trouble. The counselor can do a great deal to remedy this situation. She is also the person who interprets to the teacher the test results for the whole group, thus utilizing the testing program to the greatest extent for the benefit of the children.

These well trained people, psychologists and social workers, often act as consultants in case conferences both at the elementary and the high school level and contribute much to understandings and insights. They also contribute much in the plan-making. Teachers look to them for guidance, both for their insights into problems and for ideas in long term planning.

A team composed of a specialist, a counselor, a teacher, and vice-principal and/or principal working for the benefit of a particular child can most assuredly contribute a tremendous amount to his mental health.

It is clear, from the above discussion, that the teacher is always the key person in the school life of any child, but it is also clear that the services of specialists can be of inestimable value to her as they help share the load, give her support and bring special skills to the situation. Together they can solve many problems where alone neither could have achieved success.

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