

Sharing Responsibility in

INSTRUCTION

This article shows a blind student teacher working successfully with a class of boys and girls with normal vision. Through sharing with the teacher responsibility for their own instruction, the students develop new skills in areas of cooperation and of oral communication, and new insight into the learning process itself.

BILL was reviewing his eighth grade social studies class on a recently completed section of United States history. He moved about the room with his notes at his fingertips.

"Why did the United States want to make the Louisiana Purchase?" Five hands waved in the air, and as each hand went up its owner calmly announced his name.

"George?"

"The Americans used the Mississippi River to ship their products to Europe, and France was a greater threat to trade than Spain."

"Good! Can you show us the boundaries of the purchase on the map?"

George walked to the side of the room, pulled down the big wall map, and said, "No one really knew, but the general area extended from Canada here, in the north, to the Gulf of Mexico, here, on the south; from the Rocky

¹The author wishes to express appreciation for the cooperation of Mrs. Dorothy Royce, principal, and Mrs. Alta Owens, supervising teacher, of Campbell Grammar School, Campbell, California, and Mrs. Florence G. Henderson, associate professor of education and special supervisor for the blind.

Mountains on the west, to the Mississippi River on the east."

"Is this correct?"

Four children, two with open books, quietly answered, "Yes."

This is a normal enough classroom procedure, but the interesting fact in this particular circumstance is that Bill, a student-teacher, is totally blind. All the simple maneuvers of the classroom teacher here were something different to Bill: he read the question from his Braille notes; he saw no hands but heard voices of the children ready to answer; he relied on the verbal description of the child at the map and a special committee to check the actions he could not see.

One of the outstanding features of Bill's classroom procedure was the organization of the students for an effective learning situation. A "secretary" was responsible for doing any writing on the blackboard, taking enrollment, cafeteria count, and other routine matters. Each week a "reader" was selected to read notices, blackboard work, and written materials. Bill and the students considered the teacher as "director" of the class, but there were also

"assistant directors" who became a kind of "board of evaluation" to maintain standards among the students and act in disciplinary or emergency cases. For example, as the pupils entered the room one day Bill was conscious of a scuffle in one corner of the room. As he made his way toward the disturbance one of the assistant directors came to him and said, "Mr. Schmidt, do you want me to put their names on the board?" When Bill said "yes" and the names were written, the difficulty immediately subsided.

In helping Bill organize this student government, his supervising teacher was interested to note a difference in her approach and Bill's. She found herself looking for trouble, ready to do something about it when it happened. Bill's idea was one of anticipation, organization to preclude or prevent unacceptable behavior. Through this more positive approach, Bill seemed to challenge the best in these adolescent students who by their very developmental level were facing problems of adjustment to adult life and responsibility. The interdependent relationship between teacher and pupils developed mutual respect and loyalty.

One wonders if the visual aspects of the adolescent pattern of behavior may be extremely misleading; because of inner tensions and confusion, the behavior often does not mean what it "looks" like. Bill was not limited or prejudiced by a visual picture of behavior.

A Challenge Happily Met

Another illustration of the manner in which Bill returned the responsi-

bility to the boys and girls occurred during an individual research-study period. The students had questions to be answered, so raised their hands. Realizing the waving of a hand in the air would not gain attention, boys and girls began to gather around Bill, plying him with questions. As the group became larger and the situation unwieldy, Bill sent the students to their seats. Then he quietly asked, "Now, how best can I help you?" And together, pupils and teacher worked out an orderly way in which each child could receive the help he needed.

To say that any blind person could successfully teach normally sighted youngsters would be a gross overstatement. Bill has achieved a measure of success because he is most intelligent, has an excellent background of academic knowledge, and demonstrates with children that natural affinity for friendly understanding and creative but firm leadership which makes a good teacher. As a blind person, operating in a different manner than teachers with normal sight, Bill has, we believe, contributed unique educational experiences to the children in the class, the teachers in the school, the community, and other handicapped people.

To the students he has presented a challenge that has been happily met. They have grown immeasurably in taking responsibility, both as individuals and as members of the group. In the blackboard work there were evidenced very few mistakes; the boys and girls knew their responsibility and were very

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COURTESY MARY-MARGARET SCOBY

Students and teachers organize an effective learning situation.

conscious of the need to do well. Because of his own lack of visual perception, Bill has helped the young people to approach creative writing from a feeling or attitudinal point of view with an emphasis on sense perception. Essays written by the youngsters used words like "the fire crackled" and "the smell of popcorn" rather than usual visual descriptions of color, size and shape. And because the children were working with a blind person, they grew in the ability to make specific verbal descriptions. They have had to speak with well chosen words rather than gestures, facial expressions, pictures and other visual media. Because of Bill's need to rely on his memory,

he has more easily integrated classroom activities, and more closely knit past activities with present discussions, thus giving more practical comparisons and relationships than most teachers would give.

The other teachers in the school of course have been most interested in Bill's progress. They have learned how to accept him as one of them, and found out what few deferences to make to his handicap. He has never been made to feel helpless or inadequate. Most of this has been accomplished with the help of the teacher of the sight-saving class, himself a blind person. When Bill arrived at the school to assume his student-teacher re-

sponsibilities, Mr. Sinclair had already oriented the teachers, the community and the children, to the potentialities of the blind person. And more subtly, Bill has affected the life and attitudes of the teachers. They realize the things Bill has been doing under a handicap are much harder than they would be for the person with normal vision. Some have felt themselves limited in perspective and thinking. As one teacher so aptly put it, "If he can handle the classroom situation, why should we gripe when we think things in our own rooms are a little difficult?" The consciousness of what he has done has lifted the morale a little and strengthened the effort of the whole faculty.

The community has never before experienced the teaching of a person with such a handicap. Parents have evidenced genuine interest in Bill, and much of the acceptance results from the chatter and information the children bring home. One parent expressed enthusiasm and appreciation for her son's "new sense of responsibility." This community has for some time been conscious of education for the blind. A needs study made previously resulted in the establishment of special facilities for blind children, which had been in operation for 3 years.

Bill's experience should be an encouraging challenge to others who face life with a handicap. He has proved

Class discussions develop many practical comparisons and relationships.

COURTESY MARY-MARGARET SCOBIE



that methods can be derived to surmount the deficiencies of blindness. He has demonstrated that person-to-person relationships and teacher-group relationships can be positive and successful. His experiences should give

hope to those handicapped who can also demonstrate the ability to carry on teaching activities. Perhaps Bill has taught us something which will help us to improve and strengthen our own methods of teaching.

DORIS YOUNG

Identifying and Utilizing Children's Interests

What are new techniques for ascertaining children's interests?

How can effective means be created for utilizing these interests?

These challenging topics are treated in this article.

INTEREST is an essential factor for learning."

"If the children are interested you will have no behavior problems."

"Develop the curriculum according to the interests of the group."

Statements like these have been proposed for many years. That interest is an essential for learning is an accepted fact, but interests remain intangible factors in the process. Although much has been written about children's interests, teachers continue to ask questions regarding the factor of interest in planning educative experiences for and with children. Is the teacher to take the list of units or topics from the curriculum bulletin and "make them interesting," or does he begin with the interests of the pupil? How can children's interests be identified, and how

can the interests be used effectively?

A recent investigation of factors associated with the science interests of intermediate grade children revealed further evidence regarding this factor in learning.¹ Several techniques were used to identify the interests of 129 children in grades four, five and six throughout one school year. Certain factors of growth and environment were analyzed to determine their relationships to the development of the interests expressed by the children. A detailed study of the science interests of one class was reported as these interests were utilized in developing the science curriculum.

¹ Doris Young, "Factors Associated with the Science Interests of a Selected Group of Intermediate Grade Children," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1956.)

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