

Leadership That Counts

In educational leadership, the teacher is the key person. Both as knower and as doer, the teacher in the classroom assists children and young people directly in improving the quality of their living.

EDUCATIONAL leadership reaches its greatest height in the classroom teacher. The teacher is the key person in the classroom learning situation and he influences, as well, the out-of-school learning of children and youth. The kind of person he is and the relations he has with people determine the quality of the living that goes on in the classroom. Administrators, supervisors, and all the vast array of persons connected with education justify their positions only insofar as they help the teacher build resources in himself—resources in terms of understandings, skills and attitudes which will make him a better person and a better teacher. They have responsibility to provide a climate in which the teacher is released to do his best, where he can feel secure and confident in himself, where he can live creatively with children and youth; to arrange situations through which the teacher can deepen the understandings, sharpen the skills and develop the attitudes essential to artistry in teaching; to provide adequate facilities and materials that will further learning.

The kind of climate in which the

teacher operates determines to a large extent the kind of living that goes on in the classroom. The understandings, skills and attitudes he has made a part of himself are reflected in his relations and his ways of working with children and youth. The physical conditions and the things with which he has to work contribute to the scope and quality of the learning experiences.

The Teacher Learns

Leadership that furthers the goals of democratic living is well described in current educational literature. Research is available which makes it possible to identify the characteristics and effectiveness of different ways of working to achieve group objectives. Literature on group processes is full of suggestions for improving the effectiveness of an individual's participation in a group. Each individual has his own interpretation of leadership based on the understandings, skills and attitudes acquired through experiences in living. It is extremely difficult to describe how the teacher learns to understand, appreciate, assume and accept leadership. It is safe to say that the teacher learns leadership through experience. The kinds of experiences in group living that have been satisfying

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will determine the type of leadership to which the teacher subscribes.

Many teachers are forced to live in situations where the group associates leadership with status positions, where the leader is "looked up to" as a superior person, where only the ideas of the leader or the "in group" count, where loyalty to a particular individual is expected, where communication of ideas is blocked, where little premium is placed on each individual's creative potential.

Oddly enough, many persons in status positions think of themselves as leaders. They interpret what they do as right for the good of the group. They see themselves as demonstrating to perfection the characteristics of a democratic leader.

A university professor meeting his class for the first time announced that the class would be conducted informally, that there would be opportunity for group participation and that emphasis would be on the process. "We will start first," he said, "by having each one introduce himself and tell something about his interests and his responsibilities."

It was apparent before half the people had introduced themselves that the instructor was impatient and anxious to get on. From then on he lectured through to the end of the course discouraging in no uncertain terms any "interruptions." His interpretation of a leader was one who "let" people introduce themselves and then carried on.

Everyone is familiar with similar strange interpretations that different individuals bring to the meaning of leadership. It is difficult to acquire the skills involved in democratic leadership when these are the working relations. It is important that one accepts others and does not repudiate them because their concepts are different. Rather, one recognizes that the major task in working with

others is to try to understand them, to look for the reasons underlying their actions, and to be empathic.

Mary L. found herself in an interesting situation. Mary had taken a job as a fifth grade teacher. It was her first year of teaching. The preliminary meetings before school opened were mostly routine. Then, in the second week of school, a note signed by the principal was in her box: "A special faculty meeting today at 3:15."

Following the faculty meeting Mary returned dejectedly through the deserted teachers room to her own classroom. Her disappointment showed in her face as she sat a few minutes looking around her room. She needed to get her feelings out somehow. This would be a good time to get a letter off to Dr. John R., who had been her adviser at the teachers college. She quickly got to the point of her letter.

"My 22 coworkers were sitting in subdued silence when I entered the room. A few smiles were directed toward me as I slipped into a seat. Apparently one doesn't come in after Mr. P., the principal, makes his entrance. Tribute to Mr. P. was made, when he walked in, by dead silence. I am sure no one in the group knew any more than I did about the purpose of the meeting. He announced in stentorian tones, as if to add to his stature, that a number of matters had come up which he felt needed attention. He assured us, however, that this meeting would not take the place of the regular meeting scheduled for next week. He felt that attention should be called to a number of items in the bulletin he had placed in the mailboxes that morning. Since someone might miss the points he felt should be stressed, he decided to read the entire bulletin. He then announced that the report of the committee working on yard duty would be given.

"Mrs. G., chairman of the committee, reported as if the committee had worked just to please him. Mr. P. did not ask for reactions but told the group he had already discussed the report with Mrs. G. during the day. They had agreed that the plan pro-



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posed by the committee would not work. He had prepared a schedule which he would post on the bulletin board outside his office in the morning. He was sure everyone would find it satisfactory. If anyone were not satisfied, he should see him personally. He called our attention to certain policies made years back which he wanted us to remember were still in effect. Finally he got to the problem that most concerned him—bicycle traffic. A teacher near the front of the room offered a

suggestion in a timid voice (which I couldn't hear). Mr. P. said, 'We tried that last year but it didn't work.'

"He requested each of us to send in the first thing in the morning the names of all the children in our room who rode bicycles to school. I decided to throw out an idea. If the kids were responsible for the bicycle problem, why not get them involved? The first idea that came to me was to have each child start by drawing on a map of the com-

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superiors and hear the plans for curriculum development on which we were going to work. Before dismissing the meeting he reminded us of our monthly reports which he asked us to have in his office the last Thursday of the month instead of on Friday.

"What do you think I learned about leadership at that meeting? What do you think my feelings were about Mr. P., my co-workers, myself and the Fairview situation?"

Excerpts from Dr. John's letter were encouraging and challenging:

"Even though you recognize Mr. P.'s purposes and the purposes of the faculty as different from yours, you will have to accept them as legitimate and desirable for them. I am sure they are trying to arrange better learning situations for girls and boys. Their experiences make them think this can be done in certain ways. Your big job is to get to know Mr. P. and the teachers. You will have to work hard to find the purposes and plans you *do* have in common and come to agreement on things you can do together. The areas in which you differ will be the ones through which you will interact and grow through planning together and experimenting . . . persevere, Mary. It might be a slow process, but it is one that we cherish."

Every teacher strives to give leadership in the classroom. He judges his success according to his interpretation of the leader's role. In classrooms where teachers conceive of leadership in terms of helping individuals and groups formulate and carry out their purposes, there is an atmosphere of friendliness, wholesome pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher relationships, and of accomplishment.

The Teacher Is a Knower

The teacher who leads knows children. He knows that each child is unique—that his uniqueness makes him different



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munity the streets he traveled en route to school. No one supported my idea. Mr. P. said, 'It looks as if we are all agreed that your idea wouldn't be of any help. As soon as I get the information I requested, we will develop some rules to settle the problem.' He announced that he had invited the people from the county office who worked in the district to come to the next regular meeting. He thought it would be an opportunity for the teachers to meet their

and his differences make him interesting. The teacher knows that each child is a growing organism. The pupil is going through a growth pattern that is common to all—but to add to his uniqueness he goes through the pattern at a rate that is peculiar to himself. The teacher expects wide ranges in the physical development of a group of children even though they have all lived the same number of years.

The teacher knows that children can learn—some faster than others, some slower than others. Most important of all, he knows how children learn. Learning is discovery. He listens to each child as the youngster makes discoveries. He hears him say, "Do you want to know something?" Thrilled with his discovery, the pupil shares age-old wisdom as if he were the first to discover it. Knowing that learning is discovery, the teacher doesn't give the answers, but helps children and youth to find the answers.

The teacher knows that children have feelings. He knows that Mary glows when told her painting is beautiful; that John feels taller when the committee of which he is chairman gives its report. He knows that Mac wishes he could ride his bicycle to school like the other fellows. He sees Nancy trying her best to pull her straggly hair into a pony tail like the other girls. He watches Ellen respond when the girls ask her to work with them on the decorations for the party.

The teacher knows that each child wants to be loved, to be like others, to belong and to be important. He knows that feelings play an important part in personality development, particularly one's feelings about himself.

The more the teacher knows about children in general and each child in particular, the better he understands them. Knowing that child study is still open, he continues his efforts to gain new

insights and deeper understandings about human growth and development. The better he knows the needs, interests and abilities of the group, the easier it is for him to help them formulate plans, carry out their purposes, and move leadership in the classroom.

The Teacher Is a Doer

The teacher who knows, guides children so as to help them grow and in the process he grows himself as a person and as a teacher.

Knowing children—how they grow, how they learn, and how they feel—the teacher is able to facilitate learning by using the children's purposes as the motivation for learning. He helps individuals and groups make plans and set purposes, arranges situations in which the purposes can be realized, and helps the children evaluate their progress in terms of their goals. The program develops as purposes are satisfied and new purposes and goals are defined.

The group in Miss R.'s room is studying pioneer life. They are pioneers living in Boonesboro. Miss R. helps them plan the activities they will carry on at Boonesboro. What will they need to make their living at Boonesboro more realistic and more satisfying? A cabin, furnishings, utensils, clothing, rifles, and so forth. Miss R. places tools and materials in the room so that they can make the things they need. Life in Boonesboro is exciting for ten-year-olds. They have a purpose for planning, for working in groups, for carrying on certain activities. They have a purpose for using numbers, for speaking, writing and listening. They have a purpose for gathering all the information possible to give realism to the play. Boonesboro could be lost to the wilderness!

Opportunities abound for each one to contribute to the planning and the carrying out of the group's purposes. Today Miss R. might give the leadership by having the best idea for cutting the patterns for the sunbonnets. Tomorrow, John might have the best idea for rounding up the cattle. The next

day Mary might further the group's purposes by her suggestions for cooking the meals.

The teacher knows that he can facilitate learning when he motivates on the basis of what comes from within the child rather than on what he imposes.

The teacher is a harmonizer as he encourages leadership to function. He recognizes the right of each one to be different and places a high premium on the differences. He wastes no time in trying to erase the differences but utilizes these to make life in the classroom interesting and exciting. As a harmonizer the teacher is not a "smoother over." He does not say, "We are all agreed," but rather, "Why did we have difficulty?" or "What can we do about our disagreements?" The teacher as a harmonizer helps the children to do better the things they have purposed to do.

The teacher is a supporter. A child returning to school after an absence gets a special greeting from the teacher. "We're glad you're back. We had trouble getting along without you. We need your help to finish the boat." The teacher senses when a child needs some personal approval to

keep him going. Harry's father is a migrant worker and Harry has been around. The teacher shows enthusiasm for the places where Harry has lived and encourages him to tell the class about his experiences. Whenever necessary the teacher does a little social engineering to get particular children into certain groups to broaden their opportunities for group participation.

The teacher who is a knower and a doer helps children and young people to understand the world in which they live. He helps them to understand peoples' relations with each other; to see their relations with each other, with their families and with the school. He encourages them to express in many ways their reactions to living. And most important of all, the teacher helps them to build the kind of feeling about themselves that will contribute to their wholesome personality development.

Educational leadership may appear in strange guises in some classrooms. In general, however, in the schools of the nation, leadership functions to improve living for children and young people.

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