

The Teacher's Leadership Role With Children and Youth

What are the teacher's leadership attributes in the instruction and guidance of children and young people?

THE ROLE of the teacher is not only related to a specific concept of the teaching-learning process—it is predetermined by that concept. During the past three decades there has been increasing acceptance of the principle that learning is an active process. The socialized recitation, the project method, the activity concept, the unit of learning found a place in the professional literature and were used as ways of organizing learning experiences in the classroom. By some unfortunate alchemy, these ways of working with children became ends in themselves—devices, panaceas for improvement of teaching, or convenient targets for the Rudolph Flesches of a former era.

The classroom teacher listened to lectures, attended college classes, visited laboratory and experimental schools, and attempted to synthesize or reject the newer practices in teaching. No one was apt to tell him the simple truth that he was still the most important factor in the teaching-learning process. Not the socialized recitation, nor the project, nor the activity, nor the unit, nor any other way of organizing learning in the classroom was half as important as the role of the teacher in living and working and learning with children. The teacher was con-

fused about his proper role, and the results ranged from a relapse into authoritarianism to total abdication and confusion. Could this have been a contributing factor to the dramatic exodus of teachers from the profession in the early 'forties?

One significant development in the education field during the past 15 years has been the cooperative workshop for teachers. In these field workshops, college faculty members, school administrators and teachers met to work on problems of immediate concern in the classrooms. In the course of discussion, debate, and study, a clarification of the role of the teacher gradually emerged as one of the important by-products.

The role of the teacher was given new dignity and importance. Teachers began to be more articulate, to formulate statements of their own problems, to initiate study groups, to accept and discharge responsibility for making plans to improve educational practice. This emerging clarification of the role of the teacher included many functions. Kimball Wiles suggests that the teacher is a listener, a helper, a resource person, a stage-setter, a spotlight-shifter, an explainer, a questioner. William Ragan suggests that the

teacher is a builder of human lives and a trustee of cultural heritage. He further maintains that teachers need to be equipped with the technical skills comparable to those required for members of other important professions.

The writer is indebted to Louis Rath for the following marks of identification of effective teaching. The teacher gives clear directions (he communicates effectively). The teacher helps the child or youth to clarify his own goals (through suggestions, questions, cooperative planning). The teacher suggests effective ways of reaching those goals (helps the child or youth to determine whether or not what he is doing will get him where he really wants to go).

This concept of teaching is one of guidance and leadership. All of the great teachers of history from Socrates, Jesus, Mohammed, Confucius, to Mahatma Gandhi and Mark Hopkins have sought to develop character rather than to impose morals; to lead the individual through an inductive process to the formulation and acceptance of moral and spiritual values and to the translation of those values into everyday human living.

The Teacher's Attributes

Paul Witty's interesting study of the analysis of personality traits of the effective teacher as revealed in children's letters showed that children value and rank certain attributes as follows: cooperative, democratic attitudes; kindness and consideration for the individual; patience; wide interests; personal appearance and pleasing manner; fairness; sense of humor; good disposition and consistent behavior; interest in pupils' problems;

flexibility; use of recognition and praise; unusual proficiency in teaching a subject.

That proficiency in teaching a subject should occur less frequently than other qualities in the letters of these children is not too surprising. "What Johnny has done in arithmetic is important," says William Ragan, "but what arithmetic has done to Johnny is still more important. If he has learned arithmetic and at the same time learned to like school, to do his own work, to continue with a task until it is finished, and to do his work accurately and neatly—in short, if he has developed desirable personality traits as a result of the way in which he learned arithmetic—then his experience with arithmetic has been successful."

The effective teacher realizes that the routine of the school day is the framework within which the teacher and children operate; the various subject areas are the media for the development of personality; and personal relationships establish the emotional climate in which learning does or does not take place.

The leadership role of the teacher determines the quality of living and the kind of learning that take place in the classroom. The teacher, as an educational leader of children and youth, is mentally healthy, emotionally and intellectually mature. He is interested in people, he seeks to understand the causes of behavior, and to apply methods of intelligence in guiding children toward effective social living.

The teacher as an educational leader is consistent and dependable, and reflects in his own behavior the moral and spiritual values to which he subscribes. He is not only respected for his competencies, but he challenges the intellectual curiosity of his students and communicates to them the fire of his own enthusiasm. He inspires emulation.

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Teaching may be compared to driving an automobile. If the car has plenty of gasoline and a good battery and the mechanism for igniting the gasoline vapor, the engine will purr happily and the automobile will travel under its own process of internal combustion. The driver guides its course according to his own ability and wisdom. But if there is no gasoline, no spark, no internal driving power, the driver has little choice but to push or be towed—a laborious, exasper-

ating and often a totally unnecessary hardship.

Children and young people not only respond to effective leadership in the classroom—they seek it, they are eager for it. At all developmental levels, from kindergarten through college, the teacher is best remembered who, by virtue of the kind of person he is, reveals worth-while goals to be sought, effective ways to achieve these, and an over-all zest for living in the process.

MARJORIE KINGSLEY

Helping the Student Become a Teacher

What is the room teacher's contribution in helping the student teacher become a competent, confident member of the teaching profession?

HOW DID you feel, the very first time you entered the classroom in which you did your practice teaching? Do you recall that hollowness in the pit of your stomach, the general feeling of uncertainty about the situation into which you were moving and your ability to operate in it? How suddenly all the courses you had taken and the preparations you had made for this day seemed of little consequence? Did you feel woefully inadequate in the face of a whole new world about which you had read a great deal and which you had observed a little? Although you were thrilled to be actually embarking on this most important step in becoming a teacher, did you, down underneath, have a sneaking desire to

gather up your belongings and bolt? As you stepped into that first classroom teaching experience, you probably took with you a very mixed set of feelings.

A little later, remember too how you felt, as you tried various plans with the youngsters? The situations looked so well organized in the hands of the room teacher but simply disintegrated when you tried them. You seriously wondered if you were capable of learning to teach. Some of the youngsters were impudent, some weren't learning a *thing*, and you were *so* tired at the end of each day. And then there was the day when things went better, no one was sassy, a discussion went well, and you had been blessed with a shy smile from a youngster who

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