

When a Difference Is a Difference

For each child or teacher here described, differences have made a difference. Upon such differences we can build a better and richer life for all of us.

WE ARE living in an uneasy world. This very uneasiness is both cause and effect in opening and closing boundaries to men and women seeking fulfillment of both self and group goals. Individual differences appear to be both heightened and leveled as individuals and groups move from one geographic area to another, from one social sphere to another, from one economic position to another. We see both threat and acceptance of our beliefs in the worth and dignity of each human being. We note the displacement of families and groups of families due to political, economic and social shifts. We read both of progress toward and threats to our ideals of world peace. Some of these touch us, but vaguely. We are more aware of the new, if somewhat meager crop of teachers joining our ranks, of the sea of children entering school, of the children from "crop and construction" families drifting into and out of our schools and communities. We may feel that the whole world is moving about like the Ich-a-pods in *On Beyond Zebra!*

We welcome but may feel threatened by the new crop of teachers. We want to

accept but we may feel swamped by the new children. We recognize the problems presented by the itinerant children but still may be irritated by them.

Intellectually we probably accept the permanent changeableness of our present environment, yet feel disconcerted by and fearful of the ever-changing pattern of living in today's world, by the advent of new persons and influences into our educational system and community, by the "different" learner who enrolls in our classes, and by the "different" co-worker with whom we must eat lunch, share hall duty, and plan curriculum development programs.

Ours is indeed an uneasy world in which our profession gives each of us a strategic position. This profession has an important role to play in easing the tensions which often arise when newcomer meets oldcomer.

Who Is New?

The newcomer may be James, grade two, who has moved 14 times with his family in less than two years. Or Nick, speaking two languages (neither being English), who entered a junior high school following a long trip from a displaced persons' camp where he was born. Perhaps it was Mr. Clark, who moved from a teaching position in the public school to a position in the local college.

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Or Mrs. Glen, who returned to a position in the college where she had obtained her undergraduate degree.

Mr. Alvin, Miss Burt and Miss Lorne are new, too. Mr. Alvin was appointed principal of the school in which he had taught for five years. Miss Burt remained in the same community but was appointed principal of a larger elementary school. Miss Lorne was selected to be a helping teacher. This involved her leaving her first grade room to move about the school district, entering rooms of all beginning teachers to give help.

Floyd, Mr. Bush and Mr. Wesley became new for different reasons. Floyd entered grade six in a school five miles from his former segregated school. Mr. Bush, with a severe physical handicap, joined the teaching staff of a regular elementary school. Mr. Wesley became the first teacher of his race to join the staff composed of members of another race.

Everyone has been new at sometime, somewhere. Each of us has been the new one in some way. Our newness may have come about due to geographic, economic, social, political or legal changes. How does it feel to be new?

How Did It Feel?

How did James feel as he donned his coat and sloshed through the rain to his fifteenth teacher? How did the teacher feel when she discovered her sequence in his pedagogical dynasty?

What were Nick's feelings as he tried to communicate to his fellow students, teacher and principal the first day in a strange-smelling, complex-appearing public school? What were the feelings of his teacher as Nick gestured and jabbered, eyes darting from face to face seeking understanding?

What feelings did Mr. Clark and Mrs. Glenn have as they carefully groomed

themselves for that first college position? What feelings did their former instructors have seeing their new yet familiar-appearing co-workers?

How did Mr. Alvin and Miss Burt feel as they greeted the first teacher, the first day on the new job? How did the teacher feel as he returned the greeting?

What feelings were barricaded behind Miss Lorne's reserve as she opened the door of the first teacher she was to help. What was the sudden rush of feeling of the first-year teacher when she saw the door open?

How did Floyd feel as the school bus moved past his familiar if not beloved school? What were the feelings of the teacher as she greeted this young American citizen but stranger, nevertheless?

At the first teachers meeting, Mr. Bush thrust his crippled body into the circle of his new co-workers. What feelings did he experience? How were his peers affected as they saw a physically handicapped person join their ranks for the first time? How did Mr. Wesley feel as one hundred or more pairs of blue, brown, gray, or hazel eyes gazed at him as he was introduced at the first orientation meeting? How did these teachers feel as they acknowledged the introduction?

Who was the fearful one, the distressed, the excited, the accepted, the rejected, the respected, the hated, the courageous, the despairing one in each of these situations? Whether old or new to the situation, the same kind of feeling may be engendered in each. Both may be fearful or courageous, hateful or loving, belittling or respectful. Knowing how the other feels is extremely important.

Knowing How It Feels Is Not Enough

It is imperative that both old and newcomers sense and know as completely as

possible each others' feelings. It is also essential to know how to show respect for others, to know how to work together to make the little world of our professional orbit less uneasy.

It would appear that the greater responsibility lies with the oldcomer, for he has found, at least in part, his place in the scheme of things. The acceptance of this responsibility must go beyond a vague feeling that the newcomer will "work in." The oldcomer must sincerely and earnestly believe that the newcomer has a place—a good place—a place befitting him as a human being. Classifying a newcomer as a human being first may help to reduce the prejudices we have learned.

The oldcomer may need to be prepared for the shyness, the braggadocio, the restraint, the eagerness, the overcordiality, the wariness or even sullenness exhibited by the newcomer. The newcomer may surprise and please the oldcomer with his praise and acceptance of the weather, the children, or the instructional materials. On the other hand, the oldcomer may be disconcerted by the belittling remarks and unfavorable comparisons made by the newcomer. One cannot know immediately the background each brings to that situation. We may need to hold fast to the principle that all behavior is caused.

One learns to watch for the tension cues. Mr. Clark's cheeks were too pink. Floyd cast furtive glances past his grubby fist; Mr. Alvin spoke too loudly; Nick grinned incessantly; Mrs. Glenn wiggled her toes; Miss Burt confided her fears to a friend; Miss Lorne became more reserved; Mr. Bush perspired excessively; Mr. Wesley agreed with everything. Little James' body became so tense that one had the feeling that he would give off the plucked sound of a high *E* on a violin

if he were touched. All of these may be signals to the oldcomer that the newcomer is uneasy.

Knowing how it feels to be a newcomer, believing in the worth of each human being, observing symptoms of a lack of ease, all provide a basis for helping both old and newcomer better to meet the situation.

Who Helps and How?

The extension of the open hand and the eating together have long been signals of trust. Whether child or adult, the oldcomer can shake hands, arrange a coffee hour, a coke party, or sit by the newcomer at lunch. But it takes more than a handshake and a bit of bread-breaking to bring about ease in the working-learning situation.

The fifteenth teacher in the life of seven-year-old James helped him with her warm handshake, smiling eyes, words of welcome, and praise for the many things he could tell. Nick's teacher, through a skillfully directed discussion, helped his peers discover what they were doing to Nick when they taught him obscene words to say to the girls. Mrs. Glenn and Mr. Clark discovered their ideas were welcomed and utilized through a discussion of observation schedules and demonstration lessons. An older teacher, in a bantering yet respectful manner, set the tone of the staff in easing Mr. Alvin into his new role. Miss Burt, in using the building's handbook as a basis for discussion, demonstrated her philosophy of a group approach to problems and thus assured the staff that she was not upsetting previously established patterns of operation. The new teacher saw Miss Lorne's reserve slip away when she stopped to work with a child. The administration's behavior set the pattern of acceptance for Mr. Wesley. Floyd's teacher

placed a reassuring hand on Floyd's shoulder as he was introduced to a supervisor. The superintendent of the school gained verbal acceptance for Mr. Bush before offering him the position. But Mr. Bush gained actual acceptance only when he explained the cause of his handicap, why his body did certain things; and when he reflected to the other teachers the distressed feelings they were apt to have on viewing his appearance and movements.

Not only must each newcomer have a specialized "treatment" but the sequence of the learning-to-work-together experience must be specialized for each situation. We could hope that after the initial meeting the enterprise would be a cooperative one, but it may not be. The newcomer may be incapable of doing his share because of his previous experiences and the impact of the new situation. The oldcomer may be so disturbed by the entrance of the newcomer into his world that he cannot behave in a mature manner. We need guide lines and boundaries to help both those new and those old to the situation.

1. Prepare to be disturbed and to see others disturbed. The appointment of Miss Lorne as a helping teacher disturbed some of the principals because they thought it showed their inadequacy to help beginning teachers. Miss Lorne was upset because she knew this was happening to the principals.

2. Work on a specific problem. Nick's teacher began with a specific situation when she called the group together and asked, "Is this what you want Nick to learn?"

3. Do something beyond discussion. Miss Burt went beyond discussing her fears with a friend. She planned a program of action with the staff in her building to reassure them.

4. Make a clean-cut decision if possible. The administration announced Mr. Wesley's addition to the staff with a matter-of-factness that alleviated the uncertainty of many, gave courage to some, and prevented some of the undirected bubbling wondering if two races could work on the same faculty.

5. Expect heightened hostility in some cases. The social structure of Floyd's minority group and that of the group into which he moved was threatened. Among persons in each group greater hostility was evidenced.

6. Distribute facts based upon sound research and reputable fact-gathering. Mr. Bush and his administrator many, many times and to different groups in the community explained the causes of brain injury and the characteristics of that kind of exceptionality. The skill, the understanding and the courage of Mr. Bush made it possible for some persons in the community to evaluate more realistically the movement of special education and the employment of physically handicapped persons.

7. Have a light touch for a potentially heavy moment. "Good morning, son, Mr. Alvin, sir," said the older teacher in her accepting tone and manner. This helped to create an atmosphere of fellowship and respect which tended to permeate the whole school staff.

8. Accept differences as real and valuable. Floyd, Mr. Wesley, and James were quite different in many ways from the members of the groups they joined. But each had something of value to contribute. Their ability to participate effectively was released only as the oldcomers learned ways of working with them.

9. Focus on a particular aspect of the problem. A new answer was needed to schedule the increased number of demonstrations in the laboratory school, a small

part of the over-all problem of effective use of the laboratory school. The focus was on the problem, not on Mrs. Glenn and Mr. Clark. The group leader provided a proper setting for their contributions.

10. Make use of the dramatic. It was partly the zeal and partly the timing of the director of student teaching which gave the superintendent the courage to hire Mr. Bush.

11. See the area of least resistance. Floyd's group wanted better educational advantages for their children. The school personnel stated they desired this, also. Here, then, was a common meeting point for planning and action.

12. Take a many-sided approach; there is no one way. Neither can one person be all things to all other persons. It takes

many ways and many persons to open the boundaries to men and women, children and youth, seeking fulfillment of both self and group goals.

For each person sketchily described in this article, differences made a difference. Upon these differences we build a better economic, social and political life for each of us. We capitalize on the ever-present differences which we encounter in this business of living, by utilizing the knowledge research gives us, by acting judiciously and humanely because of our beliefs, and by improving our skills through constant practice.

Ours is an uneasy world, perhaps uneasier than we can cope with comfortably. But it is this very discomfort which forces us to work toward the achievement of self and group goals.

ELIZABETH SUTTON

The World of the Migrant Child

Coordinated efforts are now under way in many communities to help teachers and parents better meet the special needs of the children in migratory families.

MY, WHAT a nice report! You must be smart to do such good work."

"I try to do the best I can all the time," came the mature answer from the six-year-old as he smiled into the warm, friendly eyes of his new principal.

It was October 19, and Ted was one of the new migrant children who had come alone to enroll in this school. His school report from Ohio showed perfect attendance from date of opening until October 12. Checks of excellence were placed by these citizenship traits: keeps his word, is trustworthy; works well with

others; keeps temper, cheerful under difficulties; makes good use of time, and so on. Written comments by the teacher indicated that he was ready for initial book reading, and that he had adjusted well socially because of his warm and friendly personality.

It was October 29. In another school a nine-year-old migrant girl was enrolling for the third consecutive year.

"Hello, Jane, I've been looking for you back," greeted the principal.

"Good morning. I brought my report card with me. I have two."

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