

the American people remain convinced that homework has value but have decided that homogeneous grouping hurts more than it helps.

The reason we worry so much about "building public understanding" is simply that if the people don't like what we are doing they won't let us do it. We build only the curriculum and use only the teaching methods which the active school public has learned to accept. At the present stage in our evolution as a

profession, educational research is still a ship afloat on the tides of public opinion—now awash—now lifted high—not without power of its own but ever moved by a larger force. We must still depend on persuasion rather than solid proof to convince the public that modern methods are valid. Orderly patterns of public participation give us a small chance to influence the choice of worthwhile content and a big chance to explain why we teach as we do.

L. T. CAMP

## Three-Way Conferences Assist Lay Participation

**The three-way conference brings together child, parent and teacher in a setting that induces greater understanding and confidence.**

**T**HE TEACHER'S classroom position is a most favored one for building and establishing working relationships with parents. He has the day by day contact with the parent's most valuable possession—his child. Thus of all professional personnel, the teacher usually has a most favorable opportunity for communicating with the parents.

In order for the schools to guide students in terms of a common orientation, adults responsible for children at home and at school must reflect consistent ideas and values. Both parents and teachers can build an understanding of

the life of the child at home and at school. In such an interchange the child's aspirations, attitudes and beliefs become a working basis for establishing a more worthwhile educational program. Children are the benefactors when parents share in the development and functioning of the school progress.

In the program of parent participation one of the most significant ways devised for parent and teacher to exchange ideas and work together is the three-way conference. This contact with the home does much to develop better understanding and cooperative effort. The parents possess unique knowledge and understanding of their children and it is wise for the teacher to tap this resource. A

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teacher is a temporary, changing factor in the education of the child; whereas, upon mothers and fathers falls continuous educational responsibility. For example, by the time the child has reached the fifth grade, his parents have had from 10 to 11 years of close association and constant observation of their child's progress and development, while a teacher has had, at best, but a casual acquaintance with the group assigned to his room to add to the wide over-all knowledge of children in general which he may possess.

Examples are given of data revealed in conferences that assisted one classroom teacher in improving and developing the curriculum for the individual child on a fifth grade level.

John's conference offers an example in which both the child and the mother felt the freedom and opportunity to discuss an academic problem and to make specific recommendations.

*Teacher:* John, how do you like school?

*John:* I like it. It's fun, but I wish we had longer recesses for I like to play. Next to recess I like gym best.

*Teacher:* I'm glad you enjoy school, naturally, but how do you like the library?

*John:* I don't like to read.

*Mrs. Allen:* Now, Mr. Camp, this is what really worries me. He reads a lot of comics and Dr. Doolittle books, but that's all.

*Teacher:* John, have you thought about why you don't like to read?

*John:* Oh, I don't know, I never have liked to read. There isn't time, for one thing.

*Teacher:* Maybe you just look for other things to do.

*Mrs. Allen:* Yes, I think he does. There are many times he has nothing to do and he could be reading. I have bought him a number of books.

*Teacher:* People read for many reasons. One reads for entertainment, or he may read for information. How do you think you would do in all your subjects if you read only for entertainment?

*John:* Pretty poor.

*Teacher:* John, let me tell how I see the picture and you tell me if I hit the nail on the head. If you are working and if anything is going on in the room that looks like play, you quit and join. Am I right?

*John:* Yes, you are.

*Teacher:* What can you do?

*John:* When someone asks me to pass a note I can say *no*, or if someone begins to talk to me while I'm working I can tell them that I will talk to them later.

*Teacher:* Now, how about social studies?

*John:* In social studies, you don't give me time enough to read what is assigned.

*Teacher:* I'll try to help you in social studies and library if you want me to. The librarian and I can give you more time in helping you select books, and I can give you some assistance in social studies in the afternoon free period.

*Mrs. Allen:* What can I do to help?

*Teacher:* I'd suggest your reading aloud to John, or John reading aloud to you. Why not change around after deciding among yourselves which you want to do? Then some evenings after John has read an assignment silently, you might ask him some questions about the material and discuss the main topics. Too, you might examine for reading interest the books that you are buying for John. John, what do you think?

*John:* I'd like for Mother to help me.

*Mrs. Allen:* John, I will work some with you every night. You don't know how much better I feel, now that I know more about John's problems and how I can help. Mr. Camp, I'm sure that I will need help from you as time goes by. May I phone for an appointment, or are you too busy?

*Teacher:* Please feel free to call me any time. If we can get John interested in reading on his own, our job will be made easier and his reading will be more beneficial to him.

The honesty of each person gave opportunity to analyze John's academic problems and to agree on respective responsibilities. The teacher saw almost immediate results due to John's self-discipline and reading habits. It seemed that John had assumed higher standards for himself, and much of his success was attributed to his mother's help. She

followed through on the suggestions made in the conference.

One of the significant aspects of regularly scheduled conferences is that the teacher does not spend undue time on the children working in the lower quartile of the group. Equal time is given to the average and the gifted child. Mothers of these children appreciate having the chance to talk to the teacher about how to develop their child's ability. Such an example is shown in Bonnie's conference.

*Teacher:* Bonnie, you do excellent work in all your subjects. You are popular, a strong leader and a good influence. There isn't much I can say about your school work. I'd like to know if you have special interests that you follow outside of school.

*Bonnie:* I like to draw.

*Mrs. Bell:* At home she has a pencil, crayon or paints in her hand all the time. It's disgusting. (The mother laughed at this point, but it was evident that there was some feeling back of the comment.)

*Teacher:* I have noticed that you have drawn pictures of girls in class and you do a beautiful job in drawing their wardrobes. Have you ever thought about being a fashion designer?

*Mrs. Bell:* I think she has. Everytime I get a magazine she looks through it to see what all the girls are wearing.

*Teacher:* Do you two talk together about the fashions, colors and materials?

*Mrs. Bell:* We talk about the styles casually, but you help me to realize how much more I could do.

*Teacher:* You recall at our mothers' meeting that we decided to help the children in spending their time in more worthwhile activities, and I think here's a real opportunity to enrich Bonnie's background by discussing styles, getting books from the library, and talking to her about dress designing. Bonnie, you have an unusual talent in drawing. The girls you draw are beautiful and you certainly know how to blend colors.

*Mrs. Bell:* You know, I have thought of her drawing as a whim, but I can see now that this is a real interest and that I can

do a lot in maintaining and extending this interest. I don't know why I'm so late in waking up.

*Teacher:* Bonnie, there is much interesting pictorial material that you two will want to review together. You and your mother have great fun in store for you in comparing styles, finding out about colors that go well together, and examining materials. How about you and a group of interested friends planning a style show for the rest of the class?

*Bonnie:* I'd love that.

*Teacher:* Remind me to tell you what I have in mind later. (Before school the following day, the teacher discussed with Bonnie the possibility of a style show. He talked to all the girls, who enthusiastically agreed to participate. They planned the program and decided to schedule it at 1:15 P.M. one week later, enabling them to return to school from lunch wearing the costumes. The girls modeled school clothes, a riding habit, sport and party dresses. Background piano music was played by one of the boys in the class. They gave programs to the boys and to their guests, a visiting fifth grade class.)

The conference helped to change Mrs. Bell's attitude about Bonnie's ability. She began to express an appreciation for her daughter's talent and began to plan many avenues that would convert what she considered "doodling" into a worthwhile adventure. The teacher dignified and gave importance to Bonnie's artistic skill. He provided a school outlet that gave her further direction and involved other children in a stimulating social relationship.

In Howard's conference, the teacher discovered that Mr. Morgan would be a valuable resource person to visit the class.

*Teacher:* Howard, one thing that I would like to bring up before we leave, is your homework. It seems to me that you are getting a little careless in your written assignments. You have had to recopy several of your papers recently. Why is this?

*Howard:* Just in a hurry, I guess.

*Mrs. Morgan:* Mr. Camp, I try to look over the children's homework each night, but I haven't had the time these last few nights. Mr. Morgan is gone so much of the time which leaves all responsibility to me. He's been gone two weeks this trip.

*Howard:* He sent me a menu from a swanky restaurant in Beirut the other day.

*Teacher:* Is he visiting several places or is he working in Lebanon primarily?

*Mrs. Morgan:* He stopped in a few cities in Europe, but he is spending most of his time in the Middle East.

*Teacher:* Howard, since the News Filmstrip we study each week nearly always has news coverage of the Middle East, do you think your father would come in to talk to us when he returns?

*Howard:* Sure, I think so.

*Mrs. Morgan:* He will be glad to and he is taking pictures. I think that will make it more interesting to the children.

*Teacher:* Howard, let me know when your father returns and I shall call and arrange his visit.

Mr. Morgan was delighted with his invitation and pleased that he could show pictures and tell the class about conditions he had found in the Middle East. He was surprised at the amount of knowledge that the children had learned about the area through the weekly News Filmstrip. His color pictures were

flashed on the screen by the opaque projector and snapshots were shown from Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq. Included in the scenes were people, buildings, animals, a water reservoir and filters, oil wells, and topography. The information was current and clearly explained. Children took an active part in the discussion for they were familiar with the content. They thought it a real treat to have Howard's father visit the class and present such a colorful account of his Asian trip.

The school curriculum can be enriched, more and more, through closer contacts between home and school. Not only are parents volunteering to come into the classroom but they are suggesting how other citizens of the community can help in building concepts relating to what is being studied in class.

The nature of the three-way conference leads to greater understanding and confidence, for the atmosphere is educative rather than disciplinary. The conference brings together child, parent and teacher, the people most concerned in helping the child receive greatest value from his educational opportunities.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

May 3-7

ASCD Research Institute

Chicago, Illinois

This Institute will focus on *learning*. It is open to individuals and to groups from school systems. Registration fee is \$40.00 per person. Chairman of the ASCD Research Institute is Alexander Frazier. Further information and application forms are available through the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington 6, D. C.

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