

Human Relations Training for Teachers

ALTHOUGH there is some agreement that skills in human relations are crucial needs for educators, there is little agreement regarding how these skills are learned, improved and maintained by classroom teachers. One way to learn such skills has been suggested and promoted by the summer institutes at Bethel, Maine, organized by the National Training Laboratory. The work of this laboratory is well known and its worth to ASCD has been demonstrated in such instances as the "First Cooperative Curriculum Research Institute."¹ One research program has introduced human relations training for school administrators in an attempt to improve current educational practices. However, evaluative studies regarding the worth of laboratory training in human relations to the classroom teacher have not yet been completed.²

Such is our task. Involving some 60

¹ See: Stuart Chase, *The Bethel Story*. Washington, D. C.: National Training Laboratory in Group Development, 1957; and Matthew B. Miles and Stephen Corey, "The First Cooperative Curriculum Research Institute," in *Research for Curriculum Improvement*, 1957 Yearbook, Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a department of the National Education Association, 1957.

² Vynce A. Hines and Hulda Grobman. "What Makes a Good Principal." *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals* 40: 5-16, November 1956.

elementary classroom teachers of the Nashville City and Davidson County school systems, an effort is being made to evaluate the effectiveness of laboratory training in human relations.³ These teachers have been divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group, subdivided into two sections numbering 12 and 13 teachers respectively, participated in separate three-week workshops that were patterned after those of the National Training Laboratory. The remaining 35 teachers form a control group that will make possible comparisons regarding the worth of this kind of training. All of these teachers have cooperated in supplying extensive attitude, personality and biographical data. They have permitted extensive observations of their classrooms, and they have maintained a comprehensive diary of their classroom activities. Specifically, all these data include:

1. *Attitude and personality data*—Purporting to inventory respectively attitudes towards pupils, towards teaching, and personality factors, all teachers were asked to complete the *Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory*, the *Teacher Opinion*

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Inventory, the Survey of Educational Leadership Practices, and the Minnesota Multiphasic Inventory.

2. *Biographical data*—A biographical history blank was constructed and administered that asked a variety of questions dealing with a teacher's preparation and experience in teaching, participation in community and professional activities, job opportunities and preferences, and open-ended questions related to situational job satisfaction.

3. *Classroom observations*—Utilizing two relatively new techniques, the teacher's classroom was assessed with respect to social-emotional climate and the ability of pupils to work together in groups. Social-emotional climate in the classroom was assessed by use of the *Observation Schedule and Record (OSCAR)*,⁴ a behavioral rating card that inventories what children are actually doing in a classroom at a given time, what the teacher is doing, and the extent and patterns of communication maintained between teachers and pupils. The ability of the pupils to plan and carry out a series of group tasks was assessed by means of the *Russell Sage Social Relations Test*.⁵ This is a performance test developed to measure achievement of those objectives of education related to working together in groups that were developed at the President's Mid-Century Conference on Objectives of Education.⁶

⁴ Donald M. Medley and Harold E. Mitzel. "A Technique for Measuring Classroom Behavior." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, in press.

⁵ Dora E. Damrin. "The Russell Sage Social Relations Test: A Technique for Measuring the Group Problem Solving Skills in Elementary School Children." *Journal of Experimental Education* 28: 85-99, September 1959.

⁶ Nolan C. Kearney. *Elementary School Objectives*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1953.

4. *Diary of classroom activities*—Finally, all teachers kept a log of their own group activities during a one-week period. This was requested to supply some insight into the nature and frequency of group activities used by the classroom teachers, and offered anecdotal material dealing with the teacher's perceptions of his classroom activities.

All measurements will be obtained twice from each teacher of both the experimental and control groups. The first collection of data took place prior to the training sessions, during the early part of the spring semester, 1959. The training sessions were then held during the summer of 1959. A calendar year after the first data were collected, the follow-up materials will be distributed and completed, and all the classroom observations repeated. Analyses of these data will make comparisons of change at different levels: the social-emotional climate of the classroom, the pupils' and teachers' classroom behavior, and the teachers' attitudes, and self-descriptions. If the changes are significantly greater among the teachers who had the laboratory training in human relations, as compared with the teachers who did not have the training, evidence is available regarding the worth of the laboratory training.

Additionally, this study should cast some light on a variety of other issues. For instance, can laboratory training in human relations change the teacher-pupil relationship? Do teachers, in fact, change attitudes and behavior as a result of a three-week workshop in which there are many opportunities to develop understandings, skills, and practices in human relations? What effects on the pupils result from the teachers' increased knowledge about human relations? Although the data are far from complete,

it is not too early to report some of the findings that are already apparent. These include:

1. The variation between teachers and pupils in human relations skills in the classroom appears at least as great as the variation in pupil achievement in the commonly appraised subject areas. Human relations skills represent one of the traits on which individual differences are as great as any of the other skill areas.

2. Human relations in the classroom are centrally dependent on the characteristics and skills of the individual teacher. Variation between teachers within the same school is almost as great as the variation between teachers in different schools in this respect. It is surprising that some teachers who seem to maintain the best human relations do so in a classroom next door to teachers

who maintain the least satisfactory human relations.

3. Use of group activities in the classroom that involves a pupil-teacher affective relationship requires particular personality and attitude characteristics of teachers. Age and teaching experience appear more important as factors in human relations than do the amount or kind of academic training a person has received.

4. The conclusion of others that the social-emotional climate of a classroom may be assessed in a reliable fashion by trained observers utilizing standardized procedures is reinforced by this study. This finding may well suggest that at most the problem of measuring teacher effectiveness may be close to solution. At the least, it suggests that observers working with elementary school teachers in widely different geo-

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graphical locations and with schools having widely variant populations can utilize the same measuring instrument to obtain an index of teacher effectiveness.

5. Laboratory training in human relations need not be carried out in a geographically remote location. Some concern has been voiced regarding the need for a cultural island in which to conduct this training. However, an analysis of reactions to training of these teachers who lived at home indicates feasibility of instituting training during regular collegiate summer sessions.

6. The performance of children on the *Russell Sage Social Relations Test* represents a reliable performance measure of skill in planning and executing a problem of working together in groups. Availability of a measure such as the *Russell Sage Social Relations Test* should encourage research and further investigations into why some teachers are better able to teach such skills to their children than are other teachers.

7. Teachers differ in the degree of profit gained from the laboratory, ranging from those who are largely confused and mystified by it, to numbers who discover new, exciting, and hitherto unexpected vistas offering almost unlimited promise. Preliminary analysis indicates considerable success in predicting the relative degree of learning different teachers are likely to achieve in such a workshop.

8. Finally, and perhaps most important, teachers who experienced the laboratory in human relations are finding their work as teachers somewhat easier, more relaxing, and more satisfying than previously. A considerable proportion of teachers indicate in self-reports that such training is helpful in their work. As a specific example of a newly developed

group responsibility, a number of the teachers report being able to leave their classrooms indefinitely without occurrence of disorderly conduct by pupils.

In summary, then, this study is felt to represent a forward step on several fronts:

(a) In the measurement of teacher effectiveness in the areas of social-emotional climate of the classroom and the social skills of the children.

(b) In the application of a method of learning which is expected to upgrade those teacher skills, and

(c) In predicting which teachers have the personal resources rendering them likely to profit most from this sort of learning experience.

In the future, application of these results appears feasible at a number of levels. At one level, it might be desirable to introduce laboratory training in human relations to appropriately selected future teachers during their college years. Concurrently, at another level, those educators who are interested in curriculum change in their school systems might wish to start such programs by fostering teacher learning of human relations skills. Finally, the effectiveness of professional meetings and work and planning for groups of various sizes might be improved by the use of the techniques and methods perfected by laboratory training in human relations. The many applications of this kind of training to the educational world are almost endless and should result in better schools for a more truly democratic society.

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