

Teachers bring many resources to th ork.

A Sense of Security

THOSE who have given themselves wholeheartedly to teaching will agree that it requires a tremendous expenditure of energy. They will also concede that when one's resources of energy are low, teaching is affected adversely. While teaching demands some physical energy it also calls for much greater use of mental and emotional energy. A sense of security is a most important emotional condition which may become a source of energy for one's daily activities (1). While feelings of security are fundamental for the well-being of all, they are especially necessary to teachers who play so large a part in setting a climate for the growth and development of the young.

For evidence that some teachers experience feelings of insecurity to a degree that should cause concern, we have only to listen in on the "shop talk" heard in many teachers lounges. The frequent expressions of fears, anxieties and tensions are evidence of situations in which teachers feel insecure. Jersild reports that the interest of 90 percent of the 1000 teachers contacted, in a study of anxiety problems, is an indication of the reality of the problem (2).

Mildred S. Kunz is a Teacher in the Lansing Central Schools, Ludlowville, New York.

An Overview

Let us consider some of the assets which a teacher brings with him and some of the factors which are inherent in the teaching situation. Perhaps this will help to clarify the teaching relationship.

The teacher brings a personality to the job. A teacher's ability to understand and accept his students may be in proportion to the degree of his self-awareness and self-acceptance. Courage and humility are required as one attempts to gain knowledge of self and then learn to live with what one has found. As we come to accept our limitations and the fact that we do not know all the answers, we experience a freedom from pretense and are ready to listen and learn (3). As a capacity for growth becomes the measure of good teaching rather than a store of knowledge, teachers become a part of the solution instead of a part of the problem (4).

The teacher brings knowledge and skills. Subject matter is probably the area in which teachers are best prepared. Frustrations and insecurities seldom develop here, unless the subject matter area is one undergoing very rapid and drastic change. The teacher will come to his job today with a sound background of knowledge and understandings of

human growth and development and of learning theories, if he has been well prepared. This is not to say that he will find his colleagues and parents as well informed or that misunderstandings will not arise. The knowledge of methods, materials and resources he brings may at first seem more than adequate to the new teacher, but he will have to learn to use them effectively. Colleagues and parents may have to be sold on new methods and new ways of doing.

The teacher brings a philosophy. Beliefs, attitudes and purposes will, hopefully, be clearly defined in the teacher's mind and so internalized that they are automatically translated into his behavior. Time and energy are consumed by one's need to avoid and defend, to excuse and justify, when one has no clear-cut purposes. It is important that the teacher be able to share his philosophy with his colleagues (5).

The teacher brings aspirations to the job. Every teacher expects to find satisfaction in his chosen work and hopes for success and recognition commensurate with his abilities. In a report of research done by Allen, teachers expressed a desire for considerateness from all team members of the elementary school staff. They desired considerateness to be expressed in friendly behavior among fellow teachers (6). One area of expectations which must be faced realistically is that of role, with its variations in responsibilities, freedoms and limitations. Never before have teachers had the opportunities they now have for sharing in the development of sound educational programs. Those who are well informed and who attempt to understand the views of all staff members can make an invaluable contribution. When we can help teachers to see that the ideal is a direction toward which we work and not an

achieved state of perfection, there may be fewer complaints about discrepancies between theory and practice.

Administrators are apt to complain that teachers want freedom without limits and that they want to make policy but are not willing to give adequate time and preparation or to assume the accompanying responsibilities. Can we in some way help the beginning teacher realize and accept the fact that freedoms are always limited by physical restrictions, cultural expectations, moral obligations, ethical principles and individual capacities (7)?

Turning from the negative to a positive view, we find that limitations can form a stable frame of reference within which we can have freedom to explore and discover. Without limits we are lost, uncomfortable and hesitant rather than forward moving. Thus limits induce growth and, when clearly and reasonably defined, they can provide important security values (8).

The teacher brings certain cultural characteristics and expectations. Will the teacher find opportunities for worship and social relationships among people of his own religious group? Will he experience intolerance and discrimination if he belongs to a different race? Is he aware that teachers generally are expected to represent middle class socioeconomic standards but that two-thirds of elementary school children come from lower class homes (9)?

The reactions of children and colleagues to the speech pattern of one's native region may be varied. A southern drawl may seem delightful to the New Englander, while the midwestern twang may seem crude. An eastern accent, on the other hand, to western ears, may sound affected, and may convey an impression of aloofness.

The teacher may bring personal responsibilities. The single person, who is free from family responsibility and can give his time and energy unstintingly to his job, no longer represents the typical teacher. The young married woman who is helping to finance her husband's higher education, or the mother who is supplementing the family income so that children may be assured of an adequate education, are at present more typical representatives. Much help and understanding from colleagues and administrators will be needed if these new teachers are to meet their obligations satisfactorily and without undue anxiety.

All of these factors have within them a potential for either threatening or strengthening a teacher's security. But this is not the whole story. Regardless of the adequacy of personal preparation made there is a potential for elements that can threaten within the teaching situation to which he comes.

The teacher finds a physical environment waiting. In most modern buildings there are space limitations, yet many a teacher has been totally unprepared for the first look at "his" room. It may even be a temporary arrangement in the end of a hall with movable screens for partitions, or the stage in the end of the gym with only a curtain to separate reading groups from gym classes. Some schools operate on such a close budget that administrators do not order materials and equipment until they are assured of the need. The first weeks of school may find the teacher and pupils borrowing from other rooms and using odds and ends until supplies arrive. It may come as a shock to the new teacher to discover that the demands of special teachers, and imposed clerical duties will have first claim on the already too short

school time. It will take imagination to create an aesthetic atmosphere if the teacher finds his system one that is dominated by the "no tacks, no tapes, institutional tan policy" of a buildings and grounds department.

The teacher finds an organization waiting. The pattern may be familiar or unfamiliar to him and he may find it supported by policies which are rigid or flexible, written or unwritten. There may be well established channels of communication which are kept open or one may have to depend upon the "grapevine" and the teachers room communication system. One's program may be pretty clearly dictated by a course of study based upon a traditional curriculum or one may find freedom to adapt the program to the needs of one's class. There may be clearly defined goals and standards or a lack of these. The staff may be consistently and collectively supporting the organization, or it may be divided into opposing and competing factions. Relationships may be friendly and helpful or may be characterized by suspicion and by cliques. It has been recommended that we strive for a relationship in which the new teacher is "being a resource" and is "using resources" of his fellow staff members (10).

The teacher finds children waiting. As a new teacher recognizes the wide variations in abilities, attitudes, achievement, personality and physical qualities that are found among the children in his classroom, he may have real doubts about his ability to meet individual needs. Will he be left alone to learn through trial and error, or will he have the help and support of a staff that believes in a team relationship? With each child comes a parent, or parents, representing a background of home and

community relationships which add to the already complex situation. Here the personal qualities of humility, acceptance and compassion will be put to a supreme test.

The teacher finds a community waiting. Neither the attractive brochure prepared by the Chamber of Commerce nor the tour of the town conducted by the interviewing superintendent will reveal all the new teacher needs to know about a community. Many of the resources, most useful in enriching the school program, will be discovered only after long and close association with the people. Limitations may be uncovered as a search is made for adequate housing, as one investigates transportation facilities, and as one looks for satisfying recreation. Community expectations for teachers vary greatly and may change from time to time within the community. Contradictory concepts of the teacher's role are found and a nimble personality is needed to shift and adapt role behavior from being "a conservator of the past" to being "a leader for change." The complexity of relationships emerges when one tries to participate in the community and is viewed as a "radical" and a "stranger" (11).

In all these characteristics of the teaching situation, lie latent threats to security if the teacher's knowledge and understanding are limited or if his perception is unilateral.

The challenge to the administrative and supervisory staffs of our teacher education programs and of our school systems to assist teachers in their search for security and self-realization is great. To have a sense of security is a basic need of every individual. One's emotional growth and development are either enriched or impoverished by the quality of security he finds within him-

self or in his environment. Evidence from both research and experience indicates that we can move away from anxiety and toward security (12). Such movement is often hampered, however, by the constant changes which are typical, and which may well be desirable in a democracy, for they demand the continuing redefinition of goals and the reexamination of processes. To find security while making these adjustments is difficult and exhausting, but such a goal is worth striving for.

References

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