Inquiry

Not being bound by habit
the teacher wondered about
(and casually questioned)
those accepted procedures
which had become hers
as a portion of teacher-lore,
demanded by parents,
anticipated by children,
even desperately imposed
by some administrators.

As she gained a tenuous control,
she could not ignore
the dreary failures,
the stifling lethargy,
the ritualistic indoctrination
of young minds;
for she had come to love,
respect, and hold in wonder
the awesome diversity
of these girls and boys.

To ease her disquietude, the teacher
reached into the clutter of
new ideas and untried ways,
dipt into a book, asked a question,
imitated another—and said,
"This may be an answer!
I will test and try,
adjust and watch,
and make of this
something good and new."

Removing an offensive bit of practice,
the teacher
smoothed the "new" into
the pattern of her teaching,
leaving carefully undisturbed
the comfort of the widely acknowledged,
the most hallowed of the traditional—

for these were
beyond question,
the canons and tenets
upon which all else was based.

Pleased with this accomplishment, the teacher
welcomed each irritant which
could not be avoided,
and ingeniously incorporated it
into something better.
This became the fabric of her teaching.

By instinct and trial,
through faith and kindness,
she began to achieve
an artistry in teaching.

Then she was forced to question, not
only the potpourri
of her own methods,
but the handed down,
the long established,
the very thinking of her own
recognized and most honored teachers.

Like a homeless ant
she darted about,
frantically seeking
some bit of security.

Vainly the teacher tried to bolster the toppling
educational structure.
She searched for answers.
She asked for confirmation.
She defended almost blindly.

And finally she was caught
within a maze of swirling conflicts,
a fog of confusion, frustration,
and ever mounting tension.
Then one amazing day, with calm deliberation, the teacher gave the structure a firm and mighty shove. And as the dust settled, she pushed through the debris and spread it widely apart. Then she took time to observe, to consider, to search out a place to start again.

The teacher selected one iridescent particle. She scrutinized it from all sides. She pushed through the many colors, worked past the inviting sheen. She tested, checked, and prodded. She honed it down to a oneness. She dissected, then described, reducing it to the essence of its own reality.

She reached into the web of her imagination to find a way to explain all that she dimly sensed about this one particle. She turned to passages in books. She dug back into the past.

She played with it, placing it first in the center of one pattern, then on the edge of another.

The teacher was beginning to know several particles well. She sorted and weighed and sought. This one belonged with another. A third must be set aside. Here was one that might be a key to the pattern of a whole. And from the confusion spots of harmony and relatedness began to emerge.

Week followed weary week, and still she persisted. There were doubts of self. There was discouragement, relieved by tantalizing glimpses of a path that she might follow, a direction she might go.

When asked why she persisted she could only say—

“To draw the fragment of a dream, to some day answer someone’s need.”

—MARY HARBAGE, Editor, News Explorer and News Trails, Scholastic Magazines, Inc.

such ideas are taught for specific reasons, then they will most likely boost the program and assist in overcoming difficulties which might otherwise be stumbling blocks to the success of the program.

Avenues such as the local news media, presentations at local civic and professional organizations, “back-to-school-night,” printed materials prepared especially for and distributed to parents, programs offered by the school which are designed particularly for parents are some of the procedures that have been tried successfully in certain localities throughout the country. The writer believes that no one of these is sufficient within itself, but that a combination of such ideas and others that will occur to local administrators should be pursued. Iteration is necessary here: parents must be kept informed.

Once a locality has implemented a revision of the mathematics curriculum, the local school authorities should engage in a constant state of evaluation and re-evaluation of the program. Nothing becomes so static as a program that is allowed to “rock along” without constant vigil and alertness to pitfalls that should be dealt with at the earliest possible moment. No one program as now conceived is designed to be a panacea for the ills of mathematics instruction. Nevertheless, through the use of one such program, a local program adapted specifically to local needs and feasibilities can be built. The time to act is now!