ROBERT BURNS expressed the hope that some power would give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us. This is an important gift, but I would like to plead now for us to have the power to see others as they see themselves.

I am convinced that most of our difficulties, whether in the simplest human contacts or in the most intricate international relationships, would evaporate if we could develop the ability to deal with people as they really are, rather than as we expect them to be. Since I do not pretend to be competent in international affairs, I will not attempt to develop my thesis along these lines but will attempt to examine it in the context of a school system where 34 years of experience may not have developed competence in me but have, at least, provided me with an opportunity for acquiring some familiarity with problems and misunderstandings.

My experience in education has been varied if not profound. I have spent 17 years in junior and senior high school classrooms; I have served in line and staff positions; I have directed research and been the subject of research; I have taught undergraduate and graduate courses in universities. Worst of all, I am now serving my ninth year as that supreme scoundrel of the school system, a superintendent of schools. As a teacher, I have viewed supervisors as a threat; and as a supervisor, I have been encouraged to view teachers as blocks of intellectual granite as difficult to move as Gibraltar. As research director, I have wondered why teachers were so unwilling to adapt research results in their teaching and, as a teacher, been amazed at how stupid educational researchers could be about the practical aspects of a teacher’s job. For 25 years I was astonished by the insensitivity of superintendents, and for the past nine years I have grieved that no one really appreciates the responsibilities I bear.

The startling thing is that, with all of these experiences, I have spent so little effort in trying to resolve the areas of misunderstanding and misinterpretation which exist. The teachers with whom I worked so congenially as a colleague did not suddenly become stubborn oafs because some invisible sprite had touched my shoulder and beckoned me into a central office position. Neither did I, by the same event, become a domineering popinjay who had suddenly lost his convictions in a desperate scramble to curry favor with the powers that be. Not even did the decision of the Port Washington school board to appoint me a superin-
tendent of schools suddenly convert me into a special ogre endowed with a consuming desire to keep salaries low and exploit teachers at every opportunity.

The Central Function

Why all this misunderstanding and what can be done about it? I do not really know, but I have some ideas which may, at least, approach part of the truth. I have a feeling, almost a conviction, that the real basis of misunderstanding is inadequate perspective. Each of us tends to view himself and his function with some degree of astigmatism. Some of us seem to feel that our role is more important than any other, while others of us tend to deprecate our contribution. There are really few of us who can attain and maintain adequate perspective.

It would seem apparent that the focus of concern for all of us is the child. His needs, interests and aptitudes provide us with our chores. Nothing else is central and primary; yet because, to meet children’s needs adequately, we must have budgets, curricula, instructional materials, school buildings, buses, lunches, school trips and the like, we find it natural to focus our attention on these rather than on the primary task of the schools. To do so is divisive and productive of some of the misunderstandings I have cited above.

One approach to improvement of this situation might be to redefine our roles. In the one-teacher, rural school all of the functions of education were meshed in one individual. As time has gone by, these functions have been distributed, and special training and knowledge have been required for their discharge. In general, this has been good and progress in education has resulted. But, division of labor is completely effective only as the

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divisions work together for a common goal. This goal must be constantly in view. I have just finished reading two books, one on curriculum and the other on supervision, and in neither case was there one word about the development of the child as the central function of those fields.

As superintendent of schools, I have a value only to the extent that I contribute to the education of the children and youth of my district. This is true also of the teachers, principals, supervisors, custodians, bus drivers and all others. If we would all look at our colleagues and ask in what ways they contribute to the welfare of children, we would come closer to appreciating our interrelationship and commonness of function. This would be even more true if each of us considered once in a while how he could make his own contribution more significant to children. In other words, let us quit doing things to each other and, instead, spend our time doing things for children. When that happens, we may be able to see ourselves as we are—colleagues in a mighty cause.

—JAMES A. HALL, Superintendent of Schools, Port Washington, New York.

Potential

(Continued from page 448)

exploration of the unknown as well as the known.

In a meeting with the parents of an elementary school, a mother asked the writer if in a good art program her child should be making pot holders each year as her parents’ Christmas present. Apparently in grades 2, 3, 4 and 5 the children had made pot holders every year. In this particular school no ongoing evaluation of the art program had taken place; a dull program was reflected in this instance. Through self-evaluation teachers ascertain the creative growth in their pupils, appraise their teaching effectiveness, identify problems needing study, and discover new potentials for the further development of the program.

In another school where parents were invited to participate in the evaluation of the arts program, it was a revelation for them. They became aware of the purposes of a good arts program and the means for implementing it. Prior to their participation, they, as members of the P.T.A., had regarded the arts as sources of supply for their programs—a musical or dramatic performance (usually precisely drilled) by pupils, or nut cups, posters and program covers for their social affairs (to which the children were not invited). As a result of the evaluation, the P.T.A. began to supplement the record collection in the school. New interest was taken in plays and music, which now became more creative and more closely related to the ongoing program of the school. The point here is that when we reflect on the true purposes of education, we focus on those learning experiences which are more significant to the intellectual and emotional growth of children. Stated goals for arts education are meaningless unless they are studied in all their dimensions.

Through personal experiences in the arts, the study of new ideas and practices and continuous evaluation, the arts program becomes increasingly dynamic. When teachers and parents discover the potential of the arts in the elementary school program the results are richly rewarding.