

Poise Under Pressure

THIS paper will present three vignettes or backdrops. Some principles or hypotheses will be developed in relationship to these. These principles will then be shown in operation.

Three Vignettes

The first backdrop comes from the work of Chris Argyris of Yale, an industrial psychologist who has done most of his work with industry. Argyris states that in the typical business organization one finds at the top a president, some vice-presidents and the directors. Next come the supervisors, and finally, the workers. In the schools we have boards of trustees, superintendents, assistant superintendents and directors, supervisors, and teachers.

Argyris says that in these typical organizations there are specific human problems at the lower level. As one gets down the hierarchy, people at this lower level feel they do not belong to the organization—they are just there. What happens to these people? They leave! They get discouraged with what is going

on, they realize they are not actually a part of the process—and they leave. Some of them stay but take sick leave. Some of them do not leave, and they do not take sick leave—they leave psychologically—they come to work every day, but they are not there.

Argyris did an interesting follow-up on this last group. He talked to some of these people about their supervisors—most of the responses were pretty negative. Occasionally Argyris ran into a worker who said he liked his supervisor. Investigating this response, he came upon an interesting phenomenon. He found that the supervisors who were liked were the ones who were not seen very often!

While Argyris' study does not treat the schools, his inclination is that schools have the same problem as industry. Company newspapers, company parties, higher salaries—none of these devices seems to ameliorate the situation. According to Argyris, the only solution comes through commitment in which there is inner personal trust and confidence.

Backdrop number one then seems to say: Something has to be done about the organization of schools if people who

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work in them are to develop a sense of commitment.

Let us move on to vignette number two. The Rockefeller report on *The Pursuit of Excellence*¹ states that no educational system will be any better than the quality of its teachers. In the effort to bring about improvements, schools can do all kinds of things with such administrative arrangements as "ungraded schools" and "team teaching" and bring in machines and any new device available—experience shows that it will not make much difference unless there is a change in the quality of the teachers in the system. Moreover, this quality has to embrace many types of diversity if a rich kind of school system that most of us would like to enjoy is to develop.

A brief story seems to fit in here. A year or two ago I went to the opening meeting of the teaching staff with whom I work. One of our new teachers showed up with a beard. The president of the Board of Trustees, after the meeting was over, said to me, "What are you going to do about that beard?" I said, "Ah, nothing. I'll just wait and see what it means." In about three weeks the principal of that school came to me and said, "Would you like to know about that beard?" I said, "Not particularly." He said, "Well, let me tell you about it anyhow. This teacher is in a Shakespearean play. He's one of the actors in the play, and that's why he's got the beard." I said, "Oh." A few weeks passed, the play was over, and the teacher shaved his beard. I saw the principal about a month later and he said, "Hey, Dick, the guy's growing a beard again. You know what? The kids liked him better with the beard than they did without it!"

¹ Rockefeller Brothers Fund. *The Pursuit of Excellence*. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1958. 49 p.

Our conception of excellence is going to have to include many kinds of people who can do many kinds of things. Bruner reports that Whitehead has said that education should be "an exposure to greatness." It seems to me the only real exposure of any lasting depth that children get in the public environment called the school is with teachers. You can rig your school system with a lot of individuals called counselors, supervisors, principals and superintendents, yet it is a one-to-one relationship with the teacher that makes the difference.

Harold Clark at Teachers College, Columbia University, conducted a broad research project in his study of "quality education." When he came to analyze the data, he found an interesting fact. Whenever a teacher was using any kind of reasonable method, and was enthusiastic about that method, pupils learned. Of course, somebody is going to ask, aren't some methods better than others? Probably; but not as important as enthusiasm.

That is picture number two. Now let us move to number three and discuss the dynamics of change. There are many people in school systems who believe that change can be ordered by authority. Occasionally a trustee says to me: "Couldn't you put out an order on this item?" I point out that I could, but that probably nothing would happen. Teachers are very bright. They know which of the notices that I send out are important and which are trivial.

A system can develop a curriculum guide which may or may not be opened during the year. Guides per se do not develop behavioral change. How then does change take place if not by order, by curriculum guides or by a state adoption—although any of these may exert some influence? It seems to me that

change takes place when one has new experiences in a creative environment in which there are tremendous opportunities for perceptions in an open society. People act on what they perceive, and this is what makes the difference.

Change is a very interesting thing. Change means that one has to set new levels of aspiration—one must get a little bit anxious again about what he is doing. Change is a drain on energy. By the way, a certain amount of resistance to change is a healthy thing. If everybody changed on what everybody else thought was good for them, we would all be schizophrenic. So, in my dimension, change comes in an interesting, perceptive, aroused, creative environment in which one gets goose pimples simply because he works there.

The questions raised in these first three parts may be summarized by an additional question: How do we create an educational environment in which people are committed to the task, are open to change, and in which they are free enough to respond enthusiastically?

Leadership Style

Let me now introduce my concept of leadership. I use one that Gross advocates. He says that there is a leadership style in which the only conversation is: "What can I do to help?" I am in total agreement with the Rockefeller report on the importance of the teacher as the critical factor in how fine a school system we have. I am also amused at Herbert Thelen's comment in *Education and the Human Quest*²:

Teachers are of all sorts, too. They range from nimble piccolos to thumping basses,

² Herbert Thelen. *Education and the Human Quest*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1960. 224 p.

from mellow horns to clashing cymbals, from sparkling champagne to flat beer, from lovable Lizzies to champing Cadillacs. Teachers are of all sorts, too.

It seems to me that the most important contribution to come from those in leadership roles is the achievement of keen insights in the selection of personnel for a school district. In our district we have been using, in our interviewing and hiring, the three criteria recommended by David Ryans in his research on characteristics of teachers. According to Ryans, some of the criteria seem to be more important in the elementary school than in the high school. In my judgment, however, these criteria are as much needed in the high school as in the elementary school.

Pattern X: Understanding, friendly, warm teachers vs. aloof, egocentric, restricted teachers.

In interviewing an applicant, the first thing I look for is to see if this is a warm, loving human being. If it is a male, I look to see if he is male-like; and if it is a female, I want her to be female-like. One of the questions I sometimes ask in an interview is, "Do you see yourself as a real female (or a real male)?" It is surprising how many people are afraid of this question, almost as if they are afraid to reveal that they are human beings.

Pattern Y: Responsible, businesslike vs. evading, slipshod, unplanned behavior.

What is a good day in the fourth grade and how would you plan for it? Is this a person who plans in the broad sense? (This does not mean lesson plans.)

Pattern Z: Stimulating, imaginative, surgent, enthusiastic people vs. dull, routine sorts of human beings.

That word "surgent" is one that moves for me. What do you get excited about? Can you laugh? Can you cry? Can you feel? Can you touch? Are you a real human being? With the help of a college, a person can be taught techniques and methods and even the structure of knowledge; but it is extremely difficult to make human beings out of people who have worked for 20 some years at being inhuman.

Using these criteria we can find the warm, sensitive, enthusiastic young teachers. However, some of them will only be around for two or three years, because if they are warm, enthusiastic, sensitive young girls, they are soon going to become wives and mothers. That is one of the risks one takes when one works with human beings.

Four Hypotheses

After we have found and employed these wonderful, "human" persons, what do we do about it? I have some hypotheses that many people may not agree with, but here they are.

First, you have to operate within a decentralized hypothesis. This can be terribly debilitating if you have been working with a centralized concept of school organization. Learning takes place in the individual classroom in the individual school; it does not take place in the central office. This means that the individual school should make the decisions on what its in-service program is going to be and what it is going to work on. The school has a right to hire its own consultants without central office consent and the school should make the decisions on which consultants from the central office, either city or county, it is going to use.

This means that various schools will be moving at different paces on different things.

The second hypothesis is that supportive personnel are not responsible for producing change in others. As human beings working with teachers we have only one responsibility—to communicate openly what our feelings are and to interchange in the communication. We cannot be responsible for other people. They are responsible for themselves, to be their own self-actualizing instrument. They have this prerogative, and we have no right to deprive them of it.

The third hypothesis has to do with consultation. In my judgment, consultation is a unique professional relationship between peers in which either of the two persons involved has the right to terminate the consultation at any time. It is a healthy environment if a teacher, in consultation with his supervisor, feels he can say, "I think I am now ready to move by myself, with support." Supervisors do not rate, they do not evaluate, they do not praise, they do not reward, they do not punish. They *interact with*. This is the only kind of support that human beings should have.

My fourth hypothesis is one with which many readers may be familiar: It is that principals sometimes cast long shadows on schools. The Ohio State University study in regard to which characteristics in principals make a difference is one that ought to be considered in the selecting and hiring of people. This study suggested that there are three characteristics that make a difference.

One characteristic was comprehensiveness: The ability to see the educational cosmos in a broad sense; having intellectual and emotional stamina to stand the press of the immediate; the ability to tolerate theoretical considerations; the

ability to see that a day was good in its big sense, not because the football team won a game, and not because some pupil did something spectacular, but because of what is going on in a big, comprehensive picture. When we are near a principal like this, we get the feeling that "something is happening here."

The second characteristic was penetration: The ability to ask questions about things which everyone else is taking for granted; the willingness to penetrate into a problem and ask, what really makes the difference here? If we had done this, we would not, for example, have so many unused language laboratories around the country at present. For a time, it almost became a cultural symbol of accomplishment to buy a language laboratory whether it was usable or not.

The third characteristic was flexibility: "Flexibility," in the study, was defined as absence of psychological rigidity, a tolerance for tentativeness. Let me emphasize: A tolerance for tentativeness—so many people want the answers right now, as though the answers are always evident!

Recently a psychologist made a recommendation in regard to the placement of a youngster in one of our hard-of-hearing classes. After I listened to all the technical presentations that went on about I.Q.'s and scores and hearing and all the rest, I asked him: "What is your clinical 'hunch' as to what this youngster will do in the classroom?" He answered, "I had a feeling you were going to ask me that question, and I don't know. After all this technical data, I haven't formed my clinical 'hunch.'" I said: "Why don't you take another day and formulate a clinical 'hunch' and come back and let's talk about it? You now know so much about this child that you really don't even see him. Get an idea as to what's

going on here in a tentative sort of way. We don't care if you're wrong. We care if you care enough to have a 'hunch' about this youngster."

These four hypotheses then make up the second part of this paper. Now let us see how they work.

A Technique of Change

About three years ago, in a conference with the consultants, we were discussing the fact that our school district was getting large—about 9400 children. We were reaching the point at which it was impossible for consultants individually to contact all the schools. The suggestion was made that perhaps a more effective method of operation could be arrived at. Maybe a consultant could find some teachers and a principal who were interested in a particular area, and the consultant could then work with them in depth.

Two or three of the people at this meeting seized this idea enthusiastically. One of these was our health consultant. We have been using a magnificent health series in the district. It is one of those series in which we can teach nutrition from the first to the sixth grade and can guarantee at the seventh grade, when the kids are turned loose, they will buy a coke and candybar for lunch! Our health consultant decided that she would like to find a few teachers and a principal who would be interested in having youngsters at the fifth and sixth grade level study about their hearts and circulatory systems in depth.

She found two teachers who were interested in such a study and a principal who wanted to work with them; and with these people she developed a program. Every day she co-planned, she co-taught, she team-taught, she did all

of the things that one is supposed to do in teaching. She worked with small groups, she worked with large groups, she worked with the teachers. One of the things she found out, she said, was that you have to think through what makes a difference in knowledge before you can help anybody gain knowledge.

What about the children involved in this program? They were fifth and sixth graders, not homogeneously grouped, from middle-class environment, with average I.Q.'s—probably about 105 or 106. Every child in the group, by the time the work with the program was over, could trace a drop of blood through the entire circulatory system. They could tell you in technical terms, and they usually wanted to be more technical than we wanted to be, the anatomy of the heart. They could tell you the difference between a normal and an abnormal heart. They made all kinds of charts and diagrams. They could tell you what happens in a stroke and a thrombosis and a coronary and how the system recovers and what takes place in the capillaries and why it takes place. They could talk with you in depth about the importance of mental health or the effects of alcohol, tobacco or stress.

More interesting was the fact that these children *wanted* to do all this studying; they were enthusiastically interested in learning all they could about the heart. Parents reported that the children were asking for models of the heart for Christmas presents. Children who had never before been really excited about anything in school became so enthusiastic that they were reading books all the way up to college level in order to find the information they needed. We have done the same thing in other areas of the curriculum.

When this heart program had pro-

gressed to the point at which it really made sense to the two teachers, the principal and the consultant, we decided to put on a demonstration. Other teachers in the district were notified that we would hold an open meeting and that anybody who wanted to come was welcome. These teachers were assured that they were not expected to do anything about the fact that they were there—just to come to see what other people were doing.

As a result of this initial effort, at the present time (three years later) approximately four-fifths of our teachers in the fifth and sixth grades are voluntarily teaching a depth unit dealing with the heart.

This technique of change works equally well in many areas. In order to be able to support these efforts on the part of our teachers, we yearly hire five to ten more teachers than are needed in the classroom. We use them as substitutes, but we use them primarily to release teachers who can then go to see other people at work. It is so simple, yet it brings results. Moreover, working in this small kind of teacher-to-teacher relationship allows us to cut down considerably on the large group meetings most districts find so necessary.

In our district we have about 75 student teachers a year. When teachers come to work for us, they are told that within three years they are expected to be able to handle student teachers. We try to work so that teachers who have been with us for a year or two get a chance to do one of the demonstrations with somebody working with them at depth. We try to rotate the number of teachers who work with new teachers a couple of weeks before school starts. We recently put on a curriculum fair in

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The quality of education correlates with the quality of the teacher. And much much later I began to realize—the teacher is a uniquely developing self as he or she teaches and lives. The methods used, the ways of living with students, emerge from a developing personality. Within one's self the teacher must find the strengths to be built upon and widened; the weaknesses to be set aside or circumvented. Better than courses in methodology or subject matter are the opportunities for developing the many facets of the individual personality. Those professors who can teach the methodology and subject matter while opening the way for and encouraging uniqueness are today's great in the field of teacher education.

Not All Are Good

The inept? The unkind? The dull and dreary? The sadistic? There were some on every level. A few come shudderingly to mind as I think back to early school days. In one such room the teacher and I waged a weekly battle over spelling which usually culminated, for me, in a Friday paddling and tears. On the same weekly basis I was described as a slow learner, an unworthy member of the third grade, and a stubborn dullard. With help, I finally rejected those labels. Yet spelling still remains a "dragon."

One Thursday night mother made room for me beside her in the big rocker and we talked it over. We agreed that it didn't help to pretend to be sick, I still had to go to school. And she pointed out to me that even though I had talked the spelling situation over with the Lord, it wasn't His responsibility, but ours. She reminded me that I read well, that the family couldn't get along without my help, and that vacation time was almost

here, and meanwhile we could work on spelling in our own way.

Spelling games took the place of dish-drying rhymes that spring and continued during vacation. Otherwise there was little change in the summer. There were still long free hours: plenty of time to cut bits and pieces from many sources and reassemble them into intricate stage sets and scrapbooks, time to read and re-read book after book, time to write a whole series of comedies and tragedies with only a casual thought about the spelling therein, time to know more fully the adults and children who made up my world. Was that the summer we built the waterwheels? Or was it the one when we fixed up the playhouse around the stove on which you could really cook? It doesn't matter. It was summer and I was free to explore my world, free to learn.

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Poise—Foster

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which we presented some 18 different demonstrations for parents.

When every teacher has been a master teacher for student teachers, has put on a number of demonstrations for other teachers, has worked with new teachers before school started—then a staff seems to emerge that is motivated by excitement and commitment.

The program I am suggesting in curriculum change has a basic investment in people. First, "I really believe that people want to perform well if they are free enough to perform well, and this performance is not based on any kind of gimmick."

Second: "I have tremendous faith that individual schools will make adequate and dependable decisions on what they want to do and that each school will become its own broken front."

Third: "I believe that an environment that is dedicated to growth and to development of people, in which everyone is free to move, finds less resistance. When people suddenly discover they are free, they do not have to fight against things but can put their energy to the things they want to do."

I must warn you that if, after thinking these suggestions through, you should decide to try them, you are going to come up against new pressures. There are those who will want you to issue directives—they will want to know when you are going to make the district adoption, which means "When will we fixate at a certain point so we do not grow?" They will want you to emphasize homework and A B C's and phonics. Hemingway had a definition of "courage" which was: "Courage" is grace under pressure." I have a definition which says, "Courage" is poise under pressure." You are going to need a lot of poise under pressure when you begin to invest in human beings in an interesting, creative, consultative way.

From Center—Hillman

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and improve on what he sees and hears. This freedom leads the teacher to do his own questioning. He has time to ask himself, "Where am I going? How do I intend to get there? Who and what do I need to help me?" This kind of thinking is the basis for strong curriculum planning. By not being hampered by over-direction, those of us who might be mediocre in another setting, are pulled up and made strong and independent.

With this feeling of strength comes a willingness to experiment, change, question and move without limits.

Is it easy to teach in this type of climate? No! Just as a man in business for himself works harder than an employee, a teacher in this setting strives continuously for self-improvement. Where the focus is constantly on the classroom, where the question from all sides is, "How can we help you?", the only road open is an exhilarating uphill climb. To expand and improve on your own is never easy. However, when a teacher has no need to fight elements of hierarchy, where he is a confident member of a team and valued as a person and as a teacher, he has a bank account with unlimited funds. Once addicted to this type of affluency, where he is free to draw interest in any amount, a teacher would find it difficult to tolerate a district that offered less.

Elective Courses—Cox

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No State-Level Authority. Local option was reported by 14 states. In many of these states only the approval of local boards of education, local high school boards or curriculum committees was necessary for individual schools to establish new courses. Although state-level approval was not required, two states reported strong leadership at the state level when studies indicated the need for new course offerings.

Two other states published or otherwise made recommendations concerning the need for new courses. However, all such efforts were clearly of an advisory nature. While approval of a new course was not required, one state requested that a formal report of the addition of new courses be made to the Department of Education.

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