

The Supervisor's Part in

EDUCATING THE NEW TEACHER

ROY A. EDELFELT

**Associate Secretary, National Commission on Teacher
Education and Professional Standards, NEA**

THERE is an old assumption that new teachers know how to teach, that they know how to create and use teaching materials, and that they may even know a little more than experienced teachers about new methods, new subject matter, new psychology and sociology.

As a result, we expect the beginners to assume the full responsibilities of teaching, treat each as if he could succeed in almost any assignment, expect them to be our equal, and treat them all as if they will stay in teaching for a full career. The new teacher is treated almost the same as the experienced teacher—except for salary and tenure.

We need to take a new look at this old idea. The new teacher today is not the same as his experienced colleague, nor is he one of 200,000 copies of the same model. And he should not be treated as such. All kinds of teachers are in the new crop each year. And despite differences they are similar in only one respect—all are beginners.

Should the new teacher be expected to start at full steam? I say emphatically *no*. He should not assume the full responsibilities of a regular teacher in his first year, and maybe not even in his second or third, not until he has demonstrated the necessary competence.

I am not recommending less work. Although the new teacher should not have a full teaching load immediately, he needs extensive time to plan, analyze and evaluate his teaching, to study children and subject matter, to investigate teaching materials—all with the help of highly competent supervisors.

The cost to society for what we are presently doing with and to new teachers is too high. Only about half the teachers who began teaching last fall will be in the classroom three years from now. Supervisors are fatigued and frustrated by the constant orientation and induction of new teachers, but some of this work could be cut if the dropout rate in teaching could be reduced. Many new teachers

are too slow in reaching their potential as experts because they are told or they sense that the system is set, the boat cannot be rocked.

Supervisors Can Help

Job No. 1, then, is to find ways to organize a teaching force so that *no* new teacher assumes a full teaching load immediately.

Job No. 2 is to find effective ways and competent people to help the new teacher learn to teach.

Few new teachers want to assume full responsibility on a job, and most will admit they are not ready to.

This leads me to an attack on the myth about the equality of new teachers and experienced teachers. Equals in what? If regarding a new teacher as an equal means treating him as if he were as competent as an experienced teacher, then either we are kidding ourselves or we have some pretty inadequate experienced teachers.

If, however, equality means regarding the new teacher as a colleague, as a person of integrity and responsibility, as a person entitled to protection against capricious attack or dismissal, as another professional who should be guaranteed academic freedom, then we have a defensible concept of equality, and incidentally one which is not adequately championed by people in education. What the new teacher wants most, perhaps, is not to be treated like a student. The best solution to the destruction of the myth about equality may be to use more precise terms, to make clear what is meant by a colleague relationship and be honest about what a neophyte-senior teacher relationship might be.

Job No. 3, then, is to be sure that the status of the beginning professional is clear. He is not the equal of his seasoned mentor, the experienced teacher, but he is his colleague and he has certain rights and responsibilities which should be recognized.

If the pretenure transition period lasts three or four years, if it involves intensive analyses and evaluation of teaching, independent and group study, graduate work, and activities designed to achieve some clear goals for a "career teacher," it may be that all new teachers will not choose to take this route because it would mean seven or eight years of study (including the undergraduate years) to become a career teacher. The transient teacher might choose not to follow such a plan. Some other teachers might choose less than career status. For such teachers, other approaches to orientation and induction might be followed.

A career teacher should have a specified level of competence in teaching and more responsibility in the school than a regular or beginning teacher. He should be rewarded on a basis comparable to that of the principal.¹

Job No. 4. Within existing circumstances, make the pretenure period a screen-

¹To explore this concept further, see National Education Association, National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards. *Remaking the World of the Career Teacher*. Report of the 1965-66 Regional TEPS Conferences. Washington, D.C.: the Commission, 1966.

ing time. Make clear the desired competencies of teachers who stay, and be sure the school climate supports these expectations.

Job No. 5. Set up some pilot projects to try the idea of career teacher status. Experimentation would provide a chance to involve both teachers and laymen in developing the idea and to test its validity.

A teacher is not clearly a success or a failure because he "makes it" or "flubs it" in one school or one classroom. We treat new teachers as if they can succeed in almost any assignment. Their assignment is often a matter of placing a *person* in a classroom on the basis of preparation for a specified subject at a particular level. If the neophyte fails in that particular assignment, too often we tend to brand him a failure.

We know that teaching styles differ, that different experiential backgrounds and attitudes influence success or failure in a particular situation. We know, too, that when a teacher obviously cannot succeed in his first assignment despite a supervisor's efforts to help, there should be other alternatives than admitting failure. Transfer to a new assignment, even in the middle of a semester, should be possible. Temporary relief from a teaching post should also be possible. And both without loss of face.

Job No. 6, then, is to be much more careful and deliberate about the initial assignment of teachers and to build more flexibility into the way teacher assignments can be shifted during the school year.

The neophyte in most professions has something to look forward to, there is a visible career pattern. We have this in teaching if the teacher moves into administration, college teaching, or government employment. But the classroom teacher begins about where he ends at retirement, in status, responsibility and privilege. To keep good teachers in the classroom, to make it possible for them to afford to stay in the classroom, beginners must see opportunity and rewards ahead that can be earned. These might include:

a. Reduced teaching loads for career teachers, who will have other responsibilities—working with student teachers, teacher aides, interns and beginning teachers; developing ideas for improvement in content and instruction; serving on district, state and national committees; traveling, studying and thinking (the sabbatical leave); working on curriculum committees; consultant work in other buildings; teaching in-service education courses; writing (e.g., grant proposals).

b. Recognition within the district—a status similar to the full professorship in college, being consulted on important district decisions.

c. Added privilege and reward—expenses and salary while attending conferences, secretarial and teacher-aide help, pay on a basis comparable to or above that of principals.

As important is the fact that the roles of teachers are changing and expanding. Teachers are beginning to assume a variety of roles, depending on competence, experience and training. As differentiated roles are developed there will be even

more flexibility in possible career patterns and assignments for those who choose to stay with teaching.

These ideas are illustrative. Perhaps the most important idea is that status should be based on demonstrated competence. But we must believe that competence is important. This means we must know what competence is and be able to recognize it when we see it, which is not the case now.

An Action Program

I wish the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and other groups—at state and national levels—would take action on some of these points. It would be feasible to:

1. Communicate what is being done to help beginning teachers, short one page vignettes describing effective programs.
2. Find school systems which are not doing anything much with new teachers where there might be some interest and willingness to experiment.
3. Establish contact with Research and Development Centers and Regional Laboratories (sponsored under Title IV, P. L. 89-10), to discover what these centers are doing about the beginning teacher and try to influence what they do.
4. Develop some practical suggestions for working with the beginning teacher which will help people deal with situations as they exist—where sweeping changes are not yet appropriate.
5. Develop programs for the retraining of supervisors to establish specialists for dealing with problems of the new teacher, such programs to include new developments of various systems for analysis of the teaching act.
6. Specify some of the unique problems of the beginning teacher, such as getting to know materials, applying child study procedures, study and application of strategies of teaching, and use of evaluative techniques for student growth.
7. Develop a theoretical and philosophical basis for dealing with the beginning teacher—the learning-to-teach phase of career development.

Schools will never be any better than the teachers who man them. One of the ways to get better teachers is to make sure the new crop each year get sufficient time, help and encouragement so that each new teacher has a chance to develop his own teaching style to a high level of perfection. This goal is a primary professional obligation for teachers and supervisors. It deserves more attention than it is getting presently. ☞



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