

# TO ENCOURAGE TEACHER GROWTH

**JOSEPH L. DIONNE**

Director of Instruction and Curriculum  
Brentwood Public Schools, Brentwood, New York

WHAT is required, in light of the increasing demands of society to personalize instruction in the schools, is a teacher who is a diagnostician: one who is capable of making decisions regarding the most appropriate learning environment for each child within each phase of the school's activity. Many teachers already in the field and many of those now being educated are not capable of making such decisions. It thus becomes the responsibility of the local school district through in-service education and appropriate supervision to make possible teacher growth toward these new requirements. It is the purpose of this article to present one framework for accomplishing this task.

Historically we have striven for continuity and stability by providing a program which existed independently of the particular person who happened to occupy the position of teacher. Through standardized materials such as basal readers, both the objectives of instruction and the means for attaining these objectives were presented. In this instance the teacher was not expected to tailor his own programs but to adapt to the existing curriculum.

It is now evident that there is more to a learning environment than the presence or absence of appropriate materials. Children cope successfully with learning problems in a variety of ways. It is now expected that teachers must be capable of assessing cognitive learning styles and affective relationships in order to provide appropriate learning settings.

## **Stages of Growth**

What can the schools, faced with this expectation, do to prepare a staff to perform at this level of competence? The solution herein presented began with a study of what already existed with regard to teacher behavior in the Brentwood Public Schools, Long Island. Descriptions, in the natural history sense, of the ways in which teachers behaved were made. From these descriptions the following categories of teacher behavior have emerged: managerial, material-centered, innovative, analytical and creative. It is suggested that stages constitute a continuum along which teachers may be helped to progress. Only brief descriptions or bench marks of these stages will be presented.

### **Managerial**

This teacher is inadequately coping with problems of classroom routine. The level of instruction is often inappropriate for the class and the teacher is unable to contend with tangential responses by the students, either by dismissing such responses unilaterally or by following them aimlessly.

The classroom setting tends to be teacher dominated. There is very poor balance between student participation and exposition by the teacher.

The teacher at this level of competence is trying to develop speech, personal habits and appearances that enhance his relationship with students. The teacher's techniques of discipline are crude and he is struggling with the appropriate allocation of time to the various activities of the day. Readjustments are continually being made in long-term objectives.

### **Material-Centered**

The material-centered teacher has established classroom routines which enable the class to function with a minimum of time spent in structuring the activity. The teacher is able to control disturbances as they arise.

The material-centered teacher is one who is able to implement whatever materials are provided for instruction. At this point in a teacher's development both the ends and means of instruction are determined by the material, principally the textbook. The teacher at this stage has little knowledge of the curriculum that precedes the grade level or that which follows.

Techniques of management have been accomplished and the teacher seeks to impart knowledge of which he has an adequate grasp. The situation tends to be teacher centered and there is an absence of grouping or differentiation of instruction. The facilities in the classroom tend to be used in a consistent manner with very little movement. The instructional level is appropriate for the average student. The teacher's evaluation tends to stress recall and recognition.

### **Innovative**

The teacher in the innovative stance is one who generally subscribes to the ends of instruction spelled out in curriculum guides or the materials themselves. This teacher, however, is concerned with creating a variety of means for accomplishing the ends. He may use a variety of materials, he may group for instruction, or he may draw upon his own background of experience or that of the youngsters to enhance the lesson. He may allow the students to assume some of the responsibility for instruction. He tends to stress recognition and recall in his testings but will occasionally present unique problems to which the students must respond. The innovative teacher relies on trial-and-error methods to determine what will work and what will not work and he tends to stress motivation.

### **Analytical**

In this classroom the individual is the focus of attention. This teacher takes

into account the individual capabilities, cognitive style and personality dimensions of each student, and the presentation he chooses is suitable for the concept or generalizations being developed.

This teacher is in command of the skills of a subject area and is capable of abstracting basic concepts and showing how subsidiary data relate to them.

The analytical teacher stresses the student's responsibility for his own learning and provides a flexible school setting with a variety of materials and facilities appropriate to the task at hand and to each individual's approach to problem solving.

This teacher knows how to have the child accomplish an equilibrium with regard to the problem he is facing. He makes sure that the new behavior is fully integrated before disturbing the equilibrium with a new problem. In his testing this teacher tends to stress the application of a generalization or a concept in a new problem setting.

The analytical teacher is aware of alternative ends of instruction as well as a variety of means for accomplishing them.

### **Creative**

This teacher creates new ends and means of instruction. The classroom is noted for an environment which provides for freedom of exploration. There is a reward for and constant exposure to alternative solutions to problems which in themselves are unique.

Students are exposed to frontier areas of man's developing knowledge. In the elementary school this has to do with intuitive understandings. Additionally, in the secondary school, the child may be asked to wrestle with abstractions through which man is attempting to bring order to his universe.

As the teacher moves from one stage of development to another, he does not lose any of the successfully established characteristics. He is always considering classroom management, the appropriate implementation of materials and the individualization of instruction. It must be noted that teachers are at different stages of development as they deal with different areas of the curriculum, both as to subject and units within the subjects. Many beginning teachers start off with an innovative stance but many more follow the suggested line of progression.

### **The Supervisor's Work**

The big hope for such a framework is that supervisors will begin to recognize differences in teachers' levels of competence and will develop behaviors that are appropriate for moving a teacher from one stage of development to another. There is little differentiation in the manner in which supervisors work with teachers at the present time. It is not unusual to have a supervisor expect innovative behavior of a neophyte teacher. It is even more common to see them freeze teachers into a material-centered orientation.

The first step in supervision is to assess the stage of development of the teacher. This can be done by noting which behavior he displays and its corre-

spondence with a stage outlined above. The supervisor may then focus upon improving those areas which are representative of the first stage of development until the teacher has mastered the characteristics of that stage.

The crucial decision made by the supervisor is exactly what changes in behavior to expect. He must present exactly the right problem at the right time. As a teacher reaches a new stage of equilibrium, a new level of operational competence, he should be encouraged in that level until it is strengthened. Once this equilibrium has been accomplished, however, it may be disturbed by a new expectation. Timing in the setting of these expectations is crucial.

There are implications of this framework for in-service education. Teachers at the management level need frequent attention; this suggests that the supervisor or principal in the school should take on this responsibility, both during the school day and periodically after school. The improvement of instruction through the improved use of materials might best take place at grade or department meetings. Those activities that are innovative might best be offered in district-wide, in-service courses to which only those who have successfully mastered the material-centered stage will be invited. Another group of teachers may be invited to attend workshops that stress the analysis of the variables in the classroom.

The point has been made that we have not found a way to free teachers to reach the level of competence being demanded by society. Some means must be found to encourage growth toward the point at which teachers are capable of systematically personalizing instruction. This is but one such orientation. ☞

#### **FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION: Dimensions and Horizons**

RUTH R. CORNFIELD, *Seton Hall University*. Just published, this comprehensive and very practical guide will implement an effective language program. All phases of instruction are discussed, and its methodology can be applied to new as well as traditional materials. 183 pp., \$3.95

#### **PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA: A Foundation Course Third Edition**

GEORGE R. CRESSMAN, *Villanova University*; and HAROLD W. BENDA, *West Chester State Teacher's College*. This thoroughly revised edition of the author's widely adopted introductory text presents a concise but broad and up-to-date coverage of contemporary education in America. 483 pp., illus., \$5.95

#### **ESSENTIALS OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH: Methodology and Design**

CARTER V. GOOD, *University of Cincinnati*. This newly issued text is an updated condensation of Dr. Good's widely-used and highly acclaimed *Introduction to Educational Research*. 429 pp., illus., paper, \$3.95

#### **MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF GUIDANCE**

GEORGE E. HILL, *Ohio University*. The first in its field to attempt a broadening of the concept of guidance leadership, this recent and already established book combines practical procedures with thorough research. 508 pp., illus., \$6.00

APPLETON • CENTURY • CROFTS

Division of Meredith Publishing Company • 440 Park Ave. South, N.Y., N.Y. 10016

Copyright © 1966 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.