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The Development of Sound Mental Health
in the
Elementary Classroom

A Paper Prepared
in
Education 471

In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

Plan B

by

Mrs. Mildred Boals
October, 1962

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The teachers of today must assume more responsibility than ever before in developing the country's greatest resources--the children in the classrooms of our schools. Not only are teachers concerned with the intellectual development of pupils but their mental, physical, and spiritual development as well. Teachers are in a position from which they can observe children and their adjustment to each other. Admittedly, parents have a major influence, but teachers are able to take advantage of new discoveries and theories in child growth and development.

In the last few years a major change has taken place in the attitude of the public toward education. Formerly, the major concern of the classroom teacher was with the intellectual development of the boys and girls entrusted to her care. Provisions were made for the exceptional children--both the gifted and the mentally retarded. Also, physical weaknesses were discovered through periodic compulsory health examinations along with the school program of testing hearing, visions, and speech. Now the attainment of mental health has become of vital concern to the classroom teacher.

Concern for the mental health of the child has changed

from a preoccupation with the abnormal and very serious behavior problems to include emphasis on the wholesome development and prevention of behavior difficulties in the normal child. Most children who show a pattern or unacceptable behavior in the classroom are children with whom the teacher can cope without the assistance of a specialist. Few of these children have serious emotional problems. Rather, they are normal children who may be under tension or pressure at the time. A wise and understanding teacher can be a major influence in the life of a child at this time.

It is not the aim of the writer to discuss or suggest techniques for dealing with the abnormal who are likely to profit most through referral to specialists for diagnosis and treatment. Rather, it is hoped that a better understanding of the problems of the normal child may be gained and used in working more effectively in the area of mental health in the elementary classroom.

Chapter II

THE BASIS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

A. The Mental Health Movement in Education

Concern for the mental health of the elementary child has proceeded in the last several decades from a preoccupation with abnormality and problem cases to include an emphasis on normal, wholesome development and the prevention of behavior difficulties. Some educators consider mental hygiene as being primarily an attitude which influences the teacher's behavior at all times--in his personal relationships with pupils, in his practices in marking, promoting, counseling, and in all the incidents that make up the school day.¹ The classroom of a good teacher reflects this attitude. It is a place in which each child feels secure and is given the opportunity to achieve the success that is so important to him.

An emphasis on mental health in our schools is in accord with objectives stressed by people in education who seek, as the goal of education, the maximum development of every boy and girl within the limits of his needs and abilities. The emphasis on mental health is in accord, too, with

¹Fifty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II, Mental Health in Modern Education, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 2.

the consideration given basic human needs in the development of curricula and with the insistence that subject matter and experience be selected to satisfy "developmental tasks."¹

In addition to efforts to promote mental health in the classroom, services have been increased that are concerned principally with preventing mental illness and emotional disorders. Schools all over the country have been starting programs of guidance, psychological testing, and other practices aimed at personal adjustment of the pupil. Here is the place where youths congregate and where it is possible to detect signs of emotional disturbances. Many educators view the nation's schools as the most likely place to begin reducing this burden. Their goal is to improve the mental health of the next generation by taking preventive measures during the "formative years" when the groundwork is laid for later disturbances.² If the problem is severe, it is best treated when caught early. Even those emotional upsets that do not indicate serious problems are worthy of treatment, because, no child can perform to the maximum of his ability when he is disturbed emotionally.

It has been estimated that approximately one person in six in the United States is suffering or will suffer from emotional or other personality disturbances. In addition

¹ Ibid. p. 3.

² Wesley Allinsmith and George Goethals, The Role of School in Mental Health (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1962), p. 4.

to those who are seriously ill, there are many persons in our population whose emotional and personality disorders are the causes of their social maladjustment.¹ Practically all of these have been pupils in our schools. It is very likely that many of them were showing danger signals even in their early years. The challenge to the classroom teacher lies not only in the early detection before it becomes a fixed behavior pattern but also in the preventive measures which keep the problem from developing in the first place.

B. Basic Needs of the Child

The significance of satisfying needs is apparent in the development of personality. When they are met effectively, the result is usually a well-balanced and integrated personality. No two writers seem to agree on a listing of needs. Bernard classifies needs into three categories--organic, social, and psychological.² These are by no means distinct from each other. In fact, there is a great deal of overlapping. A fact that should be mentioned is that needs vary in their intensity from one individual to another. Lack of a satisfaction of a need for one person may throw him off balance while the same unmet need in another has little effect. This is understandable in the light of the tremendous differences in other traits. Some children need more opportunity for

¹C. E. Turner, C. M. Sellery, and Sara Smith, School Health and Health Education (St. Louis: C. V. Mosby Co., 1957),

²Harold Bernard, Mental Hygiene for Classroom Teachers (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1952), p. 3.

exercise, love, independence, and companionship than do others.

Examination of the differing intensities of needs at various ages shows that needs are continuous. There is neither a complete satisfaction of them nor an outgrowing of them. Although the degree of intensity may vary, a need is something that people of all ages must satisfy. Needs thus become one of the focal points around which the study of mental health may center.¹

Certain organic needs, such as food, water, and oxygen are recognized by all, but teachers must be concerned with the balanced satisfaction of organic needs because physical health is one of the foundation stones of mental health. There are many ways the classroom teacher can work indirectly toward meeting these needs through teaching about proper health habits and observance of health routines in schools. Attention must be given to proper lighting, adequate ventilation, temperature control, etc. to provide a healthy environment. Teachers should be on the lookout for evidences of poor posture. This interferes with proper digestion and breathing, resulting in substandard performance of the pupil. In schools today, emphasis is on whole body exercise which is provided by encouraging pupils to engage in a wide variety of play, both formal and informal.² Improper posture may be a symptom of insufficient sleep, inadequate diet, or perhaps fatigue. If such is the case, parents should be consulted and possibly may be able to furnish a clue

¹Ibid. p. 33.

²Ibid. p. 36.

as to the cause of the trouble.

Most schools today require a periodic health examination. In Unit 40, Effingham County, all children entering the first, fourth, and ninth grade must have a form that has been filled out by their doctor. The school sponsors a clinic in the spring and for one dollar the child can get the examination. This keeps the cost from being a prohibitive factor in getting full cooperation of the parents. Many deficiencies have been discovered by this method and corrected in their early stages. Teachers cannot afford to overlook the possibility that inadequacy in meeting organic needs may be a factor contributing to poor mental health.

It is a recognized fact today that there are certain psychological and personal needs that must be met to achieve adequate emotional adjustment. It would be impossible to list all of these requirements but a few representative ones will be discussed briefly. One of the basic primary needs of a child is the need to feel secure. This includes more than the assurance that he is loved by his parents, although this would certainly be important. A secure person needs to have faith in his own ability to solve problems, to overcome obstacles, and to stand on his own two feet. Security is something that cannot be given to a person--it must be won. The love of family is a good starting point, but as the child grows older he must become less dependent on others and more self-reliant. The lack of a feeling of security may result in a wide range of behavior patterns. The teacher must be able and willing to

show affection for the pupils. Each child must be accepted for what he is and assured that he is important to the group.

A second need is the need for new experiences and to satisfy curiosity. One of the things teachers can do in this area is to avoid over-organization and establishment of rigid schedules which bring about monotony. Sticking strictly to textbook content without making provisions for individual interests and needs would certainly result in very little initiative being exhibited by the class. It is a great injustice to the child not to provide opportunities for cooperative planning and exploration which will satisfy the curious child.

The need to achieve is also widely recognized. Failure to gain a sense of achievement has a harmful effect on the personality. The fulfillment of this need quite often requires some thought on the part of the teacher when working with children who are very slow. This is very vital to them because the person who fails to accomplish something becomes discouraged and retires from the field of competition.

The basic social need for each individual would be the need to be loved--we might say the need to love and be loved. Research has shown the effect of the deprivation of this need. Teachers can help by maintaining a friendly and sympathetic atmosphere in the classroom. When there is a home situation resulting in a lack of love, it becomes all the more necessary

for teachers to compensate for the lack by patience and kindness.

C. Characteristics of Good Mental Health

Mental health is determined by the way a child feels about himself, by the way he feels toward others, and by the way he is able to face and adjust to day-by-day conditions of living. The teacher has an opportunity second only to that of parents to help children like and accept themselves, learn to get along happily and successfully with others, and make wholesome adjustments to living.

It is difficult to tell how well-adjusted a child is, but there are certain characteristics that indicate good mental health. These include: (1) The well-adjusted child knows how to play and work with others so successfully and satisfactorily that he is acceptable to them as a companion and co-worker; (2) He is able to accept himself and the conditions of his life with fairly persistent satisfaction; (3) He faces the problems that confront him day by day without evasive or compensatory reactions; (4) He absorbs or masters the inevitable conflicts, frustrations, disappointments, and temporary defeats without undue emotional turmoil; (5) He contributes in a spirit of cooperation and good will to the necessary activities of his group; (6) He has wide interests, attacks his work with zest, and gets satisfaction out of doing it.¹

¹Turner, loc. cit., p. 254.

D. Effect of Classroom Conditions

The conditions in a classroom would necessarily be of major importance in developing sound mental health in that classroom. The teacher's attitude toward her work, the way she feels about children, and her professional competence are reflected in the atmosphere of the classroom. Of first importance is a warm, friendly classroom environment wherein children can feel secure as they learn, grow, and succeed. The teacher can make the classroom attractive and interesting by using simple devices such as a colorful bulletin board, a science corner, or an attractive display of books.

A feeling of friendliness can be conveyed just by a tone of voice. Children are very adept at detecting if a teacher is frustrated or upset. The teacher can show an interest in the life of the child by talking to him about things that interest him and encouraging him to share his experiences. Children also enjoy hearing things about the teacher's family. As the teacher and children work and laugh together, they enjoy each other and become close friends.

Children need the opportunity to work and plan together the activities of the day. They need to work at jobs that have meaning and are of interest to them. The demands should not be above the level of the developmental tasks for which they are ready. By means of differential assignments each child can be led to experience success within his own interests and abilities.

Children need to be praised for achievement and encouraged to participate in activities. Emphasis should be placed on participation and cooperation rather than on competition and winning. A child however needs to learn desirable ways of competing and to accept losing and disappointment. He cannot always win or have his way and he should be made to feel that losing is no disgrace if he has done his best.¹

Children are most likely to respect rules and regulations within the classroom if they have had a part in planning them. Often a teacher can help a child by talking with him and letting him know he is vitally interested in how the child feels and why he behaves as he does. Through the school program opportunities can be provided to help children bring their troubled feelings to light and get rid of their tensions and worries. Perhaps they can express their feelings through role playing, writing, or art work in acceptable ways. Games and athletics provide wholesome emotional outlets for pent-up energy and teach principles of good sportmanship. When a child misbehaves he needs to see that it is not himself but rather his behavior that is not acceptable.

¹Ibid. p. 263.

Chapter III

KNOWING AND HELPING THE CHILD

A. Observation

Teachers are in a truly unique and advantageous position from which to observe children and their adjustment to each other. Since the teacher is perhaps less emotionally identified with the child than the parent, yet deeply concerned about his welfare, the teacher can observe the interactions of children in a variety of situations.¹ A teacher who is sensitive to the needs and wants of children can accomplish a great deal in the area of mental health by constantly being on the alert for evidences of personality disorders. The teacher uses observation in the classroom, playground, cafeteria--in all the activities that go to make up the school day--to gain a better understanding of the children. Anything that the teacher feels is significant should be recorded and made a part of the child's permanent record. By recording behavior day by day over a period of time, certain patterns can be detected that will be helpful in analyzing the student's behavior.

A teacher who is trained in this area will know which behavior in a classroom is significant. Some studies show

¹Robert F. Topp, "Psychotherapy in the Classroom," Childhood Education, XXXV (May, 1959), 407.

that the kind of behavior that teachers tend to observe-- that which is most disturbing to the class--is often not so important as the kind of behavior that teachers tend to ignore or even reward, such as striving for perfection, etc.

The Progressive Education Association prepared a rating scale of positive personality trends which should require the teacher's main attention. These include responsibility, creativeness, influence or leadership, adjustability, concern for others, serious purpose, and emotional stability.¹ Focusing attention on desirable behavior helps to establish good relationship with the students and to direct their attention to good qualities that they can develop. The performance of a child in the classroom gives many indications of his adjustment to life situations and should be observed very closely for any signs of maladjustment. The earlier such evidences are detected the easier it will be to help the child to overcome his problems.

In spite of the obvious value, however, a word of caution should be considered. The teacher should be cautious and not generalize from limited observation, label, and judge rather than describe behavior. A good teacher must recognize the fact that there will always be students that cannot be reached, however hard they try. It is easy to form a biased opinion and perhaps be unnecessarily harsh with the student in retaliation

¹Ruth Strang, The Role of the Teacher in Personnel Work (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1953), p. 326.

for this personality conflict. Observation must be interpreted in the light of the background and personality of the child.

B. School Records

Learning more about children as a way of improving the mental health program of the elementary school involves a great deal of cooperation among the faculty of the school. This cannot be accomplished by each teacher working alone in her own classroom. To do an adequate job, the cooperation of each and every person involved in the education of the child must be solicited. An example of such combined effort would be the school records of each individual child. These should furnish an excellent place to start and should form the framework on which to build in working to improve the mental health of a child.

There seems to be wide variation in the use of these records and in the information found in them. In many schools it has become common to assign one day, usually at the end of the semester, as the time to bring the records up to date.¹ While this may ensure efficiency, it does not contribute effective records for counseling the child as needed. Too often it comes at a time when the teacher is unusually busy and is performed as an added burden to an already overloaded schedule. If records are to be worth the bother in a school system, there are certain characteristics

¹Gerald T. Kowitz and Norma G. Kowitz, Guidance in the Elementary Classroom (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959), p. 110.

that should be observed. First of all, it is essential that pupil records be cumulative. This gives a long-term view of the pupil. A teacher can use them in getting acquainted with the children at the beginning of the school term. Any problems of previous years would be noted and certainly be helpful in assisting the teacher to a better understanding of the child's behavior.

Records can be helpful in the classroom by providing the basis for reports to parents. If they indicate a record of low ability and achievement, the child is perhaps operating at maximum and any additional pressure would only frustrate and cause more serious problems. Parents often set too high goals for their children and the teacher needs to exhibit a great deal of tact in explaining such a situation to parents.

For a record to be valuable, it must be kept over a period of time, if possible from kindergarten through high school. The pattern of development that will appear in such a record that has accumulated over the years can be an important tool in understanding the actions of the present and predicting the future.

Also, the material in these school records should be organized in a standardized form. It seems that in Illinois there is no certain form recommended by the state, and, as a result, there is wide variation in the type of folder used in the schools. There have been times when a new student has entered the classroom and no information has ever been received

from his former school. The writer feels that it would be worthwhile for such a form to be decided upon by the State Office of Public Instruction and recommended to the teachers throughout the state.

C. Sociometric Devices

From the standpoint of mental health in the classroom, the sociogram is a useful tool in helping teachers understand the children better and in helping teachers promote better human relationships in the classroom. Any way of grouping children holds implications for their mental health. Social relations are lived and it matters to the individual how they are lived. When an individual is with others who respond to him and whom he wants to be with, he has greater security.¹ The more secure he is as a person the more freely he can function in a group. The morale of a group increases as children find they can contribute and interact freely with one another.

The sociometric test is a simple method for revealing actual natural groupings and personal preferences in the classroom. Each child is asked to express with whom he would like to associate in a certain situation or activity in the classroom. These can prove very revealing and helpful to a teacher in providing information about the members of the class who are accepted, rejected, and ignored by the class.

¹Helen Hall Jennings, "Sociometric Grouping in Relation to Child Development," Fostering Mental Health in Our Schools, 1950 Yearbook, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Washington D. C.: National Education Association), p. 203.

It does not say "why" the individuals are so designated, but it quite often aids the teacher in understanding a child's behavior.

Whatever the particulars of the sociometric test and its working, all tests should have certain criteria to be worthwhile. Helen Jennings lists the following three things as being essential:

1. The situation should be real for the choosing; choices are not hypothetical; they are made for an actual situation, in the same terms as the action is going to be.
2. The test is not an end in itself; its results are always put into effect to change the arrangements for working or living in accordance with the choices; sociometric arrangement is only setting the stage for a better group work situation.
3. There is an immediacy to the choosing; it is for right now, tomorrow, or next week--not some vague time in the future of two months later.¹

After the sociogram has been drawn, the most important step is the analyzing and interpretation of the diagram. It is of no value to gather information and draw conclusions without following through with a plan to provide everyone with his choice as nearly as possible. The mental health aim is to provide each child with companions to whom he is most attracted and in whom he is most likely to find mutual enjoyment. There are a number of values that result when work groups are established or seating is arranged on the basis of sociometric results. By taking such action, the teacher demonstrates that he is willing to give students

¹Ibid., p. 205.

some voice in classroom procedure. He has asked for their preferences and done something about it.¹

Lindgren gives a work of warning about the possible mis-interpretation of sociometric data. There is a tendency for teachers to assume that children who are "stars" are well-adjusted emotionally and that children who are "isolates" are poorly adjusted. This is quite often the truth, but not necessarily. A child may be chosen because his rebellious qualities make him attractive to the others, or a child may be ignored because he belongs to a minority group or simply is not interested in the same things as the rest of the group.²

D. Home-School Cooperation

Any school program concerned with fostering mental health must contend with the tremendous differences in children's backgrounds. The home still remains the first factor of influence in the life of the child during these years and close cooperation between the teacher and the home must be maintained. The various ways of achieving this will not be discussed in this paper, but suggestions that are likely to prove helpful include: (1) parent teacher conferences (2) open-house (3) class visitation (4) home visitation by teachers (5) handbooks.

Regardless of the method or methods used, the results will doubtless be important in understanding the child and

¹Henry Clay Lindgren, Mental Health in Education (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1954), p. 270.

²Ibid.

his behavior problems. Most parents want to do the right thing for their child but quite often do not know what is the "right thing" to do. Meeting and talking with parents can be most helpful. Close cooperation between teacher and parent is usually appreciated by the anxious parent and forms the basis for the development of desirable attitudes and behaviors in the classroom.

Chapter IV

PERSONALITY PROBLEMS IN THE CLASSROOM

A. Criteria for Recognizing Problems

Quite often misunderstandings about the nature of mental health are found among parents and teachers. Mental health is not identical with "happiness." The mentally healthy are as subject to the tragedies, frustrations, and disappointments of reality as are the mentally ill. The manner in which these frustrations, tensions, etc. are met determines the degree of mental health of an individual. Normally healthy people may be just as unhappy as are the mentally ill. In fact, an individual who always behaves happily in the face of any situation may betray one of the signs of poor mental health.

Neither is being "good" necessarily a sign of mental health in a child. This is another misconception as to what good mental health is. The terms "good" and "bad" are usually applied from the point of view of the adults who are in charge of the child rather than from the point of view of the child. A child's level of mental health is determined by the answer to the question, "Is the child's behavior good for the child now and in his future growth?" rather than whether it is good for the adult.¹ While it is

¹Sidney Green and Alan Rothenberg, A Manual of First Aid for Mental Health (New York: The Julian Press, Inc., 1953), p. 14.

true that chronic behavior problems are symptoms of emotional or mental disturbances in a child, this does not mean that a child who is not bad but good can thus escape similar problems.

Since the key to the whole field of work in the area of mental health in the classroom is the earliest possible detection of those children who need help, certain criteria have been set up for recognizing mental and emotional disturbances in a child. These include:

1. Usually, you can evaluate the degree of a person's mental or emotional disturbance by the self-damaging manner in which he functions in the basic patterns of his everyday life--his personal, social, and work relationships. In a child this refers to family, friends, and school.
2. The mentally and emotionally disturbed child is one whose behavior and attitudes frequently result, not in satisfactions and self-sufficiency, but in difficulties with others. The disturbed child is one whose adaptations to everyday living frequently bring him harm and frustrations rather than gainful solutions of his problems.
3. In contrast to the healthy child, the disturbed child frequently cannot discover sources of satisfaction beyond his parents or immediate family except those which provoke rejection by parents and family. The child's activities will be found to fall short of the full possibilities of his personality. He will be unable to make good and ample use of what other people and other activities outside of his home can offer.
4. In any given situation, the disturbed child will be unable to decide, upon the basis of all his previous experiences, knowledge, and skills, to which of his wishes and feelings toward others he should give outward expression. In short, the disturbed child is one who cannot choose and control his behavior according to his own best interests.¹

B. Adaptive Behavior

In an effort to adjust to life situations that seem

¹Ibid., p. 13.

overwhelming to them at the time, children often resort to techniques of ignoring or misinterpreting the situation and thus avoiding the frustration and anxiety they would experience. These adaptive behavior patterns may assume many and diverse forms. There is nothing abnormal about the use of these so-called "mechanisms"--we all use them, adults and children alike.

In any study of personality problems it should be remembered first of all that all behavior is caused. Teachers are likely to show more concern with the immediate behavior than to seek the cause. There is a reason for undesirable behavior just as surely as there is for those actions which are approved. Only by looking beyond the surface behavior to the underlying cause can the classroom teacher bring understanding and help to the child who needs it.

Compensatory behavior is one of the most common patterns of this adaptive behavior found in the classroom. This behavior takes two forms--an intense attempt to become good in a trait in which one feels deficient and the development of traits which divert attention from a deficiency.¹ For instance, the child who is unable to excel in sports may work extra hard to become proficient in some activity in which he ordinarily would have little interest. In many cases compensation serves a useful purpose, but this is not always

¹Mandel Sherman, Mental Hygiene and Education (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1935), p. 169.

true. Often a child may become so intent in the process of exceling in an area that he develops emotional problems. The additional effort needed to become outstanding in a certain area may likely interfere with the well-rounded development of the child.

The teacher who is consciously on the alert for symptoms of poor mental health in the classroom will usually take note of this type of behavior and understand its underlying significance. Since this type of behavior indicates a need for status in the group, a wise teacher can make sure that this child has an opportunity to achieve this in some manner. If the child is assured that he has a place in the group without his being outstanding in an area that he has chosen, he may lose his obsession and recognize the fact that he can't be tops in everything--that others are sure to be better than he is many times. He can face this when he already feels secure among his classmates.

Rationalization is probably the most common and normal defense against a personal sense of failure. The child who rationalizes justifies his behavior by reasons which sound reasonable to himself and to others and very likely believes that his explanations contain the true facts. He minimizes his own guilt by implications that he is not at fault. Thus, a child who makes an out at home plate may claim that the umpire was in his way, preventing him from scoring. Again, the child who fails to bring in his homework may say he failed to get it because his younger brother bothered him.

Teachers can help avert the tendency to rationalize by preventing, whenever possible, the child's being placed in situations where he has to excuse his actions. Often a child will be forced into giving an explanation for behavior for which he does not honestly understand the reasons.

Another commonly used escape mechanism is assuming behavior patterns that are more typical of earlier levels of maturity, called regression. When a child finds himself in a situation with which he feels unable to cope, he is likely to fall back on forms of behavior that gave him satisfaction at an earlier age.

David B. was a fourth grade boy of average ability who had a serious reading problem. He was an only child of parents who were very successful in the business world and most anxious that their son do well in school and bring home a "good " report card. When David found that he could not live up to his parents' expectations he regressed back to earlier days when crying had gotten him almost anything he had wanted. He cried when his mother brought him to school each morning. When his parents came to visit his class, he seemed pleased, yet reverted back to "baby-talk" when talking to them in the presence of the teacher.

This was not a problem that could be solved easily, even with an understanding of what was involved. Even after extra tutoring in reading, David still was an extremely poor reader and as a result, was not able to meet his parents' expectations. Counseling with the parents in this case helped some, but most parents find it difficult to believe that their child does not have the superior ability they had hoped.

Closely related to this problem is the one of projection where a child, rather than take the responsibility for his actions, projects the inadequacy on some other person or object. For example, a child who is quarrelsome is apt to say everybody is against him or that the other person always starts the trouble. Projection is actually an indication of emotional immaturity.¹ This is normal for children of school age but since habits formed in childhood carry over into adult life, this should not be overlooked. Children should be made to realize that they must accept responsibility for their actions, rather than blaming someone else for their failures.

When a child loses interest in the activities about him or is unable to take part he is likely to attempt to "forget reality" and retreat into a life of phantasy. Children who are intellectually superior and finish their work quickly may use this mechanism to occupy themselves. A child is likely to indulge in phantasy when he has no definite overt activity to perform.² Monotonous activity also influences the development of phantasy. When a child must perform routine, unpleasant tasks he often resorts to daydreaming to compensate for his dissatisfaction.

Phantasies may have a constructive value, especially for the growing child. If he is depressed or frustrated he can escape into phantasies of grandeur where he is

¹Bernard, loc. cit., p. 261.

²Sherman, loc. cit., p. 184.

superior to everyone. Phantasies also serve to stimulate imagination, ambition, and creative work. Many ideas of value rise out of the planning and problem solving of phantasy.³

However, when these phantasies persist and hold the child's attention to the extent that he refuses to face reality they have a detrimental effect upon his progress in school and his personality. It is of no use to call the child's attention to the fact that he is daydreaming and to urge him to get busy. Rather, an effort should be made to give the child something to do that is of interest to him and not above the range of his ability. If the child can become interested in some activity in common with others he may develop more confidence in his own ability and face reality rather than attempting to hide from it.

To the understanding teacher these various behavior patterns are looked upon as the child's inability to adjust to life situations rather than being considered serious emotional disturbances. Children respond positively to a teacher in whom they sense a genuine interest and concern for their well-being. There is no doubt that a great many emotional problems of our high school youth could be eliminated through increased interest in the area of mental health in the elementary classrooms.

¹Ibid., p. 195.

C. Evidences of Maladjustment

Since it is not likely that there will ever be a class where pupils are free of emotional maladjustments, any teacher should ever be on the alert for symptoms of the existence of these and attempt to correct the situation after looking for the cause of such behavior.

One such type of behavior that is very common in the classroom and still very disturbing is aggressive behavior. Aggression is a natural trait which is necessary to a certain degree in order for youngsters to hold their own and eventually achieve independence from their parents. The wise teacher tries to understand these feelings and to determine whether they are the result of positive impulses which should be encouraged or whether they are due to negative feelings which need to be released or controlled.¹

There is always some reason when children strike out against every person around them. The child who pushes, shoves, and fights may be indicating that he is desperate for friends. Although such behavior should not be condoned, it cannot be eliminated by punishment or placing blame. Instead, the teacher should study the background of the child and try to discover the cause of his hostility. The roots of aggression are often found in home life. Some children fight because this is the only way they have learned to compete; to others, fighting gives a feeling of importance. The teacher

¹Ervin W. and Mary Ford Detjen, Elementary School Guidance (New York; McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1952), p. 75.

who attempts to correct the problem through the use of force is very likely to only increase the antagonism.

The atmosphere of the classroom has a great deal to do with determining aggressive behavior. Teachers who are too strict in their discipline are sure to create tension in pupils. Although a reasonable degree of order is essential to any classroom, children are happier, more responsive, and more susceptible to learning when the room has an atmosphere of good humor and friendliness rather than fear and threats.¹

Some teachers find it hard to cope with behavior problems without using force because they feel that such actions are intended as a threat to their authority. The teacher's reaction to aggressive behavior is greatly affected by his own physical well being and emotional state of mind at the time. If the teacher's needs for success, recognition, and satisfactory relationships have not been met, he is likely to have aggressive feelings of his own. The teacher should see to it that his own mental health is good so that he may be able to accept without shock or show of emotion the aggressive behavior of children in the classroom.

Children's problems which teachers are usually most concerned with are those which cause disturbance in the classroom. The timid child is often overlooked because he creates no disorder and does not interfere with others. Often the aggressive children who have found ways of releasing their own emotions are less in need of help than are

¹Ibid., p. 79.

the shy ones who prefer always to remain in the background. These youngsters probably have underlying personality difficulties and are bottling their emotions inside themselves. The extremely timid or shy children are in danger of personality breakdown or mental illness in later life. They are likely eventually to look for ways of shutting out all of their difficulties.

The timid child usually exhibits certain characteristics. They shrink from taking leadership, rarely volunteer to recite, become frightened when called upon in the classroom, and cry when they become upset. Their timidity gives them a further sense of insecurity--they are not sure whether the teacher likes them and are in doubt about their status in the schoolroom.¹

There are various causes for this type of behavior and the teacher should try to determine why the child behaves in this manner. Strict discipline in the home often injects the element of fear and makes cowards of some children. When the child is forced to accept without question, he develops a personality without any healthy aggressiveness or initiative. Over-protection by parents is another common cause of timidity. When a child has been over-protected before he comes into the classroom he is apt to be over-whelmed by the demands made on him. He lacks the courage to take part in ordinary activities. Rather

¹ Sherman, loc. cit., p. 74.

than take a chance on doing the wrong thing the child withdraws and watches the activities from the sidelines.

After taking note of the children who behave in this manner the teacher should make an effort to find out all she can about their backgrounds. A conference between the teacher and parents often uncovers helpful information. Only by getting to the true cause can a teacher help a child to overcome this trait. The teacher's own attitude toward a sensitive child can harm or help him a great deal. The timid child needs encouragement but not undue sympathy. If the teacher is too sympathetic the child is likely to become too dependent upon him and seek further protection.¹ By showing evidence of her love and interest in the child, the teacher will cause other children in the group to accept him. The child can be asked to run errands and perform other duties in the classroom. Withdrawing children would require rather definite instructions as how to go about these assignments because they lack a self-confidence and initiative to work on their own. They should not be made to work under pressure or beyond their ability as they will certainly become discouraged easily.

Detjen gives a word of warning to the teacher: "Teachers need to remember, too, that a child's withdrawing tendencies often have their origin in the classroom. It is possible for feelings to be so deeply wounded by the sarcasm of a thoughtless teacher that they remain sensitive throughout life."²

¹Ibid., p. 75.

²Detjen, loc. cit., p. 151.

Another behavior problem that is of vital concern to all teachers is the problem of dishonesty, such as lying, stealing, and cheating. Few classrooms have not been faced at one time or another with the problem of the disappearance of either a sum of money or an article belonging to one of the students.

How to handle the situation is usually of some concern to the classroom teacher even in the event that the one who took the object is discovered. Studies have shown that children steal for various reasons, and in order to help a child, the teacher must look for that reason. The act of stealing may be the child's means of achieving satisfaction or release from tension which he cannot imagine obtaining by any other method. Stealing may be his way of achieving a feeling of equality with other children, especially if the child feels no one in his home has any real concern for him. Some children steal in such an obvious way that they are certain of being caught. This shows that these children may derive satisfaction out of punishment or the risk of danger. Case studies on numerous children have confirmed the fact that this is actually so.¹

We can no longer agree with the belief that all children steal simply because they are bad or because they haven't been taught right from wrong. Aside from being an expression of retaliation, the act of stealing may have symbolic meanings for a child which he himself cannot understand without help.²

¹Green, loc. cit., p. 156.

²Ibid.

The classroom teacher needs to move with extreme caution in handling this type of problem. One incidence of stealing does not mean that a child is headed for a life of crime. A child's future might be permanently damaged by a thoughtless teacher at this time.

First of all, corporal punishment should not be used. Striking or hitting the child may only increase his tensions and anxieties. Since there is a chance that the child has stolen in order to receive punishment, hitting him will only give him a feeling of success and strengthen his unhealthy behavior pattern. A teacher should never ridicule a child or compare him with other "good" children. This may only convince him of his own "badness" in the eyes of his teacher. Also, a teacher should never promise to conceal the child's act from his parents. It is much better to work with the parents as closely as possible in an attempt to find the causes for the child's behavior. Threatening the child as to what will happen to him if he steals again may only add to his feeling that he is surrounded by enemies who want to punish, not help him.

This does not mean that a child should not be corrected or punished in any way. The important thing in any punishment is to avoid giving the child an impression that his stealing has permanently damaged his reputation. The teacher should listen to the child's version of how he came to steal, expressing genuine interest in his explanation even though not in agreement with it. Gently, yet firmly, it should be

explained to the child that stealing is wrong and not the way to achieve the satisfaction he is seeking. Assuring the child of faith in his ability to refrain from repeating the act and trying to build the child up in his own estimation and that of others can be most helpful. Helping the child to succeed in an "acceptable" manner may help him gain the feelings of equality or recognition which he was seeking through stealing.

Lying is another form of dishonesty which is often exhibited in behavior of children. Teaching children not to lie is a complicated problem because of the widespread acceptance of the social lie.¹ The familiar story of the father who insists his child always tell the truth and then asks him to watch out the back car window to see if a policeman is following as he breaks the speed limit is representative of this type of "accepted" lying. Nevertheless, telling the truth is an ideal that must be encouraged in the children of today and teachers have the responsibility of making this ideal a part of the behavior pattern of the students. Often in young children there is no attempt to tell a deliberate lie. What they say may be a matter of fancy or imagination, because children often cannot distinguish their imaginings from reality. This is understandable when you listen to numerous versions of what happened at the scene of an accident by those adults who were at the scene at the time. No two people "saw" the same thing.

¹Thirteenth Yearbook, Mental Health in the Classroom (Washington D. C.: The Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction of the National Education Association, 1941), p. 250.

When lying becomes a method of escaping blame, the child should be disciplined for his behavior. Children must be taught to assume responsibility for their actions as they are allowed the freedom of choice. Along with discipline, however, there should be a search for the basic causes underlying the behavior.

The teacher should conscientiously make an effort to set a good example of truthfulness and honesty in the classroom. Children are quick to notice if the teacher does not keep his promises to them.

It would be impossible to list all of the various behavior problems in the average classroom. However, the ones discussed in this chapter are some of the most common and the ways they should be dealt with are indicative of the methods any good teacher will use in working with any behavior problem. Basically, this involves looking past the overt act into the background of the child and finding if possible, the cause of the behavior. An understanding of this will certainly give clues as how best to correct the undesirable behavior and still provide the child with those essentials necessary for his own good mental health.

Chapter V

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

A. Mental Health of the Teacher

In modern classrooms all too often teachers become frustrated and disturbed because there "just aren't enough hours in the day" to get everything done. With many added duties, both supervisory and clerical, it is likely that teachers often develop tensions and feelings of frustration themselves. An unhappy teacher has a depressing effect on children who might otherwise have a wholesome outlook. An inhibited and frustrated teacher can scarcely be expected to create a happy and wholesome atmosphere.¹ With the emphasis that is being placed on the development of sound mental health in the classroom today, it is of vital importance that the teacher exhibit the kind of personality indicative of sound mental health herself.

Lindgren discusses various situations that are likely to add to the teacher's feeling of tension and anxiety.² He states that the teacher is one of the most "exposed" persons in the professional world today. She works directly under the scrutiny of a roomful of children, of principals, supervisors, superintendents, parents, the school board, and literally of

¹Thirteenth Yearbook, loc. cit., p. 221.

²Lindgren, loc. cit., p. 508.

the entire community. All of these feel that they ought to have something to say about the way in which she does her job. Oftentimes a teacher is employed in a community that has confirmed and unyielding opinions as to how the teachers should conduct their personal life. This can be a source of major discontent, but if the teacher feels that she cannot adjust to the demands of the community, the only solution is to look for employment in another locality at the earliest possible time. Defying the people of the community on the issue can only lead to hard feelings between the two groups.

Another source of annoyance to some teachers is the reluctance of the people of the community to accept the teacher as a person aside from her professional role. Griffin writes that he feels the cause of personality difficulties among teachers can usually be found in one or more of three areas--the teacher's personal life, her professional life, and her relationship to the community.¹ Teachers are human and not immune to problems and difficulties in their own personal life. The teacher must learn to take stock of herself, her personality, and her problems. She must strive to know herself--recognizing her own assets, liabilities, and limitations. Emotional problems cannot always be evaded--certain facts and situations simply must be faced and accepted.²

Teachers need to cultivate wholesome social relationships more than is true of most groups. They should show a

¹J. D. Griffin, S. R. Laycock, and W. Line, Mental Hygiene: A Manual for Teachers (New York: American Book Co., 1940), p. 243.

²Ibid.

wide range of interests outside of the classroom and take an active part in civic affairs and organizations. By displaying a genuine interest in these groups, teachers can acquire many enjoyable relationships outside of the teaching profession. A certain amount of recreation is vital to teachers if they are to exhibit the healthy, cheerful, wholesome personality that is most important in their profession.

B. Pupil-teacher Relationships

Pupil-teacher relationships are very significant in the emotional adjustment of a child. It might be said that a large part of the child's adjustment is determined by his relationship with his teacher. Through a genuine appreciation of his needs, his teacher is in the position of being able to help the child to optimum mental health.¹ An atmosphere of friendliness and cooperation is as essential for emotional growth as good food and fresh air are for physical health.

Mental health is not a new subject to be inserted into the already crowded curriculum. Rather, it is a point of view which modifies all the work of the teacher.² Research shows that pupils in an autocratic classroom with rigid discipline and schedules are much more likely to develop tensions and anxieties than those in the democratic classroom. Children need the opportunity to take part in planning. Only by this

¹Marguerite O'Brien Ewald, "The Emotionally Disturbed Child in the Classroom," Education, LXXVI (October, 1955), 69.

²Paul Witty and Charles E. Skinner, Mental Hygiene in Modern Education (New York: Farrar and Rinehard, Inc., 1941) p. 307.

method will they be motivated to search for knowledge and evaluate it in the light of past experiences. The more democratic teacher of today recognizes the value in group activity in solving a common problem. Participation in these groups is needed by every child in the classroom and the good teacher will provide opportunities for this.

In spite of all that has been written about the role of the teacher in the development of sound mental health, perhaps a word of caution should be given. No matter how great a teacher's ability to manage a class there will be children who are not able to respond.¹ If there is an indication of serious problem behavior, a specialist should be consulted. Such a child can cause serious disturbance in the classroom and profit only through professional help. The teacher should recognize this fact and not be too disturbed when he is not able to bring about the desired change in behavior of a child. Otherwise, this can be a most frustrating experience for the teacher, resulting in a feeling of inadequacy on his part.

Mention should be made of those various professional groups that are capable of giving assistance whenever needed. The social worker is equipped to counsel with the teacher, the child, and the parents and to effect changes in the child's environment. The social worker is also skilled in making referrals to appropriate agencies and in coordinating the services of other specialists.²

¹I. W. Fellner, "When Children are Disturbed," Elementary School Journal, LXI (February, 1961), 255.

²Ibid., 256.

Clinical psychologists are experts in administering psychological tests and interpreting them. The child's I. Q. is not enough on which to base judgment. The specialist can see beyond the child's surface behavior and search for emotional factors that contribute to it.

The psychiatrist is another trained to discover the tensions and conflicts with which the child may be struggling. It is not likely that the services of specialists such as these will be available to many of the smaller schools, but in extreme cases, they should be searched out and used in helping the child.

C. Teacher Training

If the teacher of today is to be capable of assuming the responsibility of giving maximum benefits in the area of mental health the substance of the curriculum of teacher education must include study of the nature of human personality, focused on the development of sympathetic understanding rather than the acquisition of factual information.¹ This substance will include consideration of peoples of different economic, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds. In colleges and universities where the faculty and students are concerned about the social and emotional development of prospective teachers, guidance is provided to acquaint the student with some of the personal requirements of the teaching profession. Some may wish to choose some career other than teaching. All efforts should be made to influence emotionally disturbed or

¹Witty, loc. cit., p. 347.

insecure persons away from the teaching profession.¹ The mental health of future teachers is an important issue in any college and the program for strengthening it should be included in all the activities of college life.

The Thirteenth Yearbook lists some changes that are going on at the campuses of teacher-training institutions that are designed to affect mental health practices in the classroom. These include:

1. Improvement in the offerings in both "general" and "educational" psychology, to take advantage of the scientific knowledge now obtainable from psychiatry and other fields previously overlooked in the preparation of teachers--knowledge that is helpful in equipping prospective teachers for their own sakes and for the sake of the children.
2. More direct contacts, through field experiences, with children and youth in life situations, and less dependence upon academic psychology textbooks, lectures, and class discussions--except as these are connected with actual human living.
3. Greater attention to making the life of the prospective teacher in the training institution and in the community round about richer and more fruitful and more in accord with the principles of mental health, on the ground that living effectively during the period of educational preparation is likely to carry over into the work of the teacher in school and community.²

If these newly trained teachers, early in their teaching experience, bring into their respective classrooms a better understanding of this problem of mental health of the student and a determination to do something about, positive results may be expected. Educators tell us that the elementary years are the time when the emotionally disturbed child is likely to make the decision to drop out of school just as soon as he

¹Ibid. p. 349.

²Thirteenth Yearbook, loc. cit., p. 239.

can legally do so. This, then, is the time when help is needed. For those who have taught for several years without being aware of the importance of working in the area of mental health, a planned program of information concerning the need and the possible results of such a program should be instigated in every school system throughout the country. The need is evident--what is done about it depends upon the teachers.

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