

EDITORIAL

THE ROOTS OF FAILURE IN TEACHING

An Alberta Teachers' Association report showed principals most often found unsuccessful first year teachers deficient in classroom management skills.¹ Without skillful management of classroom activities, both student and teacher energies are directed away from the goals of instruction such that learning suffers. There is, however, no single simple solution. Effective classroom management is a complex issue involving the entire teaching process. Discipline problems result not only from failures in the interactive stage of teaching but also from failures in planning and from inadequacies in evaluation which follow teacher-pupil interaction. Inadequacies in these processes may develop from improper teacher education and/or from a rigid system of public education.

Certainly as Professor Black suggests, teacher education could be improved. An obvious place for improvement is in the transfer of training from the experiences at the university to the demands of the classroom. Transfer of training is supposed to be effected largely through the practicum. Improve the practicum and a greater integration of theory and practice will occur. This means more than just increasing the amount of time the student teacher spends in the schools. The student should undergo a series of well controlled experiences wherein he applies the various methods of instruction under the close supervision of experts. The student teacher should be guided in the application of the major methods of instruction: lecturing, discussion and individualization. Once he is reasonably skillful, he should be helped to integrate these methods and their variations into a well organized approach to classroom teaching. This demands not only a highly controlled extended practicum during the university segment of training, but it also requires a carefully developed internship program during the first two years of teaching. To achieve these goals, teachers' associations, school trustee groups, universities, and government must work together.

While teacher education should draw upon the experiences of master teachers, it should emphasize knowledge developed through research and theory. Teachers, for example, require a broad foundation in the philosophy of education. Professor Self advocates a wider view of reality in his analysis of Dewey's pragmatism. Further, most educators would agree that attention to research results would advance practice. One such instance is the conclusion that success in the classroom is partially dependent upon the teacher communicating appropriate expectations to students. For example, do teachers see the teaching of the curriculum rather than nurturance as their primary task? This is the concern of Professor Rich who concludes that the school's central purpose is to promote learning. Teachers who deliberately communicate this and other appropriate expectations have students who tend to act accordingly.

A fundamental principle of classroom management is stressed by Professor Fry: pupils must be held responsible for their own behaviour. This responsibility implies that behaviour has consequences. Depending upon its nature, the consequences of behaviour may either be rewarding or punishing. It is generally accepted that reward is the main way behaviour is changed. Even when punishment is used, reward should play an important role in building acceptable behaviour. In developing classroom management skills, teachers must learn to emphasize the various ways of rewarding appropriate responses.

The suggestion that students be made responsible for their actions is in line with Professor Brosio's plea for increased democracy in the community. The

¹*Report on Opinions of Principals on the First Year Experience of Teachers Prepared in Alberta Universities, 1973* (Edmonton: The Alberta Teachers' Association, 1973), p. 3.

goal of classroom management procedures should be self-discipline on the part of the individual. During the life of most classroom groups, the early stages are characterized by the setting of rules to govern behaviour. As a group develops trust, cohesiveness and rapport, rules which were more or less rigidly enforced are relaxed. For instance, raising a hand in order to gain permission to speak may be necessary at the beginning of a term but may be dropped later when students have demonstrated respect for others. The child who acts responsibly in the classroom is likely to act responsibly elsewhere. Thus the goals of classroom management serve those of the wider community.

While teacher education may be the basis of some discipline problems, the present system of public education does not allow even well trained, highly motivated teachers to consistently apply improved approaches. The prevailing system of one teacher for every 25 to 30 children, whether in an open area or in a self-contained classroom, stems the flow of progress in public education. Teachers still have little or no planning time during the regular school day. They are expected to conduct many of the necessary teaching tasks such as planning and evaluation on their own time. Out of necessity teachers learn the shortcuts that work, after a fashion, and are frustrated in their attempts to make substantial improvements; instructional possibilities are highly limited. Some of the best of what they have learned at the university must be discarded as impractical in the face of harsh realities. In other words, because of the restricted conditions of the classroom, teachers cannot do the job the way much of the theoretical and empirical literature in education tells them would improve the teaching and learning process. Resulting failures in planning, guiding and evaluating create the classroom situations which produce discipline problems.

Lack of individualization of instruction is a central issue. At present the individualization of instruction cannot be introduced into most classrooms. The resources for its introduction are simply unavailable. If individualization were allowed to flourish, student frustration and boredom, the causes of much unrest in the schools, would be alleviated.

Obvious solutions to the problem have existed for a long time. Professor Stott, in his contribution to this issue, argues for a clarification of the purpose of public education. One of the most practical solutions, however, would be to increase the number of people working with each class. Instead of a single teacher, a group of four or five educators should have as their sole responsibility a class of 25 to 30 pupils. The group of educators would consist of at least two fully qualified teachers and a number of college-trained paraprofessionals. Schooling would be most markedly improved by individualized instruction made possible by the coordinated group effort. Discipline problems would thereby be reduced and students would more likely reach their potentialities.

The waste of human resources caused by an ineffectual education system should be a central issue in western society. That it is not, underlies the lip service paid to the significance of education. Symptomatic of this crisis are the discipline problems confronting many classroom teachers. To effect change, sufficient staff working directly with the students might make the greatest difference of all. Teacher education can and should be improved, but even when teachers receive proper training, they are prevented from doing their best by a rigid system lacking in resources. Some critics would say that society cannot afford the financial burden of increasing the number of people associated with each classroom group; but can it continue to afford the awesome waste?

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