

## **LEARNER-CENTRED TEACHING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

### **NEED OF THE HOUR**

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#### **Introduction**

The teacher's attitude toward himself, his attitudes toward others, and what he wants from life determine for the most part how he works with his pupils. If, for example, a teacher decides to become a teacher because he wants to dominate and to manipulate others but doubts his ability to dominate adults, this will reflect itself in the way he works with children. Frequently, the teacher is not fully aware of these motivations himself; consequently, he may not realize the extent to which he manipulates his pupils to meet his own needs. In fact, most such teachers build a rationalization which justifies their behavior. Other teachers believe that they know what is best for all children and that any effort to adapt instruction to the pupils' interests, needs, or academic backgrounds represents a failure to protect society's best interests (though for some this too is a rationalization of their emotional needs). There are three possible reasons for this view: (1) they do not know that a child may be hurt by repeated failures, that repeating a grade often fails to improve significantly a child's score on achievement tests, and that retarded children may have a bad influence on their younger classmates; (2) they understand the consequences of enforcing rigid standards and of not providing challenging work for the gifted children but they are either unwilling or unable to provide the special individual assistance required; and (3) they do not believe in free public education for all American youth – they want to encourage the slow learners to leave school.

On the other hand, there are many good elementary-school teachers who believe that they know what is best for their pupils and that their pupils are too immature to help them formulate classroom regulations and plan worthwhile learning activities.

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These teachers tell their pupils how they respect them to behave and what they may expect from their teacher, present information to the class, plan demonstrations (and either do them or arrange for pupils to do them in accordance with the teacher's plan), ask questions, judge the pupils' contributions, answer the pupils' questions, and evaluate pupils' growth. Though they reserve the center of the stage for themselves (and therefore we shall call them teacher-centered), they are interested in doing what is best for their pupils.

In contrast to this way of teaching, the learner-centered teacher respects his pupils' judgment, encourages them to help define class-room regulations, seeks their assistance in planning school work, encourages them to participate in the teaching activities, and teaches them to take progressively greater responsibility for their own behavior. He assumes the role of a democratic leader in the classroom.

In this research paper we shall begin by considering what is meant by this conception of the teacher as a democratic leader in the classroom, and what are some of the goals he should seek and dangers he should avoid. One of the important goals – perhaps the most important – is the fullest effective participation of his pupils on both sides of the teaching-learning process, and we will next consider the most complete development of this pupil-participation – the use of pupil assistance.

There are, however, other factors beside the democratic leadership of the teacher and pupil-participation which facilitate learning, and we will go on to discuss what these other factors are. We will divide them into factors which occur within the physical setting and within the pupil, and those which are the result of the teacher's daily classroom activities.

## **Overview**

### **Democratic Leadership in the Classroom**

Within this accepting, permissive atmosphere children feel free to say what they think. They realize that their ideas and opinions are respected and that the teacher can accept opinions which are different from his own. Children can afford to be what they really are. They discover also that sometime or other everyone faces problems which he cannot solve by himself. Thus, they feel free to seek help from classmates as well as from the teacher. Although they move about the room and talk with each other more freely, they tend to waste less time than they do in teacher-centered classrooms because they understand what they are expected to do, they realize why they should do it, and, having helped to define the limits and to plan the work, more of them want to do it. Furthermore, pupils soon learn that unnecessary confusion interferes with the achievement of their goals and that it may reflect on their own maturity and embarrass the teacher in his relationships with his

colleagues. Within this wholesome climate most pupils are motivated to help each other meet their responsibilities rather than to challenge the teacher as an authority figure. Thus, maintaining good working conditions puts less strain on both the teacher and the pupils.

Though pupils can participate in making decisions only with reference to those policies and procedures about which the teacher is free to make decisions, the teacher may permit pupils to discuss other topics, obtain their ideas for improving policies and procedures, and forward them to the appropriate person or group. Of course, the extent to which the last step is encouraged by the administration's attitude will vary from school to school. Even those administrators who are genuinely proud of the democratic leadership provided by a learner-centered teacher may have difficulty accepting pupils' suggestions.

If the teacher is to provide effective democratic leadership, he obviously must know and understand the school's policies and procedures. He must understand what he and his pupils are expected to do and be cognizant of the limits within which he is free to make decisions. The teacher also has responsibility for communicating these understandings to his pupils. Even when the school has policies and procedures which pupils believe are unsound, they must use them as guides for their behavior until changes are made.

The teacher's personal needs and values must also be taken into account. If, for example, the teacher believes that a given problem has only one acceptable solution, he does not solicit pupils' assistance in solving it. Pupils do not like being asked to "rubber stamp" the teacher's solutions; in fact, such behavior tends to make them question his sincerity on asking for help. And so he requests his pupils' assistance in solving only those problems upon which he can accept their decisions. Though he too has a voice in making these decisions, the teacher must prove to the pupils, by his daily behavior, that he takes their recommendations seriously and that they can disagree with him without fear of reprisal.

Whenever the teacher confronts a problem on which he wishes to have the pupils' judgment, he presents the issue to the pupils and helps them clarify any ambiguous elements in the statement of the problem; then he helps them obtain relevant information, helps them define alternative solutions, and encourages them to select one of them. In addition he encourages them to suggest problems for co-operative study. During this process the teacher makes it as easy as possible for everyone to contribute. Otherwise, good ideas may be lost and some pupils will miss an opportunity to learn how to participate in solving problems which affect their class.

When children become accustomed to working within this permissive atmosphere, they often suggest topics for study as well as guides for classroom behavior. Sometimes they

suggest topics or regulations which create problems for the teacher. For example, they may decide to study a topic in science for which they lack the requisite knowledge or for which the school lacks adequate references and equipment. What can the teacher do in such a case? If he realizes what the situation is before the pupils make the decisions, he is obligated to present the facts of the case and to suggest related topics for which the pupils are prepared and the school is equipped. If he discovers what the situation is after a decision has been made, he must present the facts and ask the pupils either to substitute another topic or to postpone its study until they are prepared and adequate materials have been obtained. When, however, the decision involves something less clear cut, such as behavior within the classroom, the situation is different. Sometimes when children vote against the teacher's view on a proposal more than the merits of issue are involved; it may be important for them to test whether the teacher is really sincere about giving them a voice in the matter. If the teacher then fails to make an honest effort to make the regulation work, it will reflect on his sincerity about giving pupils real choices. He must therefore not request a review of the decision until the proposal has been given a fair trial. When he feels that he must request such a review, he neither scolds the pupils nor apologizes for failure; he frankly presents the issues involved and requests the pupils either to help him formulate a new regulation or to suggest ways of making the old one work.

By observing the teacher's behavior children learn to help create a permissive relationship within which they can contribute worth-while ideas about the study of subject matter as well as the problems of classroom management. They learn how to help a classmate recognize when he has something to contribute, explain and clarify his ideas for others, to defend them if necessary, and to accept criticism from his fellows. At the same time each learns how to present, clarify, and defend his own ideas. To create this permissive atmosphere, the teacher must be genuinely interested in his pupils and be willing and able to help they learn from each other, from him, and from independent study.

During classroom discussions he listens attentively to the speaker; he also observes the rest of the pupils-not merely to see whether they are misbehaving, but to notice how they are responding to the speaker and to help them get their questions and ideas before the class. He also listens so that he may learn from his pupils. On the other hand, his own rich background enables him to contribute whenever he thinks it would be helpful. Of course, he expects his contributions to receive the same careful scrutiny that the pupils' contributions receive.

The pupils soon realize that when the teacher opens a discussion by asking “What questions occurred to you while studying about –?” he really wants to know how he can help them – no matter how simple the question is. Pupils are given the first chance to answer each question. When a question has been adequately answered they turn to another one. If no one answers it adequately the teacher pulls together the relevant facts contributed by the pupils and answers the question himself. When he suspects that a point about which no one has asked questions may not be understood, he asks questions or uses a sample problem to determine whether they understand the material.

On some days pupils use most of the work period for a project or lesson on class discussion; on other days they have few questions so they use most of the time for independent study. While the pupils are studying, the teacher and his pupil provide individual help as it is needed.

Usually several different kinds of learning activities are going on at any one time. Frequently, these are carried on in work groups which have been organized for special projects.

To fully appreciate how differently discussions are conducted in a teacher-centred classroom we should compare them with those in a teacher-centred classroom – even one where the teacher is con-scientious and highly regarded by his colleagues. First, we would note that pupils are rarely encouraged to work together on special projects. Except for reading and arithmetic instruction, the class is not divided into subgroups. Consequently, most discussions involve the entire class. In general, the teacher asks the questions, listens to the pupils’ answers, judges their answers, and, if satisfied with the answer, asks another question. Usually when he entertains pupils’ questions he answers them himself.

### **Pupil Participation in Teaching**

Most elementary-school teachers believe that their pupils learn much from their classmates. They recognize that even the most successful teachers occasionally have difficulty communicating with their pupils and that frequently some pupils will be able to explain a concept or demonstrate a skill better than the teacher can. At the same time they often disagree on the best way to use pupils’ assistance in teaching.

Teacher-centered teachers usually believe that pupils learn most efficiently from each other when the teacher leads group discussions and supervises pupils’ demonstrations. They feel that encouraging pupils to help each other with their assignments has a number of drawbacks: too frequently the poor pupil merely copies another’s work without learning how to do it; pupil assistants frequently give incorrect information; pupils often waste time

when working together; and unnecessary disciplinary problems eventually arise. Some of these teachers also feel that the use of pupil assistants makes the less able pupils become more rather than less dependent.

Learner-centered teachers, on the other hand, have found that these negative results occur most frequently when the teacher tries but fails to prevent pupils from helping each other. They also hold that teachers may avoid the negative consequences of pupils helping each other by helping pupils' to define what the teacher may expect from the pupils and what they may expect from each other and from their teacher, and by training pupil assistants for their responsibilities.

Teaching pupil assistants how to help classmates is not easy, but it can be done by demonstrating the difference between doing the work for a child and showing him how to do it. Usually a teacher can obtain the agreement of a pupil who needs help to participate in the demonstration. (He should, of course, select a pupil who would not be embarrassed by his role. Often, this can be done best while the teacher is introducing new work and the pupils realize that many need assistance). There are five important aspects of such demonstrations for the one who is doing the teaching: (1) helping the pupil go as far as he can on his own; (2) helping the pupil realize just where it is that he is having trouble; (3) verbalizing the mental processes that the pupil must go through; (4) helping the pupil summarize the steps involved; and (5) pointing out how these steps may be used in solving similar problems.

Some learner-centered teachers encourage pupils to help each other, but do not set up formal arrangements for using pupil assistants. Others use some variation of the plans described below. In both cases pupils must be taught to differentiate between helping a class-mate and doing the work for him.

### **Introducing the Use of Pupil Assistants**

If the teacher decides to make formal arrangements for using pupil assistants he should describe the class organization to his pupils and explain through the use of examples how selected pupils could help him provide the additional individual assistance that most pupils need at some time or other. From the very first, the teacher should solicit the pupils' assistance in defining the teacher's role, the pupil assistants' role, and the role of those who profit from assistants' help. Whenever the use of pupil assistants changes the teaching methods substantially, it is usually easier for both the teacher and pupils to introduce it at the beginning of a school term than to wait until working relationships have been established.

### **Selecting Assistants**

Who selects the assistants? Obviously, this decision must vary with the maturity of the pupils. Even first graders may be taught to help their classmates with their school work, but usually they are quite willing to accept the teacher's choice of assistants. By the time they reach the fourth grade, pupils can write their preferences in response to sociometric test questions. What is more, they enjoy being consulted on the choice of assistants. For fifth and sixth graders, pupil participation in choice of assistants becomes important; failure to consider the pupils' choice at this level may result in the assistants being regarded as mere teacher's pets.

Pupils should be encouraged to consider two characteristics in selecting assistants: (1) their knowledge of the subject matter and special skills, or both, and (2) their acceptability as persons to their classmates. Thus, different pupil assistants may be selected to help their classmates with arithmetic, art, language arts, music, science, and social studies. For example, even fourth-grade assistants have been taught to help classmates to select topics for stories, to find materials, to polish up the grammar and spelling in their stories, and to clarify what they have tried to express.

But will even the upper-grade pupils know each other well enough to answer such sociometric test questions? Frequently, they will. In any case this issue should be discussed with the pupils and if they feel uncertain about their choices, they should be told to make temporary choices and then select regular assistants later when they know more about their classmates.

### **Responsibilities of Pupil Assistants**

Earlier we said that the teacher should enlist the pupils' aid in defining the assistants' teaching responsibilities. Obviously, they should not be used merely to reduce the teacher's routine paper work. If, however, correcting written work is integrated with remedial instruction, their time may be used very effectively for this purpose. When, for example, an assistant finishes correcting a paper, he should sit down with his classmate to help him discover the errors in his work and do over again that part of the assignment in which the errors were made – something a teacher rarely has time to do when he assumes the entire responsibility for instruction.

What else can assistants do? They can help the teacher provide whatever individual assistance that is needed; they also may serve as consultants for special committees and study groups. Most teachers are especially grateful for the help they provide for the rest of the class while the teacher works with a part of it, such as a reading group.

Whether or not the pupil assistant completes his assignments ahead of his classmates and has them corrected by the teacher is for the teacher to decide. Usually, the pupil assistants can be relied upon to do their work and check its accuracy without the teacher's assistance. In any case, they must have completed the work in order for them to be prepared to help their classmates; pupils recognize this. Why should a pupil want to be an assistant? From the assistant's point of view, being chosen by his peers is sufficient recognition to justify participation. He also likes to be recognized for his own special competencies. Moreover, this recognition tends to strengthen his interest in the subject for which he is chosen and thereby encourages him to pursue further study in that area.

What benefits are there for the assistant? How can it be justified in terms of the assistant's personal growth? He learns to appreciate his special competencies and to use them in aiding his peers. In order for him to help another, he must examine what he knows, integrate his knowledge, and adapt his explanation to the learner- a task which requires much more insight and more thorough mastery of the concepts and skills than is usually required to complete assignments and pass examinations. Finally, the time he spends giving the necessary remedial instruction to his classmates provides the teacher with enough additional free time for him to give some special attention to the assistants – to provide them with work which challenges them and to help them find the materials they need to pursue old interests and develop new ones. This may be done on an individual basis or it may be done by setting aside some time for the assistants to work together as a group, by themselves where they can talk about their special projects and help each other with the learning problems which they have met in their independent study. Other talented pupils in that field who were not selected as assistants may be encouraged to work with assistants at such times. For example, pupil assistants in science often discuss their outside reading and their experiments; do experiments in school, trade specimens, and exchange books. Pupils thereby discover new interests, strengthen old ones, and develop greater resources for independent study and self-education. Usually such experiences also motivate bright pupils to improve the overall quality of their work.

### **Conditions which Facilitate learning**

So far we have discussed the influence of the teacher's attitudes on teacher-pupil relationships and the learner-centered teacher's techniques for involving pupils in classroom planning, some of his classroom methods, and his use of pupil assistants. We believe that these relationships facilitate learning. We also believe that there are other important factors which every teacher must consider in facilitating learning. Knowledge of

these factors helps teachers understand why on some occasions children learn a lot in a short time and why on other occasions they work equally hard for longer periods and learn very little.

Most authorities agree that good morale facilitates learning. From his review of the research, Wrightstone concluded that the teacher's personality is an important factor in determining pupil morale and classroom climate:

The findings about the effect of teacher personality on the climate of the classroom show that the teacher has an opportunity to organize his classroom and teaching procedures in such a way as to provide conditions and experiences that will lead to healthful personal and group growth or morale for pupils. The teacher's contact with the children is continuous. The teacher's personal attitudes influence the emotional or social climate of the classroom. His social adaptability determines the relationships between himself and his pupils and influences the relationships among pupils themselves.

The emotion of a warm and sympathetic teacher translates itself into a friendly spontaneous emotion of the pupil group. Thus, pupil-teacher social distance reveals the degree of warmth and interest that the teacher has for the children. In studies that have involved an analysis of pupils' comments about teachers, researchers have found that a cooperative, democratic attitude, kindness and consideration for the individual pupil, and patience were among the highest ranking traits mentioned for the teacher who had helped them most.

Studies have shown that authoritarian methods induce pupil attitudes of self-concern and of competition with others. A laissez-faire approach on the part of the teacher tends to produce a state of extreme individualism, of concern for self often bordering on anarchy. Under democratic leadership, the pupil attitudes developed are concern for the welfare of the group as a whole and for the individuals in the group, and an effective working relationship among group members.

Since the teacher is such an important factor in determining whether conditions within the classroom facilitate learning, we should like to review the personal and professional competencies which govern his success with his pupils: his ability to accept himself and others (especially pupils, parents, and colleagues); his ability to communicate this acceptance of others; his ability to empathize with others; his skill in sensing pupils' difficulties and communicating a genuine desire to provide assistance; his ability to cope with his own emotional problems; his mastery of the subject matter he teaches; his ability

to communicate his ideas and feelings to others; his ability to accept and profit from criticism, and his interest in improving his teaching methods.

The successful teacher understands his pupils and is interested in them as individuals; he likes and respects them, and they know it. Not only does he teach them specific subject matter, he also helps them develop new interests and strengthen old ones, understand and accept themselves and others, and become more competent in working with classmates. He knows that having children memorize facts is not sufficient; he realizes that he must teach pupils how to define problems, obtain the facts, interpret them, and use them in solving problems. He is aware that what a child learns is dependent not only on his learning potentialities, but also on his needs, his community and family background, and his educational experience.

Other conditions that facilitate learning fall into three general categories: (1) factors within the physical setting; (2) factors within the pupil; and (3) the teacher's daily classroom activities.

We have already made the point that a wholesome emotional climate—such as one finds in a learner-centered classroom—contributes to effective learning. Perhaps we should add that though pupils should feel free to seek aid from classmates when they need it, pupils also should respect an individual's right to work alone in pursuing his own special interests.

Working relationships and job assignments should be clearly defined. Best results are obtained when pupils help make up the classroom regulations and plan work which is meaningful to them. It is also important that these plans be sufficiently flexible to allow pupils to pursue special interests.

School work must be adapted to individual differences. Ideally, every child should be challenged by every assignment yet no child should be assigned work which he is unable to do.

Available experimental evidence on instructional provisions for meeting individual differences at the elementary-school level favors groups within the class. The teacher organizes these groups for various purposes such as direct instruction of specific academic skills, satisfaction of common pupil interests, and social purposes. These groups are flexible; the personnel and the size of the group vary according to the specific purpose at a particular time.

Adequate teaching materials should be purchased, arranged, and stored to enable each pupil to complete efficiently his assigned work and work on his special projects. They should be selected to make allowances for the various learning levels among the pupils.

The physical conditions within the classrooms must be conducive to learning: adequate light; comfortable temperature; and a room decorated in good taste and furnished with comfortable furniture that lends itself to arrangement for varied group activities.

Though a child must give his full attention to a discussion to profit from it and contribute to it most effectively, we should not conclude that three of these pupils were not profiting from the class discussion when we asked what they were thinking. Perhaps they were learning something even then, but obviously they would have profited more had they been able to tune out the distracting stimuli.

A child learns most efficiently when he wants to learn, knows what he is expected to do, believes that he has the ability to do it, and recognizes some value in doing it. The child's general attitude toward himself, his previous school experiences, and especially his memory of success or failure in doing similar work, will determine his decision that he can or cannot do the work. In the same way, his interest in doing the work will be determined by the attitudes which he has learned both in and outside school.

There are several other characteristics of the child who learns efficiently:

1. He is relatively free from disabling handicaps and distracting pain.
2. He is relatively free from worries and anxieties.
3. He has a reasonably good understanding of his needs and knows how to satisfy them reasonably well.
4. He feels that there is someone in the school to whom he can turn for help when he is faced with a problem which he cannot solve by himself.
5. He has sufficient energy to do his school work.
6. He possesses the ability, the learning skills, and the related knowledge to do the required work.
7. He has learned to appraise his own progress toward his goals, and when he is unable to do this, he knows that his teacher will help him appraise his progress, diagnose his learning Problems, and correct the deficiencies.
8. He is given an opportunity to use his knowledge.
9. His success in applying the knowledge and skills gives him personal satisfactions and attracts praise. This reinforces the learning and improves his chances of making the correct response the next time he is called upon to use the knowledge or skill.

Child-study techniques which the teacher can use to determine whether the conditions within the child will facilitate learning are presented in Chapters 3 and 4 and further discussed in Chapter 19. However, even good techniques are not sufficient to

identify the forces within the child which interfere with efficient learning. Solving this professional problem, and the related one of teaching the child to cope with the forces which interfere with learning, requires the child's wholehearted cooperation. This is most easily achieved in a permissive atmosphere where pupils help decide how they will work together, discover that they can express their feelings freely, and are convinced that the teacher will use facts about them to help them achieve success. Within this setting they soon learn to accept the teacher's request for help when he suspects that forces within the children are diverting attention away from the assigned task. On such occasions he may, for example, interrupt a discussion or work period with the request that each write in a word or two what he was thinking about, and thus identify the forces which distract pupils' attention. He also may obtain suggestions from the pupils for controlling these distractions. Within this framework pupils recognize readily the implications for themselves of others' suggestions. Further, such occasions set the stage for the teacher to give pupils information on work habits and study skills.

In other words, the child's needs, interests, values, problems, and abilities all influence his readiness for learning; they also determine what he notices in any given situation and how he perceives what he has noticed. Though pupils may have equal opportunities to learn from a given situation, we know that individuals notice and remember different elements in a situation, and that they may perceive differently even those elements which they have noticed in common. The teacher must take cognizance of these differences. One thing he can do is to help pupils become more sensitive to the significant elements in the learning situation. More is said about this in the next section.

### **The Teaching Process**

Teaching is the process of facilitating learning. Learning, in turn, is a complicated process of selecting, interpreting, and integrating which begins when a person responds to a stimulus. Sometimes action results; at other times the person merely changes either the way in which he perceives a situation or the way in which he will act in the future. Blair, Jones, and Simpson define learning as follows:

Any change of behavior which is the result of experience, and which causes people to face later situations differently may be called learning. The person not trained in psychology may conceive of learning in a narrow, academic sense. To such a person learning means acquiring skill in reading, spelling, or a trade. Actually it is much more! Children learn cultural values; they learn appropriate sex roles; they learn to love and to hate and to fear and to be self confident; they learn wants and interests and character and personality traits.

Although Wiles defines learning very similarly, he introduces some new elements:

We live, and through the process of living we learn. Each of us, as he lives, selects from his environment the things with which he will interact. Some of the things will be words of other people: some will be the behavior of other people; some will be physical features of the environment. As we interact with the features of the environment which we select, we change. The process of change in a person through interaction is learning.

Therefore, in addition to distractions which cause inattentiveness and to physical conditions such as poor vision and poor hearing, there may be other factors to account for the fact that children who participate in the same class discussions may learn very different things. Not only does each individual's background influence his interpretation of experience, but each pupil's interests, values, and previous experiences in similar situations also determine whether he will notice specific elements in the situation. Usually, with the help of his teacher and classmates, a child can be taught to observe more of the relevant elements in a situation.

What else can the teacher do to facilitate the learning of specific knowledge and the mastery of useful skills?

1. He can know the conditions which contribute to efficient learning and enlist his pupils' assistance in satisfying these conditions.
2. He can enlist his pupil's assistance in planning units of work which are meaningful to them. Obviously, this requires knowledge of the subject matter, knowledge of the pupils' backgrounds, and an understanding of the way in which the unit fits into the entire school curriculum.
3. Not only can the teacher and his pupils plan each unit with care, but at the end of every discussion period they can plan for the next discussion period; they should decide what they will do and how they may prepare to do it. While the teacher is preparing him for the discussion of the next topics, he should try to recall which concepts and skills were found to be difficult by previous classes and to plan appropriate explanations and demonstrations to meet the needs of the situation.
4. Even when the teacher finds himself in a situation where he has little opportunity to involve pupils in planning units, he can enlist their assistance in planning demonstrations and field trips, in locating interesting teaching materials, and in defining working relationships within the classroom. The teacher must at least try to make the work interesting to his pupils. To accomplish this he must believe that

the concepts and skills which he is attempting to teach are worth learning and assign to individuals only that work which each can do.

5. He can accept the fact that pupils differ—that each has special needs, interests, values, abilities, and aptitudes—and that they reveal their desire for help in different ways.
6. He can adapt his assignments to his pupils' various maturity levels, their ability levels, and their knowledge and skills. If he is really concerned about his pupils learning to accept themselves, then he will take cognizance of the fact that children learn to accept themselves by discovering what they can do well, by accepting the weaknesses which they cannot correct with a reasonable expenditure of time and effort, and by discovering and correcting the weaknesses that are remediable.
7. He can secure materials and equipment to enable pupils to do their work efficiently and to pursue their special interests. If he is really concerned about teaching his pupils to be independent learners, he also will assume responsibility for teaching them to use special equipment, to locate their own materials for special projects, and to use school and community resources such as libraries and museums.
8. He can be conscious of the fact that he can accomplish desirable changes in pupil behavior which carryover to new situations (transfer of training) only when he teaches his pupils how to identify the general principles which are used to solve specific problems.
9. He can inform pupils of their progress and teach them how to appraise their own progress. He should be interested in each individual's progress, convey this interest to each, and provide individual assistance whenever it is needed. One of the teacher's hardest decisions is being critical enough to remove errors, and being lenient enough to give pupil encouragement and a chance to develop a style of work that fits him.
10. He can become proficient at identifying, diagnosing, and treating the problems which pupils confront in doing their work. He also can teach pupils to discriminate between concepts which they understand and can use in solving problems and those which they understand only vaguely.

### **Conclusion**

Frequently, beginning teachers have difficulty differentiating between the child who is idle because he does not know how to do the work and anyone of three other types of problem children, each of whom knows how to do the work but wastes school time and often

becomes a discipline problem: (1) the pupil who does not see any reason for doing the work; (2) the pupil who does not know how to plan use of his time; (3) and the pupil who has completed the work and does not know what to do with his free time.

Often the bright child who completes his work quickly can be shown how to pursue projects of special interest to him and be trained to help the child who does not know how to do his work. Thus, more of the teacher's time can be devoted to helping the first type see reasons for doing the work and the second type learn how to use his time more efficiently.

While conducting discussions, the teacher should try to identify learning problems. He should encourage pupils to ask questions whenever they feel they need help, and help them answer each other's questions. It is also quite appropriate for him to ask questions to determine whether pupils understand those concepts, principles, and skills which have troubled other classes, and the same class in earlier sessions. As pupils answer each other's questions, the teacher can discover the degree to which pupils who believe they have mastered the material, really have mastered it. Furthermore, answering questions helps the pupils who answer the questions clarify what they thought they understood. As they explain a principle, clarify a concept, or explain and demonstrate a skill, they come to understand it better themselves.

The teacher should remember that learning is an individual matter. Teachers can introduce ideas to pupils, help pupils identify the stumbling blocks which prevent learning, and aid them in removing the barriers, but they can neither learn for the pupils nor force them to learn.

By using the teaching resources found among the pupils, a learner-centered teacher can provide more remedial work for the slow learners and devote more time and energy to challenging the gifted children. He also has more opportunity to help pupils to discover their own strengths and weaknesses, to understand and accept themselves, to understand and accept others, to learn to work with others, and to initiate and carry out independent learning activities.

Working under such conditions, elementary-school pupils have participated successfully in formulating guides for their own behavior in the classroom and on the playground and have helped to plan units of work, field trips, social activities, and community activities. They also have learned how to help each other with their work, to help evaluate their own progress and their instructional activities, and to assume progressively greater responsibility for helping to maintain good working conditions within the classroom.

### Suggested Readings

1. Blair, G. M., Jones, R. S., and Simpson, R. H., *Educational Psychology*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954. Elementary school teachers will find that the following chapters will help them apply psychological principles in the classroom: 5. "Orientation to Learning", 6. "Readiness for Learning", 11. "The Social Psychology of Teaching and Learning", and 12. "Discovering and Overcoming Special Difficulties in Learning".
2. *Creating a Good Environment for Learning*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervisors and Curriculum Development, 1954. The title of this book describes it very well. It discusses the teacher's role in creating a good environment for learning and explains why teachers assume different roles. It also describes other important forces which influence learning.
3. Cronbach, Lee J., *Educational Psychology*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954. This is another excellent book for teachers which explain how to apply psychological principles in teaching. We found three chapters to be especially useful for our purposes here: Chapter 2, "What Teachers are Trying to Accomplish", Chapter 3, "An Introduction to the Learning Process", and Chapter 8, "Adapting Schooling to Individual Differences". These chapters provide helpful answers with reference to such questions as: (1) what are the social goals of the school? (2) What are the key elements which influence behavior? (3) What individual differences must be considered by a teacher in planning her work?
4. Jersild, A. T., "Understanding Others Through Facing Ourselves", *Childhood Education*, 30:410-414 (May 1954). In this paper, Jersild explains why self-understanding is especially important to a teacher. He also explains how a teacher's attitudes toward himself influence his behavior in the classroom.
5. Otto, Henry J., *Principles of Elementary Education*. New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1949. In addition to presenting principles of elementary education, this book explains how to apply psychological knowledge in understanding children and in working with them. Perhaps the most valuable chapter for our present study is Chapter 13, "Working with Children".
6. Overstreet, B. W., "Building the Self-Image", *National Education Association Journal*, 41: 14-15 (January 1952). In this paper the author describes the development of the self-image and the factors which contribute to self-acceptance.

7. Stendler, Celia B., *Teaching in the Elementary Schools*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958. This new and stimulating book applies the principles of learning to teaching all the various school subjects. Perhaps Chapter 1, “The Task of the Elementary School”, and Chapter 2, “A Basic Theory of Learning”, would be most useful here.
8. Wiles, Kimball, *Teaching for Better Schools*. New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1952. Those who are interested in becoming learner-centered teachers should read the entire book. For present purposes, the first four chapters are very helpful: 1, “What is An Efficient Teaching-Learning Situation”, 2, “What is the Role of the teacher?” 3, “What Quality of Human Relationships Do We Seek?” and 4, “How Can We Improve Human Relations in the Class?”
9. Wrightstone, J. Wayne, *Class Organization for Instruction*. Washington, D. C.: Department of Classroom Teachers, American Educational Research Association of the National Association, 1957. The author drew from the research on classroom organization for the items which promised to be most useful to the classroom teacher and organized these ideas into well-written pamphlet. He answers such questions as: (1) “What are the advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping?” and (2) “That are the characteristics of an effective class organization?”