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THE VISITING TEACHER



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THE VISITING TEACHER.

In talking with working children about the reason for their having left school for employment, frequently the reply is: "I didn't like school and I wanted to work." Usually the reasons are found to be economic or educational maladjustments of the individual child. It is obvious that if we are to succeed in keeping children in school until they have had a chance for an education some means must be provided of finding out, understanding, and remedying the individual child's difficulties. His problems must be discovered before they have loomed so large in his limited experience as to determine an unwise course, or before they have become such serious difficulties as to handicap him permanently.

It has been found advisable in a number of communities to secure the services of visiting teachers not to get the child "back to school" but to prevent the unfortunate, unconscious drive out from school which results when the school fails to see and understand and remedy each child's individual problem. The aim of the visiting teacher is to adjust the conditions, in the lives of individual children, that retard development and school progress and that are responsible for school conduct, scholarship, or attendance.

The visiting teacher must not be confused with an attendance officer or a probation officer. Her work is entirely preventive and she gets in touch with the child when the first symptoms appear which, if not heeded, develop frequently into truancy, retardation, or delinquency.

It has become recognized that for the true education of the child the home and the school must work together. The visiting teacher stands between the home and the school. She interprets the school to the parents and enlists their cooperation. She passes on to the teacher the results of her observation of the child in his home surroundings, noting his interests and his handicaps, and so helps the teacher to understand the child.

There are boys and girls who have fallen below standard in scholarship but who are not subnormal; there are children who have grown restless and whom school fails to interest because it seems so remote from the life they lead outside its walls; there are retarded children who are undernourished and who seem to have reached the end of their mental development; there are the girls who have an extra burden of home duties placed on their shoulders and who are

unable to keep up with their studies; there are the children whose home conditions are so adverse that they need special guidance and supervision; there are those boys and girls who have fallen below standard in conduct and who are not yet delinquent but are showing serious tendencies; there are children who need medical care and who can not progress in their studies. All these children will doubtless leave school as soon as the law allows and enter industry to drift into the ranks of the unskilled workers. These are the boys and girls for whom the help of the visiting teacher should be enlisted.

The visiting teacher goes into the home and establishes friendly relations with the parents. She attempts to discover the cause of the child's trouble by finding out the home conditions, the attitude of the parents toward school, the child's special difficulties and grievances; his point of view, his habits, his tastes, and interests, and how far these interests and aptitudes are made a part of his school life; how the school requirements may be modified to adjust the child's special difficulty and help him to get the full value out of his school course; how he spends his time outside of school hours; and how he is regarded by his family and his mates.

When the cause of the child's trouble is discovered, then the visiting teacher, with the cooperation of the parents and the school, attempts to make a plan of correction or adjustment and tries to secure a point of contact from which to work out a new interest.

She studies the neighborhood where the school is located to determine what part it plays in the child's life. She finds out the nationality of the neighborhood, the standard of living and education in general, the play opportunities for children, the parks and play grounds, the churches and settlements; the educational facilities outside the school; the agencies available for relief, correction, or medical assistance. In brief she acquaints herself with all the conditions that are working for and against the child and with all the social agencies at work in the neighborhood.

To assist in the solution of the child's problem the visiting teacher may enlist the interest of a playground director, a Big Brother, a librarian or club leader, a district nurse, the associated charities, or a tutor; employment may be found for a father or an older brother; the other children in the family may be aided in various ways, or the child may be transferred to another school or another room, all to the end that he may make more profitable school progress. Much is accomplished by merely showing the family how they may cooperate with the school and by releasing the child's energy through awakened interest or a changed attitude.

In one city the visiting teacher has formed clubs and classes which meet outside of school hours as a means of working out specific problems with individual children. With the cooperation of the princi-

pals, housekeeping classes for girls in the lower grades have been formed; special diet has been arranged for mal-nourished children; meetings have been held for parents and an effort made to form school and neighborhood associations.

VALUE OF THE VISITING TEACHER TO THE SCHOOL.

The visiting teacher's work has been found to be not only of value to the child but of immense value to the school. The visiting teacher, reaching out beyond the school, seeing the child's home life with its lacks and its ambitions, realizing the deficiencies, the dangers and trend of the neighborhood and the demands that are therefore made on the school for industrial and manual training, is able to assist the school in getting a clearer vision of the educational needs of the child.

One school in an eastern city, realizing through its visiting teacher that an unwholesome and undemocratic attitude toward housework was developing in a district, added to its curriculum a special course in housekeeping and for some time put special emphasis on the dignity of housework and home helping both for boys and girls. The visiting teacher has been found to be of service to the school in estimating for the school the value of certain types of school work as tested out in the home. A visiting teacher was called upon by a domestic science teacher for advice on the best method of interesting a group of foreign children in cooking and applying in their homes the lessons taught at school.

It may be thought that the class teacher should do the work of the visiting teacher. In time the schools may become socialized and the work so arranged that the teachers may give more time to the individual child, but at present in most of the communities the teachers are already overtaxed by the large classes assigned to them. The work of the visiting teacher often involves many visits to a home in order to adjust the difficulty in the case of one child. This means an expenditure of more time and energy than the teachers are able or have a right to spare from their teaching. The visiting teacher assists the class teacher in giving to each child the full opportunities of education.

HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT.

The work of the visiting teacher began informally in 1906 in two eastern cities as a settlement activity because the residents found that frequently children were problems to the school because the school had inadequate information regarding home conditions or because the home failed to understand the school's demands. Since then the work has extended to large and small cities, east and west, and to suburban and rural sections. In some cities the work has been imitated by parents' associations, women's clubs or a group of clubs,

public education associations or child-welfare organizations, and later has been taken over by the school board after the need for and value of the work has been demonstrated; the work has been done in the schools while the salaries of the visiting teachers have been paid by private organizations. In other cities the school board has conducted the work from the beginning. At present in about 75 per cent of the towns maintaining this type of work it is carried on by the departments of education.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE STARTING THE WORK.

In starting the visiting teacher work it has seemed desirable in most communities to secure the services of a person who has not only the training and experience of a teacher, so that she may be equipped to see the school problem, but also that of a social worker, so that she may be equipped to deal with the intimate and larger social questions involved in education and have a technique of "case work," which means a thorough understanding and specialized treatment of each individual case. She should have an understanding of children and of human nature, as well as tact and vision. She should have the ability to draw constructive conclusions, both educational and social, from her work with individuals. Occupying the position of go-between she should have the double viewpoint from first-hand experience.

RELATION TO THE SCHOOL.

It has been found advisable in most places to appoint the visiting teacher as an integral part of the school where she is regarded as a consultant on problematical children and on social educational problems. The principal refers to her children who become problems to the school because they are but half seen and half understood or those with whose situation the school finds itself unable to cope.

In cities where the schools are large it has been found advisable for a visiting teacher to work in one school only. In other places the visiting teacher has been assigned to more. The following principle, however, holds true: That the visiting teacher should be assigned to a field small enough for her to be identified with it, so that she may be the school representative in the neighborhood and the representative of the neighborhood in the school.

The visiting teacher's office should, of course, be in the school and so arranged that she may see the parents and children alone. In most places regular office hours have been found a convenience for the teachers as well as for the parents who wish to consult the visiting teacher.

The hours of the visiting teacher are usually equivalent to the hours required by the school-teachers, but they are not so definite, for

frequently a visiting teacher calls on Saturdays or in the evening to see the father or a mother who works during the day.

It has been found desirable to keep accurate records of significant facts relating to the children referred to the visiting teacher. A printed record form is a simple time-saving device. Experience has shown that it should include, among other items, the following:

Name and position of person referring the child to the visiting teacher.

Reason child was referred.

Important facts about the environment and home conditions.

Special characteristics and tendencies of the child.

The action taken by the visiting teacher:

With the child.

In the home.

In the school.

Through outside agencies (in relation to health, financial assistance, correction, opportunity for study, recreation, etc.)

The final outcome and fundamental difficulties.

Such a record serves a double purpose: It is valuable to the visiting teacher while she is planning for the child, and it summarizes the significant facts so that the school may see the child and his needs in the light of his social experience and may therefore be better able to provide for him the type of schooling which he needs to fit him for success in life.

The Children's Bureau will be glad to refer committees who plan to include in their activities for the lessening of child labor the preventive work of a visiting teacher, and who wish further details, to those who are carrying on the work in various cities and towns.



