

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD TEACHERS' MEETING

**T**EACHERS' meetings offer a supervisor a wonderful opportunity to show her teachers what she considers a good working situation between a teacher and her pupils. These meetings should have the same characteristics that any good classroom work should have: (1) the program for each meeting should grow from the needs of the teachers as these needs are recognized and expressed by them; (2) each program should provide the opportunity for the co-operation and the participation of the teachers in each phase of it; (3) the work should be planned to secure the greatest amount of growth possible from each teacher participating; (4) the teachers should feel that some progress has been made toward reaching the goal which was selected:

1. *The program for each meeting should grow from the needs of the teachers as these needs are recognized and expressed by them.*

When a supervisor takes a new position, one of her first problems is to try to find out what help the teachers actually want. This is often difficult, because the teachers do not know her. They are anxious to make a glowing impression on the new supervisor; therefore, it is hardly fair to ask them to take the personal risk demanded by exposing their weaknesses to a stranger, who can lower their standing with the powers that be even though the supervisor is not supposed to rate them. One method of learning teachers' needs which was used with some success was for the supervisor to ask the teachers to list their needs on an un-

signed paper and hand it to one member of their teaching group. This person then delivered all of the lists to the supervisor. This procedure was successful, no doubt, because the teachers felt that they could express themselves without running the risk of incurring the personal censure of either the principal or the supervisor.

Another way which has been used was to have the principals and the supervisor make a list of the needs as they saw them. Without disclosing this fact, the list was mimeographed and given to the teachers, who looked over the items and suggested any which they felt should be added. The more complete list was then mimeographed and passed to the teachers. This time they marked with first, second, and third choice the three problems or topics which they would like to have discussed at a meeting. The problems which received the greatest number of first, second, and third choices were used in the order of their importance to the teachers.

This last method is more suggestive. It may get what the supervisor and principals want instead of showing the real needs as the teachers themselves recognize them. The members of the teaching staff may feel that their problems are too insignificant to be mentioned, and some who have real problems may not mention them. There are very few teachers who do not have difficulties of some kind and who would not be glad to get the help for which they feel a need. The problem of the principal and supervisor is to learn these felt needs.

However, no one in a supervisory capacity can be satisfied merely to meet the needs which her teachers have made known to her. Unless the teachers develop higher ideals, unless they have that divine discontent which precedes growth, the supervisor



has failed in one of her important functions.

How can a supervisor make her teachers dissatisfied with the type of work which they are doing?

(1) If the work in the system has been quite formal, standard achievement tests offer one of the best means. There is no difficulty in interesting teachers in the mean scores made by their pupils and in the relation of these mean scores to the norm for the grade—both in the total score and in each of the different subject scores. This study may lead to special emphasis in teaching one subject, in forming a drill period which will enable the children, weak in only one or two subjects, to overcome those deficiencies, and so on. These test scores are something with which the teachers are familiar. The results may give them something definite to do, some problem or felt need with which they want assistance.

(2) Study courses also may prove very helpful in raising the level of a teacher's needs. Especially is this true when the books used are those written by people who have had actual experience in working with children. Some books of this type are: *The Teacher in the New School*, by Martha Peck Porter (Houghton Mifflin); *The Activities Curriculum in the Primary Grades*, by Mrs. Marion Paine Stevens (D. C. Heath); *The Teacher's Guide to Child Development*, State Department of Education, California; Gustin and Hayes, *Activities in the Public School* (University of North Carolina Press).

the teachers are carrying on a so-called "activity program" are very helpful. The teachers see what the children have done. They

(3) After-school visits to rooms where have the opportunity to ask questions about instruction and management.

(4) Observations in rooms where children can be seen living and learning. Sometimes, if the teachers observed have more equipment and material than have those doing the observing, it may be wise to ask the observers to think how the desired materials

and equipment may be obtained through the co-operation of pupils and their parents.

(5) Questioning teachers in the presence of others arouses interest. For example, after observing some good work and learning what procedure was followed, you may ask, "How did your children become interested in this topic? What routine did you use? What changes would you make if you were going to do it again?"

(6) Complimenting the work seen in one room stimulates the interest of other teachers. They go to that room, ask the teacher questions, and often a new standard of work is formed.

(7) One procedure which got excellent results was to have the teachers outline the best work they had done during one year. These outlines were mimeographed with no names attached. The ones for the first grade were numbered I-1, I-2, I-3, etc. The papers for the other grades were numbered in a similar manner. The teachers of each grade read the outlines for that grade and selected the one which they wished to have written out in complete form and mimeographed.

(8) Hearing reports of work done successfully, of failures, of helpful books and magazines, all contribute to the teacher's knowledge of what better work is and make her anxious to improve her own.

(9) Working on committees to select helpful books, to find materials, to suggest helpful procedures, and to prepare curriculum materials also raises a teacher's ideal of good teaching.

(10) Attending summer school or general educational meetings may prove helpful if you know who is to teach the course or who is to give the lecture. Teachers have come home after a course in Children's Literature and said, "Well, thank the Lord that is over. I hope I never hear of a child's poem or story again."

(11) Visitors may help if they are on fire with enthusiasm for less formal work and know how to get the attention of the persons



with whom they come in contact. Teachers have to listen to so many speeches that one hesitates to suggest another unless one is sure it will prove worthwhile.

Too much cannot be said about the importance of developing higher ideals of teaching and arousing a desire to do better work. Unless a teacher is convinced that there is a better type of work than she is doing, she will not only be bored with all teachers' meetings but she will resort to all kinds of tricks to fool the supervisor. The writer has known personally teachers who sent an eraser from one room to another when a supervisor was discovered in the building. The appearance of that eraser meant, "Get all of the paper off the floor, open your bag of tricks, and when *she* walks in, shoot her the works." What teacher growth comes from this attitude?

One supervisor whom I know stopped at a school one afternoon to see a principal. As she passed a room she saw such an excellent drawing of a milk bottle on the board that she stopped to admire it. Imagine her surprise when this material was used to teach a lesson for her two weeks later. It had been on the board all of that time just waiting for her to appear.

A somewhat similar experience happened to the writer when she went into a room and the teacher, a white-haired old man whom she had known before, said, "Don't be afraid, children; it is no one but Miss Pitts." When he was asked what he meant by that, he said, "We were warned two weeks ago to get ready for the state supervisor. We planned a lesson which required an experiment first. That vessel has been here all along, and today, I broke it. The children said, 'She is a-coming. She is a-coming, today.' Now here you are with my vessel broken."

To the inquiry, "You are going to have some work this afternoon, aren't you?" he replied, "Yes, and you might like it, though I had not thought of it as doing for a state supervisor. I was going to teach a poem I learned from McGuffey's Reader. It gives

me pleasure so often, that I want my children to know it, too."

The old man would have been satisfied to have taught the McGuffey's poem only. However, the children would have been terribly disappointed not to have their show-off lesson. Therefore, it was arranged for the writer as Clara Pitts to stay for the McGuffey lesson; after that, "Miss Pitts" was to go into another room, and stay until they sent word that they were ready. At that time, the state supervisor would hear the other lesson.

These stories are told as concrete examples of the reactions of teachers who think that they are doing a fairly good piece of work and consider supervision as just another form of inspection. As a child the writer often heard the expression, "You must be convicted of your sins before you can be born again." She thought the words had meaning for her. However, their true significance was never realized until she began working with teachers and supervisors. Before any real and lasting improvement can be made, the teacher has to realize within herself that she can and should do better work. If she has this conviction, her work will improve, to a certain extent, even though there is no one to help her. Of course, she will make far greater progress if she has the sympathetic understanding and guidance of some one with more training and experience than she has.

2. *Each program should provide the opportunity for the co-operation and the participation of the teachers in each phase of it.*

The teachers should help plan the program, help carry it out, and also assist in evaluating what is done. There is little difficulty in getting teachers to help with the planning. It is a much more gigantic task to get them to speak out in the meeting, to argue points, or to express their own opinions, especially when they know that some one disagrees with them.

Some supervisors like to eat lunch with different groups, or to serve tea and wafers when the teachers assemble. When this is



done the members of the group begin talking naturally and sometimes do not realize just when the regular work begins. This procedure seems to prevent that fear which so contracts the muscles of the throat that no sound can be made.

Holding group meetings in the library, in some corner of the auditorium, or at one end of the cafeteria gets the teachers out of the desks-in-rows found so often in the upper-grade classrooms of our public schools. Sitting in those formal rows seems to bring back all of the old associations when those who sat there were supposed to "sit up tall" and, when questioned, answer in the fewest words possible. Their feelings can be appreciated by those of us who would faint if we heard our speaking voice in church—this feeling having been brought about, no doubt, by our early training when we were taught to go into church quietly, take our seats, bow our heads reverently for a few moments, and then look toward the front of the church without speaking or noticing anyone.

Some form of preparation beforehand is necessary if the participation of the teachers is to be worth while. Reading to report chapters from books or magazine articles, preparing reports of work seen or done, collecting and reporting printed and environmental materials used successfully, reading to find points relative to some problem, and drawing conclusions relative to some group study are types of preparation which may be made.

When teachers are not in the habit of expressing their opinions in a "public" meeting, it may be well to have different small groups state a group opinion and hand this in. Any strong minority opinion should be recognized in the report. This gives a basis for discussion. The reports of the committees or groups may be mimeographed and passed to the teachers for them to consider before the meeting.

Sometimes this procedure gives an excellent incentive for discussion. The writer used it once in a situation where all of the

work had been formal and where a few of the teachers were just beginning a less formal program. The members of the group were asked to answer these questions:

1. What are the advantages of the so-called formal or traditional school program?
2. What are the disadvantages of such a program?
3. What are the advantages you find in using the so-called activity program?
4. What are the disadvantages?
5. If you are trying the activity program, what difficulties are you meeting?

The answers to these questions contained many contradictory statements which some of the teachers investigated before the meeting began. For instance, one group said that in the "activity program" discipline was very difficult; another group said that there were no disciplinary problems in the "new" school. The explanations of these statements were: in a formal school a child who only sat still was no problem, but in the "new" school he would be a source of continual worry on the part of the teacher. In this situation "discipline" takes in the growth of the whole child, thus so broadening the field that the teacher must ever be on the alert to know and to help each child in every way—this task being a much more difficult one than merely keeping the group quiet.

The group which stated that there is no disciplinary problem in the "new" school meant that the teacher no longer needed to be a policeman. There were so many interesting things to be done that no child ever thought of putting pins in the toe of his shoe in order to stick unsuspecting children as they passed him.

The mimeographed materials offer many different means of getting teachers to consider problems before a meeting. Some examples of uses are: (a) A situation was described and suggestions for solving it were handed in. The situation, together with representative solutions, was mimeographed; at the meeting, the teachers evaluated the suggested solutions and drew up



some principles for judging such solutions. (b) The summary of a discussion was mimeographed. The teachers were asked to think them over and to make restatements which could be gone over at the next meeting.

3. *The work should be planned so that each teacher may have the opportunity to secure the greatest amount of growth possible from the meetings which she attends.*

Not all teachers profit from the same programs. Several persons may need to think through the functions of a public school in a democratic society. They may need to become familiar with the theories of some outstanding persons, to study conditions, to review how children learn and to formulate some ideas for group discussion. This phase of a supervisor's program is a most interesting one. It is also a most helpful one in getting teachers interested in trying to change habits long fixed.

There may be some teachers who know the theory. They can state it more beautifully than the supervisor herself. However, they see no relation between their theory and their practice.

Once when the writer observed a demonstration lesson in an ideal situation, she was handed a plan which was a magnificent thing. Neither Dr. Kilpatrick, Dr. Bode, nor Dr. Dewey could have stated the objectives more beautifully. The lesson itself was very different. The teacher began by saying, "How many of you have ever been to a Hallowe'en party? What did you do?" Each beginning first grade child was required to use a whole sentence if it said one word. After some talk of Hallowe'en parties the teacher said, "I will write on the board some of the words we have been using." She wrote Hallowe'en, party, apple, water, pumpkin, bob, cut, witches, black, cat, peanuts. The group pronounced in concert each word just after the teacher pronounced it for them. One or two children pronounced the entire list before five different word drills were used. At the close of the last word drill the teacher said,

"I shall write some sentences on the board for you. Watch me. When I finish, I shall ask some of you to read what I have written." The children watched. When the sentences were written the children read them. They were not through with the drill, however. They found the words in the reading matter, pointing to them. Small pictures (9x12) of witches, cats, apples, pumpkins, children bobbing for apples, and so on were placed on the ledge of the blackboard. When the printed word-card was shown, the children placed it beneath the right picture. The cards were then held under the same word where it occurred on the blackboard. A table to one side was uncovered. It was set for a Hallowe'en party. The children were shown cards: "Cut the pumpkin," "Bob for an apple," "Point to the black cat," "Get the witch." Just enough action was permitted to show that the children understood the printed card. After this, large poster pictures were shown and some conversation was carried on about them. This included "how to behave at a party." When these posters were put away, the children, as called upon, underlined the words on the board. Later, others erased the words as they recognized them and were given permission to do it. The teacher then gave each child a booklet made of hectographed sentences and pictures. These booklets had been prepared for the children by the teacher before the children had thought of Hallowe'en. A page was read by three different children. As the time was up, the children filed from the room.

The discussion followed. Only the first criticism was heard by the writer. It was, "The teacher had forgotten to use the word peanuts in her sentences on the board." That was sufficient to show the trend of the criticisms. The writer followed the children.

In the adjoining room the children "sat up tall" with their hands in position while the teachers passed napkins, apples, candy witches, and so on. At least, it was gratify-



ing to know that the children were permitted to eat for themselves. Demonstration lessons very similar to this one have been witnessed often. Many illustrations could be given if space permitted. Frequently, such lessons are given by people who talk of progressive education as though they lived by its tenets—whatever they may be.

Many teachers need practice in evaluating work. Suppose, after the demonstration given above, the teachers could have set up points for judging lessons and applied them to that one. Only one question, "What part could the children have taken with advantage in planning and in having a Hallowe'en party?" might have been used to reconstruct the whole lesson. It could have been shown that the children could actually have planned and given a Hallowe'en party. The records of their plans and doings could have been used for reading lessons with profit for a period of several days. This thinking of work in terms of criteria has to be guided at first. It seems to be much easier to apply criteria to the work of others than to one's own work.

Some teachers wish to see the direct teaching of skills. They find it easy to get children to want to read, or to build a house and play in it. Others can do the direct teaching but become confused when the children begin to make suggestions and to act on their own initiative. Each group needs to see a different type of demonstration lesson. There are a few teachers who have to learn to work with others, to take criticism in a friendly and impersonal way. Some suggestions for meeting these needs have been given.

*4. No teachers' meeting can be successful unless the teachers feel that they have made some progress toward their goal.*

To determine your success here is very difficult. Some indications may be noted from questions the teachers ask then and later, from the professional books taken from the library, or from work seen in the schoolroom. On the day of the meeting some indications may be observed. If the

teachers stand in groups discussing their work, or if as they pass out they discuss points brought out by the program, a supervisor has the right to be very glad. However, if she hears one say, "Have you seen Mary's new permanent? It is horrible," she must study that teacher to find what needs she has and how she can be helped.

Sometimes, if a supervisor will stand near the exit, with her back to it as she listens or talks to others, she will hear much that will give her food for thought.

### IMPLICATIONS

If a person in some supervisory capacity accepted the qualities of a good teachers' meeting as they are listed here, what would be the implications? How would this acceptance affect her work?

1. A supervisor would have to know her teachers—their theory, their practice, and their ability to see any relationship between the two.
2. All plans would have to take into account this knowledge of the teachers in order to be able to begin where they are—not where she wishes them to be.
3. All kinds of schemes would have to be used to interest the teachers in knowing and in wanting to do better work.
4. Each step forward would have to be made so easy that the teacher could do it with pleasure and profit. Being satisfied with, or happy about, her first efforts is the best way to be sure she will make further efforts. (One of the best books the writer ever read on how to train dogs stressed this point. It is no less true and important with teachers than it is with dogs.)
5. No definite program can be planned a year or even half a year in advance. No one can know what progress a certain group of teachers will make during a given time. No one can tell what the needs recognized by them will be at any given date.
6. Very few meetings would be held which all of the teachers of the whole system would be expected to attend. The needs of teachers can be more nearly met when only those having the same or similar problems come together.
7. At any one meeting, only what could be done well during the time available would be attempted. Many programs for teachers' meetings include from four to six topics. To be the last of seven speakers on seven different topics at an all-day meeting is an experience which will convert anyone to a different procedure. In order to get teachers to see relationships and opportunities for doing better work, it would be much better to consider only one problem at any one meeting.
8. Compulsory attendance would not be stressed



since it is not necessary to urge the teachers to be present. Instead, the invitation might have to be worded, "Only those teachers are invited who have been making a study of ..... Many of the best teachers attend every meeting they know about. They say these meetings are beneficial. If there is any doubt of one or two being present after everything possible has been done to make them feel a need, it may be necessary to say to them, quietly, "This meeting was planned to be of special help to you. I shall expect you."

9. An understanding would be reached that supervisors may have to work and plan for a meeting from a week to six months in advance. If, at that time, the supervisor does not feel that she has made her teachers need that particular skill, the meeting should be postponed indefinitely or until the need for it has been aroused.
10. The programs for teachers' meetings would no more be turned over to the teachers entirely than the work in a room would be left entirely to the discretion of the pupils. The supervisor is needed to stimulate, guide, and encourage the teachers.

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## A WORD TO EDUCATORS ABOUT ALLIED YOUTH

EVERY so often, history books have to be rewritten. It is not enough after a great war, an international crisis, or a worldwide depression to add a chapter. Historians see facts and trends in a new light, and so they say, "We must write the record from a new approach."

This is what is happening in the alcohol field in 1937. Scientific authority given to previously uncertain conclusions; the growing freedom for youth, with its attendant increasing personal responsibility; the presence of 26 million automobiles on the nation's highways; the rapidly increasing tempo of life—these are among the factors that have outdated previous texts, methods, and materials in alcohol education.

It is in the search for "a new approach" to the alcohol question that alert school leaders in every section of the country are discovering, and in a growing number of high schools adopting Allied Youth's program of alcohol education to supplement classroom teaching.

### *Let Youth Do It!*

The first recommendation of Allied Youth, this organization that specializes in effective alcohol education, is "Let youth do it!" Drinking in its many modern guises is a problem that most high school students will meet somewhere before their graduation or shortly thereafter. What they say and do about it may influence the whole course of their lives; they have a right to know this, and to be prepared. Further, the attitudes that they take, and the habit-patterns they adopt will generally be the reflection of the lessons they have learned and the social customs they have observed.

The fact that drinking is to such a large extent associated with social and recreational activities is one of the explanations for the promotion of Allied Youth's program through local youth-led Posts, frequently formed at school, with the endorsement and cooperation of principal and teachers.

### *The Local Post*

The Allied Youth Post is chartered by the national organization. It has officers and a sponsor, regular meetings, a definite program, standards of conduct and attitude, very much in the way that the athletic team is organized—a unit of leaders in a particularly specialized field, drawn from and organized within the school. There are also community and neighborhood Posts.

The initiated members are the "letter-men". They do not drink, and can be relied upon to set high standards of conduct within their own social and school sets. There are also associate members, who are interested in the Post program and activities, but do not quite "rate" full membership. They are in a sense "members in training."

### *The Post Program*

The Post program supplements classroom teaching about alcohol, as it is integrated with chemistry, biology, history, economics,