

AN INTROSPECTION

BELEN D. VILLEGAS

When the new idea of "integration" began to seep into the thinking of teachers, Miss Belen D. Villegas, who has written feature stories for the **Philippine Educator**, began tinkering with the technique. Meanwhile she kept a diary of the things that she and her class were doing. Subsequently, after her technique became fairly well started, Dr. Willis P. Porter, one time Fullbright professor at the Philippine Normal College, visited her class. In a letter that Dr. Porter sent to Miss Villegas sometime last May, he said the following: "If you have time within the next month, I would be very happy to have you try a little introspecting to determine just what changes have been going on within you this year, particularly changes in attitudes, and what factors seemed to contribute to those changes. I am as much interested in what this new approach does to teachers as I am in what it does to children." The accompanying article by Miss Villegas is the result of the "introspecting."—**Editor**

I used to be a teacher who aimed at perfection—from the discipline of my class to the traditional technique of teaching that made a slave of me. I remember the agonies and embarrassment I used to suffer while my pupils chattered away like magpies in the presence of Mrs. Reyes, a typical nose neighbor of mine in school. Of course, she had her reasons, as busybodies always do, and glib excuses at that, for being in my room most of the time. She reminded me of hounds, sniffing and training at their leash, the way she poked her ugly nose at my room and children. So while I prayed that she hurry her departure, I flashed vile looks, as sharp as daggers, to the rascals and brats in my charge. My "just-wait-till-she-is-gone" look always had the desired effect. I was that obvious. At the time, I believed I had what was called a "very strong personality"—a qual-

ity that only teachers who had graded in the service, possessed.

How I savored the power of seeing the kids quail at my relentless tongue lashing! That will make them remember not to embarrass me next time. But what exasperated me was when "next time" came, they behaved no better than the day I called them names. I was heartbroken at my dismal failure. But I persisted in my opinion—that my technique, to be effective, must be paired with strict discipline; I therefore doggedly clung to my gruff and almost inhuman ways of putting the fear of "teacher" in them.

There was a time, too, when I drew a dividing line between me and my pupils. I did not like them to joke or laugh with me, to ask me questions that had no bearing on the lessons and which I therefore, considered useless. Once, I heard a boy asking Miss Ruiz, a new teacher, (whom I personally

thought to be the extremely flighty type) where she had bought her pretty dress. In my mind, I blamed her for talking nonsense with the pupils and being intimate; for how else did they get the effrontery to ask her a question like that if it were not for her "goofy" ways? I vowed then that should a brazen child try to talk to me that way I would certainly put him in his place.

I insisted on plenty of memory work, on prepared assignments, on lessons for the day recited in a parrot-like manner. How I loved to talk! I monopolized our daily lessons for I was of the school which believed that a child should be seen, not heard. Now if I asked them a question, that was a precise time for them to talk and yet if they went beyond what they were expected to say, I thought of them as terribly impertinent and pigeon-holed them for the rest of the year as those "brats who talked too much."

When I look back on the kind of teacher I was, I shiver to my toes. These wasted years seemed to be the driving force which spurred me to change my attitude and perspective about teaching. The change was as revolutionary as the modern trend that we are now experimenting on.

Had I been older, I know that change for me would have been a slow and difficult process; because here I was, barely steeped in years as a schoolmarm, yet trying to mould myself in the likeness of the martinets who had been my teachers, for the sake of their approval, for the sake of wishing to belong. What if this innovation in teaching did not come sooner?

The first change which came over me was my attitude as a teacher. Today, I no longer think that I am the most important figure in my room. I began to see this when the children started asking questions and sharing experiences with one another. This never happened before. In the past, I was the one who asked questions most of the time and if I permitted them once in a while to quizz each other, the things they asked were about topics and stories I had chosen. The stories they used to tell revolved around the theme I had given them. So now, when I see them planning and discussing, working together and sharing things, (mostly on their own) I drop into the background silently. I begin to be just an interested onlooker, someone to guide and help where guidance and help are needed.

I have become a friendly person, more of an individual than a teacher. And, oh yes, a pupil did tell me that I looked pretty in my green outfit. I did not put him in his place as I had vowed to do. I thanked him for his compliment.

Laughter comes easily to me these days. I laugh at the clean pun and jokes that my children tell me during our off-hours. I listen with my heart to their problems and worries. I have become more tolerant of their childish prattle and chatter.

I am no longer a despot. Why this changing of spots, this sudden turn-about, one may ask? In this new approach to teaching, there is no place for rigid rules and discipline. Just being a teacher won't suffice either. One has to be a person first, warm to emotion and understanding, gentle about frailties and shortcomings,

tender to a fault, loving as a mother.

How can I encourage these children to talk and think for themselves, to map out plans, arrive at decisions and seek my help if they feel that I am as remote as the North Pole, that I cannot be approached in my ivory tower? The very things I censured before in my flighty co-teacher seemed to be just the starting point in the kind of relationship that should exist in a modern schoolroom. How can one remain stiff and formal in a classroom that is informal?

How can one act "stand-offish" and dignified when this new trend calls for planning and sharing together? I believe a severe teacher is incompatible with this modern aspect of education.

These changes that have taken place within me this year are what I think the best things that could happen to a teacher like me. All my life as a teacher, I shall bless the day when educators saw the inadequacy of the traditional method and mulled together to bring about the change that we are enjoying now.

The Classroom . . .

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ical environment. It should be measured in terms of outcome. It behooves every teacher to exercise a great skill in properly stimulating and directing the thinking process. When and Where? the teacher may ask. In reply we have the following activities: (1) in giving assignments (2) in directing pupils to study under his supervision (3) in checking up lessons (4) in giving pupils time to give his answer (5) in the formulation of his questions (6) in giving differentiated assignments (7) in making test questions (8) in well-planned drill and review lessons (9) in directing physical education and in every school activity to be exact. In the giving of differentiated assignments the pupils' assignments should be such that they tax each level accordingly. Freedom to think things through is afforded the learner. In making test questions, we must be sure we are measuring facts in relation to thinking. When we test on facts, often we assume that thinking is assured. We may have 1001 facts, but if we don't

know how to organize them and formulate them into action, they remain useless, because complete evaluation should include measuring power of thinking and progress of pupils.

It is particularly important for a democracy that its citizens shall be able to think effectively. The school should produce individuals who can direct themselves as thinkers, efficient thinkers. Merely having ideas is not thinking. There must be a realization of relationship between ideas and experiences. A thinker must always doubt or question accepted belief. Thinking comes as a result of experiences or through organization of experiences. Idle observations, recollections, day dreams, undirected and uncontrolled associations do not involve thinking. To give a specific example: A boy who watches a snail crawling over a stone is not thinking at all. If however, he watches the snail for the purpose of discovering its mode of locomotion or its speed under varying conditions, then he is thinking about the snail.