

1-1-1968

We Suggest

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Recommended Citation

Buelke, E. (1968). We Suggest. *Reading Horizons*, 8 (2). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol8/iss2/8

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Redl, Fritz

When We Deal With Children

New York: The Free Press, 1966, Pp. xi + 511.

No matter what educators may be teaching, they have most impact upon children when their teaching comes to grips with pupils' real lives. In a challenge to educators' concepts and theories about this impingement and mental health in the classroom, Fritz Redl makes this statement:

. . . the process of learning weaves cognitive, instinctual, and affective events into an impenetrable design . . . much is yet to be learned about their unique interweaving and about the optimum given if constructive learning is to take place in the classroom group.

Addressing himself to one important segment of all those who "deal with children," Dr. Redl calls teachers to account for their management of group behavior and the cultivation of group atmospheres that support children in their tasks of learning and growing. He suggests that behavioral-management techniques, planned and executed with awareness that all parts of a pupil's psychology sit in on the classroom scene, and capable of promoting wholesome growth and character formation, may be moving within the realm of attainable goals for educational personnel. Further, he points out the need for increasing the push for knowledge about *which* of the environmental givens do *what* to the child. Given this knowledge, teachers may learn to respect and to analyze the milieu factors with which they have to cope.

Part Three of this book, "And What About Groups?" dealing with concepts designed to develop democratic discipline, rather than demoralizing, defensive behavior in children, is fascinating reading, far-reaching in its implications for classroom teachers. In particular, the section about discipline in classroom practice can be of real value to those who seek increased insights for intelligent group leadership.

Throughout the book the author reminds those who deal with the young that child behavior is complex. Gently, he chides those faced with group teaching and management who insist that dichotomies exist between individual and group benefits, between managerial

manipulation and attitude change. Without pretending to give encapsulated prescriptions for answers to the enigmatic problems faced by teachers, he proposes and cites examples to illustrate some workable systems for helping both individuals and groups in the complicated tasks of human development and learning.

Genuinely concerned, informed teachers who constantly note reliable research reports in their own particular curriculum area may find something familiar in the guideposts this distinguished psychologist suggests for classroom management:

1. Don't develop undue admiration for organizational tricks or "gadgets;" rely a little more on yourself, your "person," in thinking, planning, loving, and understanding.

2. Don't overwork the "mystery of personality" either; remember that children have considerable need for regularity and predictability in their expectations.

3. Don't expect certain successful techniques to work under all circumstances; some problems may need varying adaptations or translations of such techniques, or more planning.

4. Don't underestimate the complex nature of children; learn about their "texture and elasticity" before applying various "tools and machinery" to them.

5. Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself and your mistakes; "real" respect and leadership are only enhanced, not destroyed, through laughter and "real" humor.

6. Don't expect to be omnipotent, almighty, and perfect; it takes long-range planning, respect for the time element, and acknowledgement of personal limitations for even the most conscientious, scientific guidance of human beings through growth turmoil.

The teacher of beginning reading is often one of the very first observers and manipulators—leaders, most likely, of the early impact of the school learning environment upon the young child. Understanding of what can happen to children during the learning process, plus methodological equipment for leadership, can determine quality and quantity of pupil growth. Upon the classroom teacher rests "one

of the most tangible tasks of teaching—the task of establishing group-psychological rapport with classes and of creating group-psychological atmospheres most favorable to the educational process.” Some essential concepts and techniques applicable in accomplishing this task may be found in this new book, directed to all “when we deal with children.”