

Willowbrook teacher protests change

In your Jan. 21 report on the plight of the Willowbrook Developmental Center teachers and their impending 8 to 5 work day, the most salient components of the dilemma were barely alluded to — the damaging effects on the quality of the teacher's performance, in a task already heavily laden with frustrating and emotionally draining elements. Whereas the balance between job satisfaction and job performance is evident in most working situations, it is particularly crucial in this case.

Currently, the Willowbrook teachers are being asked to assume the inequitable burden of undoing or remediating the catastrophic effects of the institution's past years of failure. Teachers are now servicing those residents who had been deemed "untrainable" and abandoned to the back wards for most of their lives. These patients are often easily agitated, severely emotionally disturbed, self-abusive, and incontinent. There is a growing increase in the number of physical injuries to teachers who are bruised, bitten, or kicked by agitated residents, during the course of their normal work day.

Many teachers jokingly suffer through these incidents, sympathetic and understanding that these residents have no other means of expressing their tension and frustration with their life situations.

Research studies on personality traits among teachers have singled out humor as one of the prevalent characteristics of Special Education teachers. Indeed, among Willowbrook teachers, humor

sustains and propels us through our arduous tasks. Humor is also one of our more effective devices in eliciting humane elements from a population denied many basic humanizing experiences. Very often the life-time defenses built up by these residents preclude intimate teacher-pupil contact. A sensitive and aware teacher using humor to perforate these defenses can make contact with the "essence of personality" and from there all kinds of growth are possible.

The crucial factors in "making contact" with these types of residents are those facets of the teacher's own personality that he chooses to share during the contact. And the most positive and effective personality facets in teachers are those developed because they were inherent within their own personal lifestyles.

Teachers who have chosen their profession because their working hours allowed them to pursue creative activities, deeply enjoy their leisure. If you are capable of experiencing the fullest enjoyment of your own life, you can appreciate the necessity of searching for those experiences that would validate the lives of the unfortunates that we serve.

The 8 to 5 work day for teachers will indeed wreak havoc with their personal lives. Some of the most creative and effective teachers will be forced to leave. While the results of this change may appear very impressive on paper, the damage done to the sensitive quality of what occurs between Willowbrook resident and teachers will be irrevocable.

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Willowbrook

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