

The Importance of People

Dorothy T. Hayes

DEAR MARY

With this issue we introduce Dorothy T. Hayes, recently of Syracuse University and now professor of education and coordinator of early childhood education, Oswego State Teachers College, Oswego, New York, who will write "The Importance of People" this publication year. Illustrations for this article were done by Alla B. Cooper, ASCD executive assistant.

DEAR MARY:—I have just reread your letter—the one in which you say: "After all these years of teaching, I'm afraid I'm a bit discouraged. No, I've not lost my job. Nor am I discouraged about the children, nor about the people with whom I am working. I am discouraged about myself! Despite all I know about the sensitivity of children to the feelings of others, I find myself getting so cross with the children. What must I be doing to their feelings?"

It is disheartening, Mary, to find that your philosophy and your ability to carry it out just do not always coincide. But you are seeking help. The very fact that you are concerned about children's feelings is encouraging. So many adults—teachers and parents—are neither aware of children's sensitivity to the feelings of the adults in their world, nor do they even realize how many adjustments children are constantly making to the "upset feelings" of those around them. The wonder to me is not that a child is affected by the turmoil but that he so often finds ways of learning to live with it. It ought to give us fresh courage to keep working harder and harder to help adults help themselves in straightening out their emotional tangles!

The other day I was in the play yard of a school. The young student-teacher was making an *almost successful* attempt at hiding her "hurt feelings" that resulted from an abrupt comment from the critic teacher. A four-year-old, who seemed to sense her difficulty, tried to help her meet it by quietly taking her hand and saying,

"Don't let it bother you, Miss Jane. She just finished bawling me out, too. I guess this is one of her off days. Come on, let's have some fun."



Another child, six-year-old Susan, was talking to me about a teacher in her school (one whom I later learned has been giving her colleagues some concern, also). Susan attempted to identify the teacher by this description: "You know the one—the one who doesn't talk English—the one who doesn't speak our language. You must know the one I mean—the one with the sick, tired voice!"

And then there is nine-year-old Sally who has been spending some time with me each week. I have done nothing but try to create a situation in which she might feel free enough "to blow off a little

steam." Her teacher thinks Sally is a disturbed little girl because she often fidgets



in her seat and bites her finger-nails. Sally is often sent out into the hall because she fails to pay attention and "wastes so much time." But the following are the exact words spoken by this little girl who is working hard to understand and accept her teacher:

"I lie awake at night trying to figure out my teacher. In the morning she seems nice, but she gets crosser and crosser as the day goes on—except some afternoons when she's been invited out for a good lunch. Then she seems happier. She hates to have me suck my hair. I hate it, too, because often my hair is dirty, but before I know it, there I am sucking it again. Sometimes when she sends me out in the hall I get so darn mad at her I could kick



her. Sometimes I think I don't like her at all. I even feel sorry for myself that she is my teacher. But when other children tell me they have a better teacher than I do, I find myself defending her. It must be that I really like her after all. I guess I really feel sorry for her and wish somebody could help her."

I wonder if I ever told you about the reactions of two of our boys. Jonny used to whisper to me, "Dad is only teasing you, Mom. That's just his way; don't worry about it, because then he only teases you more."

And you can imagine my amusement when I overheard Dick explain the reason for his interest in photography. He said, "Well, when my sister went away to college she told me I ought to work harder at getting along with Daddy. She said, 'Think of something he likes to do and learn to do it with him—then, before you know it, you'll become better friends!' At first I had to pretend I liked photography and I was bored at his technical explanations, but now I believe I like it even better than he does, and Dad is going to help me build the new darkroom."

Good luck, Mary. Teachers like you will find the help you need. Lucky children with teachers like you!

Dorothy

ASCD's ANNUAL MEETING is February 13-16, 1949. The place—Hotel Commodore, New York City.

Detailed information on the convention and cards for making room reservations went out to all members in the September News Exchange. By sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope (legal size) to the ASCD office, non-members can receive the September News Exchange with convention data.

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