

The Importance of People

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ATTITUDES AND CURRICULUMS

THE SUPERINTENDENT walked rapidly, staring straight ahead. From long force of habit he stopped in front of his house and looked over the yard to see what needed doing on the weekend. But as he looked at his favorite, the old lilac tree, he was suddenly aware of the fact that he was not really seeing anything, anything outside of himself, that is. Abruptly he shrugged, and went inside. His wife called down from upstairs that there were two phone messages, one about some express shipments and one from the chairman of. . . .

The superintendent said, "Yes, dear," and sat heavily in the chair before the fireplace. He looked into the little flames of the new-lit fire, and at the curling bark. For a moment he was happy and warm. Then he realized again that he was not really seeing the logs or the flames. He was thinking about Miss Reezal.

Things had come to a head, that afternoon. Miss Reezal had burst into his office and demanded her rights. She had talked somewhat incoherently, and there had been tears. She was frustrated. She was angry. And she expected the superintendent to do what she wanted or else. The "or else" was a vague threat compounded of the unspoken fact that Miss Reezal was the niece of the president of the Board of Education and that she also had formed a little block within the faculty which was skillful in maneuvering votes on policy. Miss Reezal, as head of the department of social studies, had been skeptical from the first time the superintendent proposed a citywide study of curriculum. She became actively hostile when the new curriculum director suggested interdepartmental meetings, and began talking about the holy cows of subject-matter divisions.

When the interdepartmental committee recommended lengthened class periods for

trips and counseling, and teacher-pupil planning of units of work, Miss Reezal knew it was time to fight.

In the first place, she owed it to herself to maintain standards. What was her doctor's degree and her chairmanship for if she was not to set up requirements and hold teachers and children to them for their own good.

In the second place, a laxness with regard to the sequence of historical studies might undermine the standing of the school as a first-class college preparatory institution. If each teacher and class were to plan their own work, it would become a matter of chance, whether or not the students covered the required material.

In the third place—well, Miss Reezal was proud of her position and it seemed insecure with all these new ideas coming in. She was proud of the fact that she, a woman, had won her fight to become a department head. She was grimly pleased with the whisper which she once overheard at a faculty reception that she was a tough baby. She would have liked to be friends with her teachers, but she prided herself on being professional. To her this meant that she must command respect, and her experience had been that most teachers, and even parents, were like the children. They didn't like to do what was good for them. They had to be forced to face up to the fact that the head of a department knew best what constituted a good education in her own subject, and must be strict and impartial, even ruthless, in seeing that things were done in the proper way.

Miss Reezal was fully aware that the rather high percentage of failures among her own students caused heartaches. She sympathized with the disappointments which came to failing students and their families when the report cards were issued. But she knew that her marking was impartial if severe. Also that everyone had to face disappoint-

ments and she herself had had enough of them, goodness knows.

Because she hadn't been a pretty girl, she had missed many things she wanted as a youngster. But that was before she realized that social life was decidedly secondary to professional achievement. Uncle Will had tried to tell her once, that personality was a bigger factor in getting along with people than good looks. She hadn't found it so. She had waited time after time for boys in her college classes to open a conversation and to discover her keenness and wide reading. It had never happened. On the other hand, her professors had written wonderful things on her term papers, and she had taken honors in all her major subjects. It was wonderful to know that the disciplined mind was understood by scholars everywhere, and that she belonged to a small group of people in the world who understood things that really mattered.

In the case of the new curriculum director, while he too had a good academic record, he had never taken his doctorate. He could not possibly know what the full meaning of scholarship was. And now he was practically forcing people, herself included, to take part in a know-nothing movement. That is what it really was, she felt, when you began talking soft pedagogy like "the development of the child is more important than the development of the subject."

As she had said, time and again, "If only three out of twenty graduate from high school, it simply proves that certain classes of people are not able to do the work. We would be very wrong, very unrealistic to make them think they were intellectually equal to other people."

When the curriculum director replied,

"Yes, but aren't they all becoming citizens? Won't they all vote? Won't some of them need to learn a lot about living in this world that schools could teach if schools would start with children and life rather than books and requirements?" Miss Reezal had snorted. Twenty years ago she might have been more inclined to listen to such talk. But she had tried the fad of correlation then, and what a mess it was! As soon as you got away from assignments in one field, students were confused. Some of them wanted to stay too long on certain easy things like biographies and current problems. Some of them even began to criticize the teacher and to suggest changes in the topics.

So, when the new citywide committee of teachers had had the audacity to suggest a total revision of work in social science to be based on community study and projects (ugh!), Miss Reezal knew it was time to put her foot down once and for all. She had told the superintendent just exactly what he could expect from her. She would see to it that no teacher in her department would take part in the new study. She would personally see that certain faculty members brought the whole business before the Board and the public, too. And she thought that perhaps some of them had been in the community long enough to carry some weight!

The superintendent looked up from the fire as his wife brought in the tray with tea things.

"Why, dear," said his wife, "you look so tired. You mustn't work so hard and so late."

The superintendent grinned a little ruefully. He caught his wife's hand and drew her down on the arm of his chair.

"It must be terrible to be lonely," he said.

New Board Members to Be Announced in March

The five persons elected by members of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development to serve on the Board of Directors until March 1, 1949, will be announced in the March issue of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP*. DSCD is grateful to members for their excellent response in returning ballots. Votes are being tallied by a Board of Tellers composed of Veryl Schult, chairman, G. M. Rawlins, Jr., and Mary A. Henderson.

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