

The Importance of People

Mary and Harry H. Giles

PROFESSOR AESOP IN THE WASTEBASKET

PROFESSOR AESOP looked up rather sheepishly at his friend, Superintendent Woodfellow.

"I hope you don't mind a bit of peeping and prying," he said, "especially as this wastebasket is too full anyway."

"Why no," said Woodfellow, twinkling. "Are you looking for doodles, left by the faculty after our meeting, or for possible love-letters passed by students who were using the library earlier? I can imagine your leaving the Aesop Doodle Collection—or the Bobby-Sox papers either, for that matter—to the Psychiatric Institute."

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Aesop straightening up, disregarding his dusty knees, and waving some crumpled papers at the superintendent, "I found what I was looking for."

"During your excellent, but rather long meeting on plans for the approaching visit of the Critic Committee of the Board of Governors of the Commission on Educational Improvement through Hard Pedagogy, I noticed that your librarian, Miss Quick, and her boy friend, Mr. Richards, the new art teacher, were scribbling furiously on this horrible green paper you supply for attendance reports. They didn't say anything in the discussion of visitors and school standards, and I suspected that they might have put it down in writing. It's quite a fistful. Let's look."

As the two men smoothed out the papers they read:

Visitors welcome at all times, BUT—

Let's hope they realize that it would make us feel good if they know how much work we do and showed some appreciation before they begin on what we haven't done.—Q.

Right! It seems to me that school people are as conscientious as any professional group

there is. The best visitor is one who knows that and is sympathetic and quick-to-understand. Remember Miss C? She made you want to hear her suggestions because you felt she was friendly from the start.—R.

I suppose we worry about it because we are insecure in some ways.—Q.

Of course we are—like everybody else!—R.

And we live in a fish bowl! Everybody in the community keeps track of us, in and out of school!—Q.

Sure. That's why we get super-sensitive to praise and blame. A visitor's casual word to the superintendent may have a lot more effect than he realizes.—R.

The main thing, though, is not fear. It is needing opportunity to do things.—Q.

You have opportunity every day.—R.

Yes, but you have to have administrative authority to go ahead, and a chance to get together, on school time, to plan things out and discuss results as you go along. We deal with living, growing, human beings, not inanimate things on a factory production belt. It takes continual adjustments to make our work pay off to the full. You can't do it unless you have a go sign.—Q.

Do you really think most of our faculty would do great things if they had a go sign? I doubt it.—R.

I don't doubt it. They are as eager to achieve important things as anyone. Trouble is people are trained, employed, and promoted mostly on the basis of subject-matter competency, "ability to maintain discipline," promptness in handling paper work and stuff.—Q.

You've got a point there. Human relationships—atmosphere in which work is done—don't get a very big play in pre-service training.—R.

Except where some bad examples are pointed out. Ideal teacher education would be a college of cooperating learners and doers tackling real jobs together and learning how to work with, not how to practice, academic ritual.—Q.

Why couldn't the school be like that, too?—R.

Yes! Yes! !

Wouldn't it be something if, for example, —well, lets make a list.—Q.

Let our school be distinguished for:

★ Recognition of teaching as a supreme art and science, needing the best of human beings, paying them in proportion—certainly as much as building-trades workers or house painters.

★ Honoring classroom skill as much as laboratory skill, encouraging teachers to live richly, not cramped, gossip-fearful lives.

★ Welcoming married teachers as much as single ones, men as much as women.

★ Welcoming and paying for in-service growth and creative, experimental contributions.

★ Inviting and arranging continual participation by teachers in administrative planning, giving clerical assistance for routine paper work and writing of all kinds.

★ Providing plenty of teaching materials and space to keep and use them.

★ Abolishing artificial restrictions on teach-

ing effectiveness, such as crowded classes (not over 25), too many classes.

★ No schedules made without regard to teacher plans, no moving children from one teacher to another just when they were getting acquainted; no externally imposed "standards," minimum essentials, grading systems.

★ Finding new ways to release and apply the creative abilities of every administrator, teacher, student, and parent.

★ Realizing that the majority of American boys and girls get all their formal schooling by the end of the eighth grade, and that what equipment and stimulus the school can give to them as voters, parents, and workers, is given by that time.

★ Making use of hot, live, current issues as educational springboards.

★ Developing continuous improvements in the way we live together in the school as a community of young and old, all human, all wanting to grow, achieve and contribute, all wanting to belong, to be loved and respected.

★ Not forgetting that though ours is a competitive society, honoring the profit-motive, the school has only one motive—human development, and seeks only the greatest profit to our society through cultivating human resources.

★ Seeking each year, each day, in fact, to define more exactly and practice more fully, the democratic ideal—the noblest, the hardest, and the most practical goal a society ever set for itself.

"Young and hopeful, ain't they?" inquired Aesop as he balled up and threw them back in the wastebasket.

"Yup" replied Woodfellow, plucking the wadded green slips from the basket, as Aesop had hoped he might.

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