

The Importance of People

Ruth Cunningham

A CLOSED DOOR HAS TWO SIDES

MISS OLDUM STOPPED, her hand almost to the door knob.

"I can't do it," she said to herself, "I just can't do it. I know before I go in there what it will be like. Either the poor kid will freeze up and be afraid to talk, in which case the youngsters will catch the feeling and be afraid too, making matters worse; or she'll try to hide her feelings by talking too much and too fast, in a tone of voice that's too loud. Which ever happens, I'll have to sit there and suffer while she suffers. If this is what supervision means, I think I'll quit. I'm going right back to the principal's office and get my hat. Then I'm for a coke."

can I ask her when I'm scared to death? If this is what teaching means, I think I'll quit. Thank my lucky stars, there's the bell! I'm saved for today, at least. Think I'll go get a coke."

And she did.

Over her coke, Miss Oldum, the supervisor, did some thinking. "This business of supervision is funny," she mused. "Nobody seems to enjoy it yet everyone seems to feel it's necessary. Personally, I think it's something like the little light in the refrigerator. When you open the door, the little light goes on, but who knows whether or not it stays on when the door is closed?

I know that when I open the door for a supervisory visit, the teacher tries to do what she thinks I think will be a light, but what about after I go, when the door is closed? And sometimes she's so scared she can't even try to turn on the light—like Miss Newbury, that beginning teacher I was about to visit. Now, I could help that girl, I'm sure. I know that as a new teacher she'll run into lots of bumps I could smooth out for her. But what can I do when there's a door between us?—Why, there's Miss Newbury now. She looks as though she needs a coke too. I'll ask her to join me."

And she did.

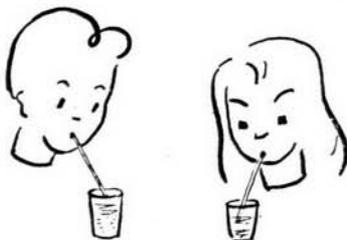
Many months later, Miss Oldum and Miss Newbury again were having cokes together. They had just come from Miss Newbury's room at school.



"I can't..."

And she did.

"I can't face it," said the new teacher to herself, "I just can't live through a supervisory visit. My throat gets all choked up just thinking about it. Wouldn't it be awful if I'd start to cry while she's here? I'm not usually the crying kind, but sometimes I get so scared I can't keep back the tears. Then what will the children think? and the supervisor? It was different in practice teaching, because then you knew the people and they tried to help you, but maybe this supervisor will criticize everything I do, or even recommend that I be fired. She could help me with a lot of things, I suppose, such as what to do with Pete's bullying and Mary's mother's prejudice against having tonsils out, but how



"I'll ask her to join me—"



"I can't..."

"You know," said Mary (Miss Newbury), "I want to tell you something that will amuse you. When I first started to teach, I was scared to death of you. I had an idea you'd come in my room and tell me what to do and what not to do—in a very nice way, of course, but forcefully—then leave and come back later to see if I'd carried out your orders. (You'd probably call them 'suggestions' but I'd know what you meant.) I had no idea

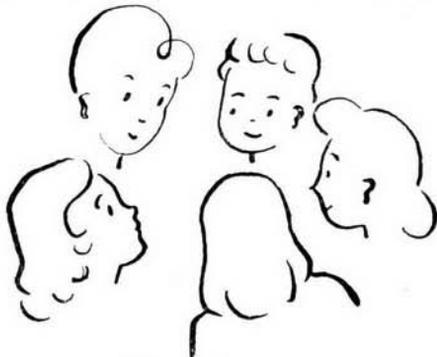


"It'll amuse you"

we'd start with meetings of teachers to discuss our problems, then try to help each other find solutions. I don't know what I'd have done without the help you and the other teachers have given me. For example, I'd never in the world have been able to do anything with that housing unit if you and the others

hadn't told me about materials and people who can help, and how to take trips, and where to go, and all those things that went into carrying out the plans the youngsters and I had made. And then there's all the help you gave earlier on how to plan. Honestly, I was so scared the first few days I was about to quit teaching. Funny, isn't it?"

"You know," said Alice (Miss Oldum), "I want to tell you something that will amuse you. I used to do the sort of classroom visit-



"We talk things over"

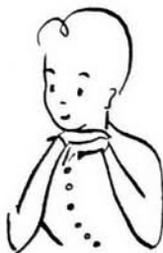
ing you described. I'd make 'suggestions,' then go back to see if they'd been followed. I hated it, but I thought that's what a super-

visor had to do. Then you taught me a lesson."

"I taught you?" exclaimed Mary.

"Yes. You remember the first day we had cokes together? I had just decided to quit being a supervisor. As we talked, I discovered we could get along very well as two people, not merely as a teacher and a supervisor. It occurred to me that if several of us could meet as people to discuss our common problems, we might find that we'd help each other. As you know, we tried it. It works. And now, instead of hating my job as supervisor, I enjoy every minute of it."

And she did.



"It'll amuse you"

THE CHANGING WORLD

(Continued from page 178)

attitudes of sympathy and understanding towards one another we both have much to learn. We can do all these things by utilizing the rapidly increasing supply of books, pictures, and materials which help us to know Russia better. We can provide materials about the United States which will help Russian education to present accurate information about our country and its problems. We not only *can* do these things, but we *must* do them for the peace of the world depends upon our success in the endeavor.

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