

# The Importance of People

Ruth Cunningham



BABIES ARE MALIGNED. There is no doubt about it. If I were a baby, I'd organize and go on strike. Why? Because almost all the things we call "babyish" have nothing to do with babies, but refer to underdone adults. It's libelous, that's what it is.

For example, did you ever hear of a baby pretending to be what he isn't? Yet that's Gertrude Raymond's trouble, and we call her "babyish." Gertie puts most of her energy into pretending she's one of her first-graders instead of their teacher.

There's nothing she likes better than to have someone visit her room and say it's hard to find her in the group. She doubles up with giggles and explains she was playing choo-choo with her little engineers.

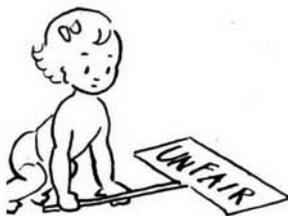
She treats the boys and girls as though they were cute playthings, rather than people. That is, she treats the cute ones that way. The ones who aren't cute have a tough time in Gertie's room.

She buys her clothes in the Junior Miss department, even though the sweet little ruffles here and there don't belong on her short-stout figure. And her English is something out of this world. (Although it's known as "baby-talk," no baby would be caught using it.) Example; (while eating a banana split) "Nasty whipped cream with naughty, naughty calories to make Gertie plumpity-plump." She calls her children "My itsy-bitsy pussy-willow buds." (Isn't that awful!)

Begin to see what I mean? Wouldn't you go on strike if you were a baby and heard people like that called "babyish?"

Then there's Joe Barton. They say he's "babyish," too, for different reasons, although the title is quite as unjust to babies. Did you ever hear of a baby who blames everything on somebody else? Joe claims his failures are all the fault of the government, ("Now if I were president . . ."); or of the school administration ("No wonder our schools are run inefficiently. Just look at the dopes on the





school board . . ."); or of other teachers, ("I spoke right up in faculty meeting and said we should hold to our standards, but nobody would

listen. Now look at the mess we're in . . ."); or of the boys and girls, ("Did you ever see such stupid kids? Of course I can't teach them anything . . .")

When he's really hard pushed to find someone to blame, Joe falls back on the human race, ("They shouldn't be allowed to propagate") or the real punch blow (Joe thinks), on Communism. Everything that goes wrong, from spitball battles to Billy Donovan's inability to conquer irregular verbs, can be blamed on the Communists. It's never Joe's fault.

Did you ever hear of a baby who didn't see everything that was going on? Of course not. A baby doesn't miss a trick. Yet they call Sally Thomson "babyish" because she has blind spots. There are certain things she just refuses to see. For example, she won't look at what modern psychology has to say about learning and individual differences. "They can all do it if they really want to," she says, as she hands out identical assignments to all, and grades by arbitrary standards. "No sense in babying them." (There it goes again; more libel!)



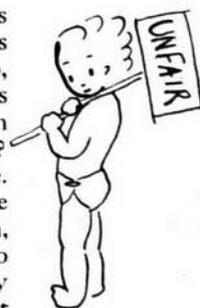
And Sally refuses to look at her responsibility for problems of race relations, for political action, or for a host of other things for which she has a responsibility as a citizen. "Isn't it awful", she'll say, "They ought to know better."

And they call that "babyish." Babies, arise!

Then there's Abbie James. She's an old grouch who takes it out on the world because she thinks she hasn't received the recognition she deserves. To make it up

to herself, she exalts in her power over children and is a regular tyrant. She seems to take joy in making them step when she says, "Step," whether the step makes sense or not. And I'm sure there's nothing she likes better than to catch some poor youngster in something he shouldn't be doing (by her standards) just so she can punish him.

You say the case breaks down here; that babies cry for recognition, too, and that maybe this is one spot where the term "babyish" does apply? You have a point there. In fact, I suppose if we push the idea far enough, we'd say that people do odd things because they have some need that isn't being met, and needs are not so very different for people of different ages.



Maybe a baby-uprising is no answer, for even if the babies won their case, we'd start using other names such as "insecure," "neurotic," or "psychotic." These might sound more scientific than "babyish," but they can still be name-calling.

Maybe the real point is that we don't get anywhere by calling names. If that's the best we can do, we're as "babyish" as Joe Barton who always blames others. Joe finds it easy to blame the Communists and we find it easy to blame Joe, and do nothing about it. Or we're as "babyish" as Sally Thompson who has blind spots. She doesn't see her responsibilities, but maybe we don't see our responsibility to her, to treat each other as human beings.

If we stop to think about it, we realize that we call people "babyish" because they're immature, and they're immature because they haven't been able to fill some adult needs, and maybe they haven't been able to fill these needs



(Continued on page 422)

## UNFAIR TO BABIES

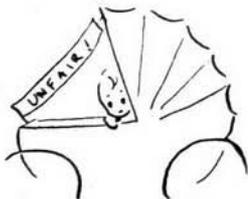
(Continued from page 413)

because we haven't really helped them.

Maybe it's our job to help Gertie find satisfaction in being respected as an adult so she won't have to find it in pretending to be a little girl. Maybe it's our job to give Abbie recognition and affection so she won't have to take out her frustration on youngsters.

Tough assignment? I'll say it is! But that's a job as adults we often fail to assume—the job of meeting human needs.

Go back to your cribs, play-pens and perambulators, babies. Your strike has been called off, or rather, we're taking it on for you—a strike against name-calling and for an action program for helping each other, for meeting the human needs of all of us—babies, youngsters, and adults.



## GROUPING CHILDREN

(Continued from page 373)

by the school board and the principals.

*Prescott:* We all are in agreement, I know, that the grouping of children is not only necessary from the point of view of financial economy but it is also absolutely necessary in order for youngsters to learn the things they ought to learn in school. It sounds paradoxical, but it is true that the most highly individualized instruction for some boys and girls necessitates group instruction. In other words, what they as individuals need most to learn can only be learned in the group situation.

*Havighurst:* If it is necessary to group boys and girls in terms of one factor only—the factor of chronological age is best. This does not imply an argument in favor of the chronological age groupings if it is possible to take other factors into consideration.

## TEXTBOOK NEWS

SECOND (1947) EDITION

# SUPERVISION

By

A. S. BARR, WILLIAM H. BURTON, and  
LEO J. BRUECKNER

THE second edition of this farsighted and comprehensive textbook for courses in supervision and administration represents a thorough reconsideration and substantial rewriting of the original text in the light of subsequent research, professional experience, and general practice. The modern definition of supervision, introduced in the original edition of the book, has been extended and clarified in the new edition; the relation of supervision to curriculum improvement programs is more extensively dealt with; new illustrative materials have been substituted for the old; and the format has been redesigned.

*Just published.*

**D. APPLETON-CENTURY COMPANY**  
35 West 32nd Street New York 1, New York

Educational Leadership

Copyright © 1947 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.