

# We Meet the New Supervisor

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The new supervisor taught a valuable lesson when she demonstrated to shocked teachers how it feels to receive the curt treatment children sometimes receive from thoughtless teachers. The author is Helen E. Buckley, staff member of the Campus School, State Teachers College, Oswego, New York.

IT WAS 3:30 and we were off—but not with our usual, buoyant, another-day-is-over step. This particular day we were off to a faculty meeting—a meeting called for the purpose of introducing us to a newly appointed supervisor.

We gathered in the designated classroom in one's, two's, and three's, until Mr. Sloan, the principal, mentally counting noses, closed the door with a firm click and proceeded to the front of the room. His speech of introduction was short, and properly studded with "cooperation" and "coordination" and "group endeavor." Then he presented Miss Gates, the new supervisor.

Miss Gates was a large woman with graying hair, smartly dressed, but rather grim in countenance. She accepted the introduction with a slight smile, and waited while Mr. Sloan excused himself and left the room. Then she turned to us, surveyed us silently for a moment, and said, "Well, you're a motley looking crew!"

We looked at her aghast—but before we could even begin to collect our thoughts, she went on, "It took you long enough to get in here! It's a quarter to four already! It doesn't seem to me that it would take all *that* time to walk up the stairs or down the hall." We sat upright and alert. We couldn't believe

we heard right. "You over there in the brown dress—you were about the last one in. What took *you* so long?"

Miss Allen, the first grade teacher, turned slightly pale with surprise and murmured an apologetic something.

"What's that?" said Miss Gates. "How do you expect anyone to hear when you mumble? Speak up!"

"I had to wait until one of my children was called for," said Miss Allen in a slightly louder voice.

"Well, I suppose that is as good an excuse as any," said Miss Gates, "but it does seem that teachers, of all people, could get to meetings on time. Now then," she went on, as she unfolded a typewritten list, "when I read your name and grade, I want you to stand up in the aisle where I can see you. No bobbing or hand-raising—just stand *up*." And so she read our names, and dutifully one by one we stood up to be appraised. Every now and then she would look at one of us a little more sharply, murmur a mysterious "mmm," and leave us to wonder what she thought, while she passed on to the next.

"All right," she said as the last name was called and we were all settled once more, "I shall endeavor to discharge my duties as your supervisor for the coming year to the best of my ability. I shall expect and insist upon your full

and undivided attention and cooperation at all times. We will meet once a week for study and work. Thursday afternoons, *promptly* at 3:35, I will meet with you here. Don't tell me that you can't come—other engagements will have to be taken care of some other day. Now I will wait until you write that down: Thursday, 3:35—Room 202. . . . Everyone! (as we sat looking at her in stupefied silence) Write it down! How do you expect to remember it? I don't want anyone calling me up on Friday morning to say they forgot! I'll outline the program for study at the first meeting next week."

Mrs. Wright, the teacher in back of me, whispered something in my ear. I turned around to reply, when Miss Gates called out, "You in the back there, if you have something to say, please say it out loud!"

Mrs. Wright thought quickly. "Why I—uh—I was wondering if we might have these meetings in the form of a social hour—with tea perhaps—or—"

"These meetings are for work and study," Miss Gates interrupted, "not for tea and gossip. You are to bring notebooks and pens, prepared to write. Now—are there any questions?"

Miss Taggart raised her hand.

Miss Gates: "Yes?"

Miss Taggart: "Could you give us an idea of the topic we will be working on?"

Miss Gates: "I told you a few moments ago that I would outline the program next week. It will not be necessary to discuss it now."

Miss Barnes: "My Glee Club girls practice every Thursday afternoon until four. Could I join you then?"

Miss Gates: "*Everyone* will be ex-

pected to be present at 3:35. You have an entire week to arrange your schedule."

Mrs. Cramer: "May I be excused now, please? I have an appointment."

Miss Gates: "This meeting will be over in ten minutes. Then we will *all* go. Now, if there are no more questions, I will go and tell the principal that we are about finished."

Mrs. Wright: "Would you like to have me tell him?"

Miss Gates: "I am quite capable, thank you, of walking to the office," and with that, Miss Gates swept out of the room, leaving in her wake an explosion of indignant and amazed exclamations.

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Within five minutes Mr. Sloan came into the room wheeling a tea cart of refreshments. He was followed closely by Miss Gates, who, to our great wonder, was smiling broadly!

"Relax everybody!" Mr. Sloan grinned. "The performance is over and Miss Gates has promised to be good!" And with that announcement he began to pass out cups and pour tea with dexterity.

We accepted the tea and the cakes scarcely knowing what we were doing, as we listened to a transformed Miss Gates saying, "I told Mr. Sloan just now that I'm afraid I overdid things a little, put on too good an act, and I hope in this case that the old saying about first impressions being the best won't count. Could you tell me how you felt during the meeting? How you felt about *me* and what I said. Could you tell me now before you forget?"

"Before we forget?" said one teacher, "how could we?"

"You mean it was just a joke?" said another.

"What's going on!" said still another.

"Wait a minute," laughed Miss Gates, balancing a cup in one hand and a pink cake in the other. "Tell me first how you felt during the meeting? Did you like it?"

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed Miss Barnes. "I couldn't understand why you were treating us so!"

"I felt *mad*," said Miss Allen, "mad enough to put on my coat and leave, but I didn't dare!"

"Yes," said Miss Gates, "you're the one who was fifteen minutes late! How did you feel about being put on the spot?"

"Embarrassed and uncomfortable, and then *mad!*" smiled Miss Allen.

"And you, Miss Taggart, didn't like the way I answered your question about the topic for study at those Thursday meetings, did you?" asked Miss Gates.

"No, you gave me the feeling that I didn't have the right to ask, or even to know about it. I don't think I would have asked any more questions for a while."

"And what did the rest of you think?" asked Miss Gates, nodding with evident satisfaction as each comment was made.

"I thought that you should have given us a choice of afternoons for the study meetings. Or better yet, asked our opinions about having the meetings at all!" said Mrs. Wright.

"Or at least let us help choose a topic for study," said Mrs. Cramer.

"I resented the way you took over," said Miss Barnes, "telling us just what to do and how to do it—as if we had no brains of our own."

"Yes," Miss Allen agreed, "so many orders! Stand up, speak up, write this down, be here. I felt that you didn't have much respect for us."

"And so you, in turn, did not have much respect for me," said Miss Gates.

"It didn't seem to me that you were looking at us as separate persons who have different obligations to meet," said Miss Taggart. "You wanted us all to conform immediately as a group without question."

"All right," said Miss Gates, putting down her cup, "our ten minutes were up long ago, so let's sum up quickly and see what we've said. By the way, Mrs. Cramer, maybe you had better run along to that appointment."

Mrs. Cramer laughed, "That can wait. I just couldn't take it any longer without exploding!"

"You mean that if you were a child in my classroom, you would be one of those who is continually looking for an excuse to leave the room for a few minutes?"

"I'm sure of it!" agreed Mrs. Cramer.

"Well, I think our point is made," said Miss Gates. "You know, it occurred to me one day that we could talk from one end of the year to the other and read every book in the library about the importance of children's feelings and the attitudes in the classroom, and yet not know, *really* know, a thing about it until we had experienced these things ourselves.

"It took a great deal of courage to put on this act for you, but I feel, with your help, that it has been well worth it. Now, what were some of those feelings you named—hostility, embarrassment—"

"Inferiority," supplied Miss Allen.

"Aggressiveness and defiance," said Mrs. Cramer.

"Dislike," said Miss Barnes.

"You felt that I didn't respect you very much," Miss Gates went on, nodding in agreement. "I ordered you about as though you were not capable of doing the most simple things yourselves."

"You were inconsiderate of our individual problems," continued Mrs. Wright.

"Dismissed our questions as of no importance," added Miss Taggart.

"And expected you to conform because I said so!" said Miss Gates, "all in the space of ten minutes!"

"And some of us go on like that all day!" exclaimed Miss Barnes. "No wonder the children react the way they do!"

"What are some of those reactions?" said Miss Gates. "What would *your* reactions have been, I wonder, if I had gone on day after day in that manner. Would some of you have complied with my wishes, and carried out my orders docilely; or would you pretend to be listening, but really be shutting your ears to my barrage? Would some of you catch up on your correspondence from the comparative safety of a

back seat; or would others of you, like Mrs. Cramer, take up your coats and leave regardless of the consequences?

What are some of the other choices children have to make in the way of behavior when we refuse to treat them with respect, ignore their individual problems, and expect them to do things merely because 'we say so'?"

"Some of them endure in silence, and explode later on to someone or something," said Mr. Sloan.

"And some of them openly defy you and run the risk of being put continually on the spot," added Mrs. Wright.

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Gates. "How much learning do you suppose would take place in such a tense and hostile atmosphere? But I don't need to ask you that, I'm sure. We could go on and on, but time is running short."

"Couldn't we talk like this again?" asked Miss Allen. "Next *Thursday* perhaps, at 3:35?"

Miss Gates laughed. "I'd like that! You know those meetings were really just part of the act, but if you would like to come, with or without your notebooks, I shall be here ready for tea and talk!"



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