

The Importance of People

Column Editor: William Van Til
Contributor: Ruth Cunningham

Polly Pratt for President

Introduce Ruth Cunningham to an ASCD audience? Introduce the 1940-1945 executive secretary of ASCD under one of its earlier aliases, the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction? Introduce the 1943-1945 editor of Educational Leadership? Introduce the only living human being who ever survived two years of writing The Importance of People? Introduce the present associate professor and research associate of that T. C. curriculum outfit with the long name and the splendid staff? Introduce Ruth Cunningham? I won't do it. It would be like carrying coals to Newcastle, beans to Boston, or meetings to educators.

Everybody knows Ruth except Polly Pratt. And Polly has something else on her mind today. Sorry, constant reader, no introduction this month.

William Van Til

POLLY was tired. She had been working hard all day to free personalities and to develop individual initiative. She smiled as she watched her fifth graders busy in happy activity and decided that it was safe, at last, to take time out to think about "the thought." It was a thought she had tucked away in the back of her mind until she could find the opportunity to examine it at leisure. This was the thought: "*I, Polly Pratt, have been nominated for President.*"

It was for the presidency of the local, to be sure, but Polly saw the possibility of local leading to state, state leading to national. The thought had wonderful possibilities. And just think, she'd been teaching only two years, yet already she was in a position of prominence in her profession. Polly felt the weight of the orchid corsage and heard the din of applause as she walked onto the vast platform leading all the honored guests. And why not? She'd been BGOC (Big Girl on Campus). She'd pulled down office after office in her college years. Just look at her record in the yearbook!

Polly Considers Her Chances

The only person opposing her now for the post as President was fuzzy old

Miss Bessie. Polly was sure that she was a better teacher than Miss Bessie. She'd visited Miss Bessie's room and had seen her archaic methods! They fairly smelled of mold. Polly could use all the modern techniques.

Moreover, Polly knew she was good-looking. She knew this should pull the masculine vote. Who would vote for that old frumpy Miss Bessie when there was a slim, chic young model to view? It was a cinch.

And even the old die-hards could look at the academic record. She, Polly, had an M.A., while it was doubtful if old Miss Bessie had even an A.B. There was a final trump card, too. She, Polly, taught in fashionable Lincoln School while Miss Bessie was in that run-down old rattletrap in the *worst* section of town. The election was in the bag!

Miss Bessie and the Shy Good-Byes

Far across town, a teacher in another classroom in another school was watching her fifth graders straggle out the door with shy "good-byes." This teacher had watched fifth graders straggle out for thirty years. She was used to the scene, but it always raised new emotions.

Throughout the day Miss Bessie had worked diligently to teach the 3 R's. There had been phonics drill, the spelling lesson, and the recitation of the multiplication table.

"I'm worried about Tommy," thought Miss Bessie. "Something seems to be bothering him. Maybe he's upset because he can't get that paper route he wants. I'd better talk with him tomorrow. But Gertrude seems to be happier. Maybe that chance the group gave her to be chairman of her committee was just what she needed. I must try to see that she has more opportunities like that." And, with another thought, Miss Bessie suddenly smiled. Nobody, but nobody, had called George a "dummy" that day. That was a great victory.

All year she had worked to find some acceptance for George. He was a bit slow, to be sure, but a nice child at heart, even if he did poke and punch at the others sometimes without reason. "Maybe he's still in the trying-out stage," Miss Bessie had often thought. "He just hasn't learned yet how to get along with others."

There were Sammy and Susan and Bertie and Don. Miss Bessie reviewed them all as they went out the door. She sighed. There was so much to do. Then she perked herself up by thinking of Gertrude. *Gertrude seemed to be happier!* It was the thought she planned to take home for the night, but something else kept tickling her brain. Then it dawned on her. This was the day for the election of the president of the local. A bit of a dark cloud seemed to pass over while Miss Bessie remembered. Polly, her opponent, was young and pretty and full of life and knew "modern methods," while she, Miss Bessie, was getting old and had a slumpy figure and didn't know any methods but phonics and multiplication tables. The cloud didn't last long. "After all," Miss Bessie

thought, "It's the young ones who need the encouragement."

Vote Announced

The meeting assembled, ballots were cast, tellers went to work, the vote was announced. Miss Bessie! By an overwhelming majority! The applause was thunderous.

Polly closed her eyes and tried to pretend she wasn't there. It had been a nice dream: "Polly Pratt for President" in the headlines of the local paper; people congratulating her, telling her how wonderful she was. The bubble had burst. Then slowly she began to rally. After all, she could *teach* better than Miss Bessie. Miss Bessie was an old fuddy-duddy. This thought made Polly feel better. Just as her self-confidence began to emerge she felt a hand on her shoulder. It was Miss Bessie beside her, looking very apologetic. "The vote really should have gone to you, you know," Miss Bessie was saying. "You know so much more about teaching methods than anybody else here."

Polly Remembers

Polly dropped down, down, down into an awful hole where she *hated* Miss Bessie. But as she began to come up she remembered things, the way a drowning man does. She remembered



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visiting Miss Bessie's room, and the pat on the back Miss Bessie had given to that "dummy" George. She remembered how "the shy one" had smiled when the group had said he had done well as a group leader. She remembered how Susan, "the smarty," "the high I.Q.," had taken pleasure in helping Eloise with penmanship. "*Penmanship—horror!*" thought Polly. "*There were penmanship, and phonics, and drill in the multiplication table!*"

Slowly as a drowning person, Polly

emerged to the light. Miss Bessie was standing beside her. Polly looked up and said, "Miss Bessie, it's *kids* that matter most, isn't it!"

Miss Bessie nodded agreement, saying, "Yes, of course. And it'll be your turn next—next year." Miss Bessie knew what she meant, but Polly didn't. Polly was busy with dreams. She smiled as she saw next year's headlines: "Crusader for Children Elected President." And in small letters, far down in the article, was the name of Polly Pratt.

Curriculum Research

Column Editor: C. W. Hunnicutt
Contributor: Merle A. Stoneman

IMPROVING INSTRUCTION IN RURAL AREAS

PROVIDING adequate supervisory service in small towns and rural areas is largely a matter of encouraging and providing for effective group activity. Assembling groups of teachers with similar interests and aims is perhaps a bit more difficult here than in larger centers of population with centralized school administration. Cooperation among numerous small administrative units calls for a type of planning and an element of understanding not required elsewhere. To complicate the situation further, obstacles of distance and the customary lack of trained personnel remain to be overcome.

Many educators have shown that improvement of instruction through in-service training of teachers depends largely upon sufficient group activity under capable leadership. To achieve this result in rural areas may require close cooperation among several school

systems as well as between them and the regional teacher-education institutions. In some instances county superintendents or rural supervisors are taking the lead in planning and implementing in-service training programs. Unfortunately, however, many rural areas still exist where local educational leadership is proving inadequate.

Guides to Improvement Developed

In many rural areas teachers have no opportunity to meet together for cooperative planning and evaluation of their work. This is equally true in villages and small towns where young, inexperienced, and but partially trained administrators and teachers need effective leadership and encouragement. Any meetings held are likely to be annual or semi-annual institutes or conferences devoted chiefly to lectures or demonstrations.

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