

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Peggy Brogan

"The Importance of People" column is in its second year of guidance by Peggy Brogan. This department will continue to give its keen and sensitive interpretation of people, of their feelings, and of how they relate to other people (who, too, are important!).

Mrs. Brogan will be glad to read unsolicited manuscripts which may be suitable for use in this monthly column. Interested contributors should send such material to Mrs. Brogan in care of ASCD headquarters office.

What's in a Number?

WHAT's in a number—in 24? 30? 36? There are some twos—12 twos, 15 twos, 18 twos. And there are threes, sixes, twelves. But is this really what's in a number—just a lot of other numbers?

What if 24 or 30 or 36 means the people in a classroom? Then what's in a number? 35 children + 1 teacher in a classroom with room for 24? 29 children in a classroom who must now telescope their living and learning to make room for the next shift of 29 that will be coming in to claim the same amount of space and time and help before the day is over? 29 children who seemed comfortable in their skins as they ran and played and splashed in the bright sunshine of summer, meeting their world with the active and enthusiastic yes that is the way of children. 29 children who now seem too big for their skins or too small for their skins or somehow out of joint as they bend their every effort to adjust to a sitting-still exploration of living. 1 teacher who must somehow weave their unique and common

needs, interests and resources into an on-going pattern of living.

What about the "single ones" in a number? *The 1 teacher* who must play so many roles, know so much about so many people, give so much to so many people. Miss Brown who has worked hard at summer school to find some better ways for doing things. Mr. Jasper who has worked in a factory all summer because his teacher's pay does not support his family. Mr. Fargo who has taken intensive training and will now face his first group of sixth graders. Miss Mapes who feels somewhat hesitant this fall, weary from explaining and defending to the folks back home when they face her with the current attacks on the schools. Mrs. Doaks whose many years with first graders give her confidence and understanding even if she doesn't keep up with all their chatter about what they see on television. Miss Jarvis who has never taught before, but who herself enjoys comics and TV and some of the other interests of the times in which she lives. Miss Jones who has

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never before taught with Negro teachers. Mr. Smith who hasn't taught with "whites."

The 1 child. Do we have time and space and resources for knowing him? Peter who comes to school without his breakfast. Barry who thinks that if the teacher doesn't give him exactly what she gives everyone else it means she doesn't like him. Louie who has been reading about and thinking about and exploring about outer space all summer. Art who has to sit still and watch TV after school so he won't disturb the neighbors. Anne whose mother wishes they'd teach the children to write instead of print so Anne could read her notes. Mollie who hurries home to prepare lunch for the younger children because the grown-ups in her family work. Ned whose family is afraid he won't be taught to read. Barby who at eight has already gone to four schools because her daddy's job keeps him moving this way. Marc who found out all about snakes exploring this summer at his camp. Bob who found out all about square measure and area while helping his dad put in new linoleum. Stu whose anecdotal record says he hasn't learned to read yet although the sum-

mer changed all this for Stu when he got interested in reading about all his favorite baseball players. Stan whose test record says "two years above grade" in arithmetic although Stan shed the burden of the memorized rules as soon as the spring test was over. Sally who has never gone to school with "white children" before but now must do her share in helping with her democratic society's latest growing pains. Sharon who has never gone to school with Negro children.

Patterns for Movement

What about the patterns for movement in a number? $29 + 1$ when it means ways a teacher and children can find for coming together on things. $10 + 13 + 6 + 1$ when it means a high group, a middle group, a low group, and a teacher. What about the children who have been labeled in such a way, who symbolically have been asked to move in ways that superior people move? Inferior people? Those who are run-of-the-mill? What about the relationships among these groups, between a given group and a teacher, between individuals within or among groups? What about $3 + 5 + 2 + 6 + 5 + 3 + 5 + 1$ when it means small groups of self-selected peers coming to know the real meaning of friendship, of working hard at some job to make it come out right, of laughing hard when things are funny, of having a teacher for help when she's needed? What about 30 when it means a few minutes daily of everyone pulling together in one group, of willingly being members of the larger group? Running hard on the playground. Listening hard to the

music or story. Planning hard for tomorrow's trip. What about $14 + 15 + 1$ when it means those above and those below that artificial median with a teacher trying to help the children as if the median didn't exist?

How many laughs are there in 30? How many heartaches? Dreams? How many bright new hair-bows, deliberately dirtied saddle-shoes (to be one of the gang), sparkling eyes? How many ways to learn arithmetic, spelling, reading? How many beliefs in the education America has offered her children? How many feelings of "I can do it" or "What's the use!"? How many pounds of help, acres of problems? How long and how wide is a teacher stretched to cover the ground?

Perhaps a mathematical formula can help out. We have discovered in recent years that the number of unemployed depends not solely upon a counting of heads, but importantly upon the kind of measure used. What about our measure for the number of people in a classroom? Is it a matter of square feet of floor space? Cubic feet of air space? Or are there other measures which must be taken into account? What is a crowded classroom? An adequate classroom? A normal teacher load? In a democratic society, what's in a number—what's in 30?

—PEGGY BROGAN, *professional staff, Child Education Foundation, 535 E. 84th Street, New York 28, New York.*



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