

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Peggy Brogan

Research in Living

CONDUCTING RESEARCH in living. Finding out whys and ways for behaving. This sort of inquiry is the job of a lifetime. Inquiry which begins with individually significant questions. Which follows its course in an especially planned environment. An environment where sensitive response is the method. Sensitive response to people and their problems.

"Why Stephe is riding on my horsie?" asks Jolly as he watches Stephe rock back and forth on the horsie Santa Claus has just brought to their nursery school group. "Why, Barbara? Why is she?"

"Because Santa Claus brought the horsie to Stephe too. It's Stephe's horsie and Jolly's horsie," explains his teacher offering a hand to Jolly. "Want to go and see about having a ride?"

A few minutes later Jolly is riding on his horsie. Or—is it his and Stephe's? This is something to wonder about and find out about. What does it *mean* to have a horsie be yours and not yours all at the same time? How does it *feel*? What is a world like when ownership is not a simple *mine* or *not mine*? When *mine-not mine* are part of the same relationship? When *mine-yours* are part of the same relationship? When *ours* is an accurate way for describing reality?

Jolly will not find his answer this morning or even this year in his nursery school. Nor will he find it three years

from now in his first grade. Or ten years from now in his junior high. For his questions about the horsie will grow to include the sandbox and the tricycles. A favored position as leader of the line and *It* in the game of tag. His teacher's attention and his community's offers of membership in groups that matter. And his noticing of Stephe will grow to include others in his world. People who are like him and people who are not. People who are in his special group and people who are not. People who want him for a special friend and those who do not. Conducting an inquiry into the meaning of living in a world of people is the job of a lifetime.

"When Is Juice?"

"When is juice?" asks Anne sitting down at one of the low tables in her nursery school kitchen. "Juice now."

How can *now* be time for juice? Doesn't Anne know that she has been in school for only twenty minutes—that juice time isn't until the middle of the morning? Or *is* it time for juice—time, that is, as measured by more than just the clock or nursery school schedule? Time as measured by matters of importance in Anne's living. By matters of importance in Anne's growing ability to intelligently manage her affairs in a world where people and events are separated by time and space.

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How can Anne best be helped to carry on her self-initiated research into meanings for living in her world? She can be told that she must wait for juice like all the other children. And this might work. Anne might happily bathe the doll or paint a picture or in some other satisfying way fill the time between now and juice.

But supposing juice time has a special meaning for Anne? Supposing juice time is the reminder that soon she'll be home with Mommie. Supposing it is the time *before* juice that hangs heavily on Anne's hands—that makes her worry about the time and space between her and home. Supposing it is the time *after* juice that is happy time for Anne—time when she can throw her whole self into activities, now that she knows that seeing

Mommie comes next. Then what is gained by having Anne wait another hour?

Might juice time then change in its special significance for Anne? Might it no longer be the comfortable dependable time that gives her a way for feeling secure in a world of movement? Might juice time become something in and of itself? Something to worry about and think about and play out alone in the corner? Might *waiting* before juice assume such significance that *waiting after* juice also becomes something to worry about, until finally any *waiting* is anticipated as something unpleasant? That *now* is the only tolerable time as far as having pleasure is concerned?

Perhaps it would be better to act on Anne's suggestion that *now* is time for

juice. She seems so unaware of other children—holding out her paper cup. Why not let her drink her juice at 9:20 today? Tomorrow she may not feel this way until 9:30 or 9:45. And out of sensitive responding between Anne and her teacher will come the day when Anne can be asked to wait a little while. And another day another little while. In this way Anne is building a useful meaning for waiting. Like Jolly, she is conducting research in living that will be the job of a lifetime. She is discovering that she can do something about intervals in time and space—that she can include future pleasure as a significant part of her present.

Response to People

“Why is he going to drop bombs?” asks Roger pointing to the pilot in his book. And then, “Do you know what? The next time I see him I’m going to hit him good.”

Why is he going to drop bombs? Who can help Roger find this answer? Indeed who wants to? Why do grownups extend themselves into one another’s living by way of bombs? What has been the course of our research into living? Our opportunities for sensitive response? What is it that proves bombs to be more effective than laughter? Or love? Or working things

out together? What research during three and a half years of living makes Roger want to hit the pilot good? And when will his findings invite him to take another view? To want to drop bombs himself? Bombs that are more powerful than all the rest?

What are the questions of children that start the inquiry rolling? The questions which grow with children as they grow older? If the alligator died, where is his head? Why does it rain when I want it to be nice? Why doesn’t Beth like me? Why does work time seem so long today? Why can’t I stand it when Tom holds my hand? Why don’t I want to do anything? Is this what it means to be bored? To be lazy? What’s this self-discipline they’re always talking about? Why don’t I have any?

Conducting research in living. Finding out whys and ways for behaving. This sort of inquiry is the job of a lifetime. Inquiry which begins with individually significant questions. Which follows its course when conditions invite it. When sensitive response is the way for behaving. Sensitive response to the adventure of living. Sensitive response to people and their problems.

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