

The Importance of People

Why?

Jean Wellington and C. Burleigh Wellington

PROFESSOR Bryan hurried into the familiar old school, stuffing his pipe into his pocket, and removing his horn rims to wipe off the steam. He breathed fast from the long flight of stone steps. He wondered how many student teachers he had sent to old Beacon since he began teaching at the University ten years before.

As he walked down the corridor considering how many more years Beacon could serve before the School Board would be forced to tear it down or completely remodel the building, he was startled to hear a familiar voice. At first he could not place the voice, and he wondered whether one of his student teachers might be installed in the wrong classroom. Then it came back to him—the voice was that of Mary Ann Barlow from the previous year's batch of student teachers. He had heard nothing from her since graduation, and he had believed she had not obtained a position in teaching. Certainly he had never expected to hear her familiar voice issuing from the classroom of Mr. Johnson, a teacher whom the Professor had known for some years.

Mary Ann had been one of his best student teachers. Consequently, Professor Bryan smiled appreciatively as he thought of her knowledge of her sub-

ject, of her creative ways of arousing interest in the students, of her insight into the teaching-learning process. The door to the classroom was open, and he would stop a moment to look inside. Mary Ann must be substituting, and she would be setting a spark in old Johnson's class. Though Johnson was a passable teacher, he never showed much life or spirit.

Mary Ann was sitting at the desk. Furthermore, she was not looking at the class, but down at the book in front of her. And even more appalling, she was reading to the class from the book. As might be expected, there was evidently very little interest in Ancient Greece droned out of a textbook, and the students were engaged in all the subtle (and some not so subtle) activities of which creative students are capable when their creativity is not being tapped otherwise. Some were talking; some were doodling; one boy was carving on his desk, another fashioning a paper airplane; a group of girls was tossing around an earring which had been pulled from the ear of one of their classmates; and one boy slept with his head on his desk. Still Mary Ann only looked up from time to time to frown deeply at someone, and then her voice droned on.

Professor Bryan was already late to the class of his student teacher, and when he arrived there panting slightly, he might as well not have bothered. He just could not force himself to listen to Latin. He kept asking himself, "Why? Why does she sit there and pretend to be teaching?"

"Just a Substitute"

Before the bell rang he left the student teacher's class—something he never did except in dire emergency. Again he wiped the moisture from his glasses and wished fervently for time for his pipe. When the bell pealed, he was standing outside Mary Ann's classroom. She saw him and greeted him warmly. "I didn't know you had a job, Mary Ann," Professor Bryan began in an effort to lead up to the question he longed to ask.

"I'm just a substitute. Mr. Johnson is in the hospital; the poor man will be out for at least six weeks." She was a tall girl, taller in fact than Professor Bryan, and he always felt she might have been attractive with her long black hair and deep set eyes if it were not for a sullen look around her mouth.

He stared at her now without speaking, and as though she sensed his thoughts, Mary Ann asked, "Did you watch me teaching?"

"I could hardly dignify what you were doing with that term," Professor Bryan said sadly.

"I know. I know." Mary Ann seemed sorry to have hurt him.

"But why, Mary Ann? It's not that you don't know better, and it's not that you can't do better. Why then?"

"Look Professor, you come with me. I want to show you something during my free period." Professor Bryan sighed and nodded, his next student teacher

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temporarily forgotten. "Now I want you to listen outside a few classrooms—I mean really listen. And I want you to think about what you hear." Mary Ann took him firmly by the arm and led him up one flight and across to Room 209. Standing close to the door but out of view, they could hear pretty well what was said inside. Professor Bryan felt momentary qualms about eavesdropping, but he found he could not help but hear.

"Now the next rule," a man's voice said loudly, a voice that sounded rather young, but bored, "is this: You form the pluperfect tense by . . ."

"All the students are writing it in their notebooks," Mary Ann whispered.

"Now it is time for your exercises," the teacher's voice went on. "You may begin." A student said something Professor Bryan did not catch, and immediately the teacher raised his voice. "No.

No. You know that the first person in the first row takes the first sentence and so on. How many times must I tell you that?"

Professor Bryan could restrain himself no longer. Moving to the door he looked through the glass panel to see a young man of perhaps twenty-eight sitting at his desk with the text in his hands. The Professor sighed deeply.

Mary Ann took his arm again. "Professor, you haven't seen anything yet."

They stopped next at Room 216. "Raise your voice, young man, when you speak to me," a woman's shrill voice called out. A student said something. "Not yes, but yes, Miss Arthur," the woman's voice said again. This time Professor Bryan could hear the echo from the student. He looked at Mary Ann.

"Professor," she said, "that woman is dreaded by every child in this school. She fails half her classes every year



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unless they happen to be top college divisions, and nobody, not even the Superintendent, ever interferes."

"I know these things go on, of course," the Professor said feebly, "but I can't believe they happen very often."

Day After Day

"You're closing your eyes, Professor. I've substituted in all the schools around here, the good and the bad, and lots of so-called teachers are like these. Down the hall is old Mr. Young. He has the students write out all the answers to every question in their biology books, and unless every answer agrees exactly with the answer book, he marks it wrong—as though that were teaching biology. Across the hall from him is Mrs. Allen. Day after day she talks in the teachers' room about Johnny and Bobby and Sally and how dumb they

are, how no one can teach them anything. Sometimes I feel like telling her that plenty of people are teaching feeble minded children *something*, but then she would not listen. You would never believe the number of teachers who do not seem so bad at a glance, but who really only hear homework or exercises out of a book."

"Surely they only act this way in secondary schools. Maybe I could switch my level."

"Don't bother. Last week they asked me to take a third grade class and just baby sit with them since they couldn't find a trained substitute. I had to go into the supply room, and while I was there, the woman teaching in the next room was telling her second graders if they didn't shut up, she would brain every one of them. And I mean those were her exact words. Another teacher in a second grade not far from here is known

to tip up the children's desks in their laps if they get too many wrong answers. And you have no idea how many teachers are being sarcastic or actually making fun of students right this very minute."

Professor Bryan took off his glasses and wiped the moisture away, and he wondered if he were crying a little. He pictured himself going home and telling his wife that he was resigning his position. "What's the use of preparing teachers?" he would say. "I work so hard with them trying to make them aware of what it means to teach and have someone learn, and then what happens to them? Like Mary Ann who put it all into practice in student teaching, they sit at a desk and read out of a book. I may as well give up and start digging ditches—which at least accomplishes something." He looked up and Mary Ann was staring at him.

"Why? Why, Mary Ann? I just don't know what else to say. Is it ignorance?"

"Of course not. Even the older teachers know what the experts say. Your own book on teaching is here in the teachers' library."

"Well, then, what is it? With you it certainly is not ignorance. Is it that they know what they ought to do, but they do not have the capacity to do it?"

"Maybe a little of that," Mary Ann said thoughtfully. "You always told us that a good teacher is creative, and maybe some of these people aren't very creative. But I'm positive they could be a lot more resourceful than they are. What really gets you, Professor, is the number who won't follow what they know they ought to do, or make any attempt to be creative. They go through the motions and put the children through their paces, and all it accomplishes is to stultify both."

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"You still haven't told me what it is with you, Mary Ann." The Professor looked at her steadily.

"You know, Professor, I was going to tell you that it's just plain laziness with me, but with those others it's lack of interest in children and their welfare. Yet I suddenly realized that the two are one and the same. And when I look at it squarely, I am ashamed because I always thought I cared about the youngsters. Yet if I really carry through logically, if I care about the youngsters, I would be giving them the very best I have to offer. And that goes for Rooms 209 and 216 and all the others too. If they really cared about those students sitting out there in front of them, they would reach out to them with love and with every ounce they could muster to see that learning takes place." Mary Ann seemed not to be speaking to the Professor any longer; she stared off into space. Suddenly the bell rang. "I must get to my class, Professor. I just don't know how to thank you for what you have done for me. I promise you I will really teach from now on."

The Professor smiled after her ruefully. Maybe Mary Ann would be a teacher after all. Maybe he would not need to tell his wife he was resigning. If he kept on caring about the students he taught and giving them all he could, constantly striving himself to be creative and inspiring, there would surely be some students who would learn and then carry on the same attitudes in their teaching. He wished he might reach out to the others too, like those in Rooms 209 and 216, to show them what they were missing, the joy to be found in caring for the students and in expressing it. Right there in the corridor of old Beacon High he determined never to cease trying to make even this change

a reality for the sake of the millions of students still to be educated.

—JEAN WELLINGTON and C. BURLEIGH WELLINGTON, *Assistant Professor of Education and Associate Professor of Education, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.*

Peace Corps—Shaffel

(Continued from page 351)

solving a variety of problems. They have developed sensitivities to cultural complexes that few teachers have been prepared to enter. These Peace Corps returnees should have programs designed for them that might very well become pilot models for future teacher education curricula.

I have speculated on a seminar program that parallels a teaching internship in American schools and builds its content around the needs these teachers define for themselves under the guidance of teacher education faculty members who have themselves lived in other cultures.

Remember, these young people have proved themselves under fire. Some of their trials may be reflected in the experience I faced in one of the Malayan secondary schools where the Forensics Society had asked me to speak on "Trends in American Education." The following are some of the questions these sixth form students (first year junior college, approximately) asked me:

1. You spoke of emphasis on science, mathematics and languages. Don't you think the moral and spiritual side of life is important? What is done about moral education?
2. Do you think a technological education is enough?
3. Do you have examination systems in America? How are students evaluated?

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