

*Teacher! Are These
Your Children?*



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FOREWORD

This bulletin describes how the teachers and the pupils in one elementary school in New York City worked together to solve their common problems. As is pointed out in the prologue, the bulletin presents "scenes of children in real classrooms—real children and real teachers."

In these scenes the reader will see in what ways attractive teaching helped in the solution of many of the difficulties.

The bulletin is published at this time as a report of how teachers can work with their children and as a source of help to teachers faced with similar problems.

February 1, 1946

JOHN E. WADE,
Superintendent of Schools

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The scenes presented in this publication grew out of a workshop project inaugurated in the fall of 1943 on the initiative of the Cooperative School for Teachers, one of the Bank Street Schools. The project developed as a joint effort of the Cooperative School and P.S. 186 Manhattan. From its inception it was concerned primarily with helping teachers to develop curriculum procedures and practices in harmony with the needs of children and a knowledge of the growth and development of children. In the initiation of the original project, Regina C. M. Burke, Associate Superintendent in charge of Elementary Schools, and William H. Bristow, Assistant Director B.R.R.S. (Curriculum Research), served as sponsors and consultants.

Members of the Bank Street staff responsible for conducting the project have included the following: Lucy Sprague Mitchell, chairman; Barbara Biber, Eleanor Hogan, Claudia Lewis, Agnes Sailer, Dorothy Stall, and Charlotte Winsor.

At the school the project had the understanding cooperation of Edward J. Bernath, the principal. Superintendent John Conroy likewise gave his support at each stage of the project.

Obviously a bulletin such as this could not have been written except in a climate where supervisors, teachers, and pupils are friendly and where they work and plan together in an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. Grateful acknowledgment is made to all persons with whom the staff has been privileged to work.

The project as conceived was manifold in purpose. One of its aims was to produce written and printed materials that would describe and bring to life the problems of teaching children in our changing classrooms. Miss Lewis and Dr. Biber have concentrated on this aspect of the workshop program, and this bulletin, written by Miss Lewis, is one of the first outcomes. Anne Heyneman, who is associated with the Cooperative School, prepared the drawings which illustrate the text.

The material is not intended to highlight any actual child, teacher, or school. In the aggregate, however, the anecdotes presented here exemplify the kinds of situations that may arise in almost any classroom.

PROLOGUE

A schoolroom today is not what it used to be. No longer is the teacher's job merely that of drilling her children in the 3 R's and keeping her class in order — if one may use the word "merely" in this connection. Perhaps it is unfair to do so. Teaching has never been easy, under any circumstances. Always it has demanded energy and patience and skill. And the best teachers, at all times, have felt just as responsible for training their children in good behavior as for teaching them reading, writing, and arithmetic. The best teachers, at all times, have devoted themselves to the welfare of their children, and this has meant an unselfish and often exhausting giving of time and effort and interest.

Today, however, there are ideas afloat concerning what constitutes the good behavior and welfare of our children. Teachers are told that they must now look beyond the schoolroom. There must no longer be any separation between behavior in school and behavior out of school. Teachers are asked to make the schoolrooms for young children homelike places where the boys and girls may move about and talk, and work and play actively. Teachers are asked to know and understand each child as never before; to help each child grow in the way that is best for him. The all-round development of children has become the primary educational goal.

If teaching, in the past, made great demands, today it seems to many teachers an almost overwhelming job. Teachers are asking themselves questions like these:

"How do I control children when I let them move around freely?"

"How much noise should I allow, and why?"

"Why are some of the children so rebellious, while others behave so well?"

"There are so many kinds of children to try to understand — the child who doesn't concentrate, the child who doesn't get along with others, the aggressive child. How can I learn to understand them all?"

"We are supposed to build our curriculums around children's true interests and needs. How can I be sure that I know what these needs are?"

"What can I do to help children who come from bad home situations? Is there any use in even trying?"

Here in this book are scenes of children in real classrooms —

real children and real teachers. Here are the problems that teachers are facing — and some of the possible solutions.

All of the situations described herein have actually happened to real children and real teachers in a real school. Real names, however, are not used. Neither have all of the incidents in any one scene necessarily happened to any one child. Rather, the scenes are used as a means of describing the types of behavior that may reasonably be expected of five, six, and seven-year-old children and the way in which understanding and sympathetic teachers may respond to this behavior.

The observer has had the opportunity of working with the supervisor, the teachers, the children, and the parents of one school over a period of two years. In the course of this work she gained their confidence and therefore was permitted to move freely in the classroom without attracting undue attention. She was thus able to catch the spirit of the classroom work and to see teachers and children in their normal relationships. Many teachers discussed with her the problems which they had in dealing with their children. As a result they often gained new insight into their own behavior and the behavior of their children. They planned curriculum experiences as well as ways of working with the children to avoid conflicts which might otherwise arise, to help some children gain confidence in themselves, and to utilize more fully the resources of the school and the community.

The observer herself grew in appreciation of the problems faced by teachers and pupils in the school. She found her experiences with this group of children both challenging and broadening.

After the anecdotes were written they were subjected to the careful scrutiny of experts in the field of teacher training and child growth and development. The material is intended primarily to illustrate how teachers and supervisors are applying knowledge about children in their daily work.

The solutions they have found to their problems are not offered in the form of neat little pills, however, applicable to all cases, because there are none such known in the realm of human behavior. They are to be thought of, rather, as stemming from and dependent upon certain attitudes — attitudes toward children and toward classroom curriculums and procedures. A teacher who adopts these attitudes can find her own solutions without too much difficulty, and she need not be magician, genius, psychiatrist. Teachers have done it; their experiences are recorded here.

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ALLEN

The Disturber

ALLEN HAS not been in kindergarten very long — he entered late in the spring — and every day since his arrival he has stuck out like a sore thumb. Trouble, trouble, his middle name is trouble.

Any teacher knows how it is. When all the rest of the children are quietly drinking milk, he will suddenly burst out with loud caw-caw sounds.

He invariably needs to go out to the bathroom at irregular times, and when he opens the door and returns from one of these trips, he comes in with great stamps of the feet and shouting of nonsense, distracting everyone's attention from the story that is being read.

If he can be persuaded to sit with the others and listen to a story for a while, as likely as not he will suddenly jump up in the midst of it and give the piano a bang, or start galloping off around the room.

When a flower is passed around for all of the children to smell, of course it is Allen who takes the opportunity to grab it, time and again.

He'll even slip out of the door sometimes and run away down the hall, against all the rules.

Mischief, mischief, and trouble, trouble.

Look at him now. His teacher has just tacked up on the

bulletin board a beautiful new picture of a pig, and has been talking with the children about it. They are getting busy with their crayons and paper, to draw some animals. But not Allen. What new deviltry is he up to? He is approaching the pig picture, crayon in hand. Is he actually going to scribble on it? Look, he has made a tiny green mark on the picture. But — he is keeping his eye on the teacher. He turns, he wants her to see him. He is holding his arm and hand up as though he were about to scribble all over the picture, but actually he is not doing anything to spoil it. He waits, he wants her to look, to see him doing this naughty thing. His whole expression shows that he is *pretending* to scribble, so that she will come rushing over to stop him.

She sees him out of the corner of her eye, but turns her back and avoids looking at him. Finally he gives up and goes to his table to draw pictures with the other children.

Ah, he has given himself away in this little incident.

Not Really Bad

He is not so much interested in doing “bad” things as he is in having her *see* him do them. In fact, he is not really a “*bad*” child. What a sense of right and wrong he really has, what self-control. He did not allow himself actually to destroy that nice picture.

No doubt all of his noise-making and disturbing are aimed, in just this way, directly at her.

But why is it so important to him that she see him doing these trouble-making things? — Is it just that he wants “attention”? Before we can answer this we must know more about him.

His teacher tells us that Allen’s father is away in the Army and that his mother has gone to work since Allen started coming to kindergarten. She turns him over to a neighbor woman and sees him herself only in the evenings.

Indeed, it is easy to believe that at home he may get very little “attention” — meaning that steady flow of parental affection, interest, and concern which every child should have as his birthright.

“Even so,” you say, “why does he have to do all these naughty things to try to get the adult attention he needs? He’d make the adults feel much more kindly disposed toward him if he’d behave himself.”

Well, here we need to look still further into the picture of his home life.

He Can't Help Himself

His mother's statement on the day she brought him to school to enroll him is very revealing:

"I don't care how much you beat him, just so there's breath left in his body . . . I just want to get rid of him a couple of hours, so I can have a little peace . . ."

And her behavior that afternoon when she called for him completes the picture. While she was helping him with his coat, she boxed him roughly around for no apparent reason except her own irritation.

Clearly, this suggests a home that is far from peaceful or happy, that has little love or warmth in it, that is filled with beatings and trouble.

Isn't it likely that Allen knows no way to get his mother interested in him except by cutting up and annoying her?

Doesn't it seem likely that his idea of an adult is someone who punishes?

And would it be hard to believe that this little boy may be driven, quite involuntarily, by a fierce need to rebel and do naughty things, perhaps in retaliation for his rough treatment, or to prove that he has some self-assertion left? (You know how it is. Punishment is pretty hard to take lying down. Let someone make a cutting or derogatory remark to us and even if we deserve it, it seems to force us to flare right up in self-defense.)

What To Do?

What should and can be done to help this little boy in school? What is his teacher's method of dealing with him? Does she punish him? Isolate him? Does he irritate her and make her cross?

We have already had a short glimpse of her in the act of purposely ignoring one of his attempts to annoy her. This might well lead us to believe that she is trying to show him he need not do naughty things in order to make her pay attention to him. Perhaps she is trying to teach him that there are other, more legitimate ways.

Look at her now. She is standing by his chair, watching him draw, and is telling him in an affectionate way what a fine picture he is making. In reality, it seems to be a rather poor drawing, compared with those the other children are making, but Allen has been working at it as well as he seems capable of working these days, and the praise may be just what he needs.

Yes, he looks up, beaming, and then gets right to work again, with even better concentration. Soon he has finished and looks up with a satisfied smile.

And what is his teacher doing now? She has opened her purse and has taken out a dollar bill. "Allen, you've been working so hard that I think you might enjoy going on a special little errand for me. Would you like to take this down the hall to Miss Smith's room? Tell her this is the money we owe her for the party."

Off he goes, eagerly. Can this child, who runs away, be trusted with a dollar bill? We'll see. It is very likely no one at home has ever given him any responsibilities. For all we know, he may rise to meet them as well as any child would, if not better. And the opportunity to go off down the hall for a legitimate and important reason may cure him of his desire to run away down this same hall.

Here he comes, back already, with a thank you note from Miss Smith. Meanwhile the other children have put away their crayons and are sitting quietly at the tables for their test. Does Allen bang the door, or sing out loudly to annoy?

No, this time he comes in looking very self-possessed, and walks straight to his chair in a controlled and businesslike manner. Apparently the errand *has* done something for him. It has made him feel important and good in his teacher's eyes. There is no need for him to bang the door this time, to attract her attention to him.

He Doesn't Need Punishment

Clearly, this teacher realizes that no amount of punishing or lecturing to Allen can produce the desired results. Punishment is all he's had at home.

But even a small amount of affection, and of praise (whenever it can be given for the slightest little thing he does well) may work a metamorphosis in time.

Allen has a lot to learn, of course, more than can be learned in just a few days. But let him gradually find that it is not necessary to be bad to make an adult interest herself in him, and let him learn, especially, that there are adults in the world who *like* him and whose affection and fairness and understanding he can count on. This can be his kindergarten lesson for the whole year, and if he learns these things and nothing else whatever, then kindergarten has been an invaluable experience for him and may make all the difference in the kind of school career that lies ahead of him in the grades.

FREDDIE

Who Cannot Concentrate

HERE IS another little boy who is new in the kindergarten, and a puzzler he is.

One begins to wonder — is the child in a daze all the time? Is he a little slow at understanding? Something wrong with his intelligence?

He never seems to concentrate on any one thing, never finishes what he starts, rarely pays attention to what the other children are doing, and is all over the place, darting from one thing to another.

During the reading of a story he appears to be a thousand miles away. And he'll never sit through a whole story without getting up a hundred times to change his place. Obviously, he's not listening to the story.

During the singing his attention is all on what another child is doing at the other end of the room.

If he comes up and asks for help with the buckle of his snow-suit, he'll wander off while his teacher is in the very midst of helping him, because his eye has lighted on a toy train across the room.

If the children are all invited to come and see Henry's fine blockbuilding, Freddie may or may not come. If he does, he'll be off in just a minute to start wheeling the doll carriage around — and just as impulsively and unreasonably he'll suddenly leave that and turn to something else.

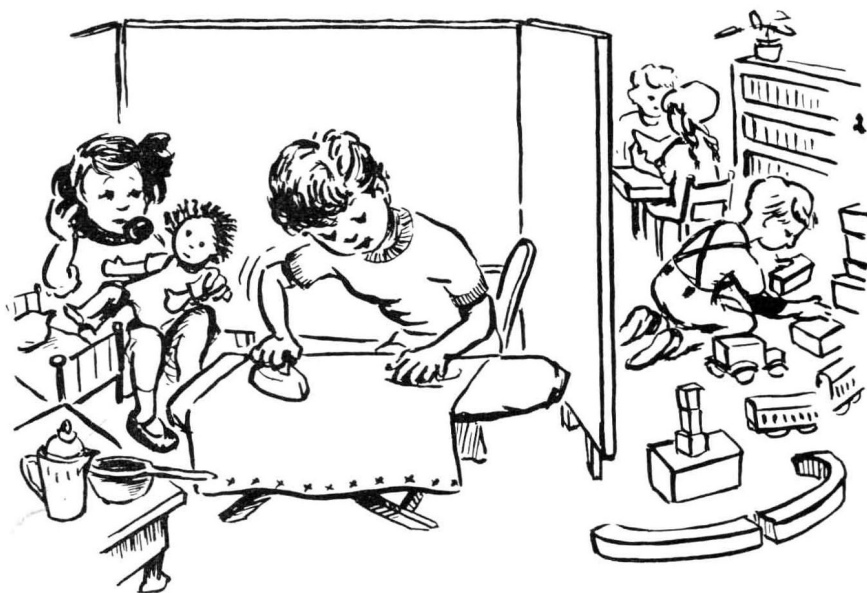
During rhythms when the game is played of marching and stopping exactly when the music stops, he alone does not heed the stopping places, but marches dazedly on, intent upon his own purposes.

What is the matter with this little boy? And what should his bewildered teacher do to help him settle down? Isn't he just wasting his time?

But wait, where is he now? For the last ten minutes he has been contentedly occupied at something, and has actually *not* been streaking around the room like a waterbug. He is in the little "playhouse" — the three-sided, roofless playhouse in the corner of the room. We can peek over the wall and see what he is doing inside.

There he sits by the little ironing board. Gently and carefully he "irons" a large piece of blue cloth, folding it, turning it, ironing and ironing away with great calmness and concentration. Can this be Freddie?

A little girl sits near him, carrying on a telephone conversation with the toy telephone. Soon she leaves the playhouse, and Freddie is alone there with just one other child, who busies himself "cooking dinner." Freddie irons and irons.



So! He *can* concentrate. What is there about this ironing that has done the trick?

There Must Be a Reason

Possibly this child has been somewhat overwhelmed by all the wealth of new things that have confronted him upon his entry into the kindergarten. Not only is the room a very large one, no doubt five or six times larger than any room at his home, but it is filled with things he may never have seen before — easels, little tables and chairs, shelves full of games, toys, blocks. And think of the number of children! Now, within the little playhouse, his range is restricted. There are neither so many things nor so many children to distract him, and here in this comfortable little enclosure he can settle down.

Possibly no one has ever read stories to him before, and he scarcely knows how to sit and listen to one. Possibly no one has ever tried to teach him a song, or a game of marching and stop-

ping. These are strange new experiences. But ironing — this is like home, something he knows about and understands.

It may very well be that he is a somewhat less mature child, emotionally and socially, than most of the others, and so finds it harder to adjust to the new school life, harder to depart from the familiar things of home.

Possibly too, concentration on "school" things comes hard for this little boy right now. We know something about his troubled, broken-up home life (mother and father recently separated), about the threats with which he is delivered at school: "If you aren't good you'll have to go to bed as soon as you come home."

All of us know our own personal troubles can play havoc with our concentration on our work.

So, whether it is the bewildering newness of school or the urgency of his own problems, or both, that are bothering Freddie, possibly this quiet little playhouse corner, secluded and comfortable, with the familiar ironing board in it, gives him more feeling of ease, more opportunity to concentrate than he can have anywhere else in the room, or in any other situation.

These, of course, are only "possibly's." The best we can do is watch Freddie and attempt to understand him, patiently trying one thing after another until we find what seems to be the right answer for him, the right activity and handling that will help him begin to settle down and feel at home in this schoolroom.

— Remembering, of course, that for another child, ironing in the playhouse may not be the solution at all.



CHRISTINA

Who Never Causes

Any Trouble

WHO IS the little girl who never has to be reminded that she is getting too noisy? — Christina.

Who never causes any trouble in the classroom? Never bothers any-

one, never quarrels, never does what she is not supposed to do? — Christina.

A teacher's joy.

But is she, really? Should she be?

A teacher is scarcely apt to notice a little girl like this, who creeps so mouse-like through the day. The boisterous, noisy, rebellious children are the ones who force the teacher to watch them and do something about them.

But we, who have the privilege of looking into these classrooms without any of the responsibilities of managing them, can concentrate on Christina for a while and watch her in her kindergarten room.

There she sits, along with three others, at the table where the crayons are. What a solemn little face! Does she never smile? And isn't she going to join in any of the conversation? The other three are chatting quietly and happily. Why, Christina seems not to be a part of this group at all. Not a word does she speak during this whole half hour. And what is she drawing? Only a few tentative, timid little lines on her paper. Most of the time she seems to sit there, absently, just staring at the other three, who pay no attention to her.

Maybe later on she will talk and smile. But watch her during rhythms. She wears that same solemn little face. She goes through the rhythms in an automatic way, almost as though attached to the others by a string and therefore obliged to do what they do, but without volition or any animation on her own part. And still not a word does she speak.

When the teacher reads a story to the children, Christina sits with the group, but never does she chime in or pipe up as the others do. She wears that same solemn, absent little expression.

When it is time to get coats on and go home at 3 o'clock, Christina is one of the first to have her coat on and slip into her chair to wait for the dismissal signal from the teacher. There she sits, serious, quiet, "good," — hands folded.

Not Even a Mouse

Suddenly there is a commotion at the front of the room. A mouse in the cupboard! Most of the children rush up to peek in. But Christina? No, she sits there like a part of the furniture, and nothing will move her but the teacher's dismissal signal.

That child has not spoken one word to anyone in these two hours, nor has she shown any real spark of interest in the activities in this room. She does what she is supposed to do, down to the nth degree — follows all the rules, obeys the teacher, but otherwise she might just as well not be in the room.

We could well formulate a new set of questions about this little girl:

Who is the child who needs a good deal of help in making social contacts with the other children? — Christina.

Who is the child who may be "good" partly because of undue timidity? — Christina.

Who is the child who may be so troubled by the emotional problems she brings to school with her from home that she will need very special attention before she is at ease in this classroom? — Christina.

Who is the subdued little child in the room who may in reality be a more seriously maladjusted child than any of the lively disobedient ones? — Christina.

The Real Problem

The obstreperous children are classroom problems, no doubt about it. The teacher cannot let them upset the class and run wild.

But here is a plea for the forgotten Christina, the mousy, quiet, conforming little children. More often than not, they are the ones who may present social and emotional maladjustments of a really deep-seated nature. The psychologists tell us this, over and over again. It is not Johnny, who dashes so wildly and noisily up to see the mouse, whose activity should worry us. It is rather Christina