

JUST A LITTLE BIT SICK

The dread of every teacher's life is the misconception that when a child is a "little bit sick" she is no health threat to other children. Doctors tell us that if a child has a temperature at 4 p.m. in the afternoon, he should not be sent to school the following day. A temperature is always less in the morning. I have known pre-schools where a teacher greeted each child with a flashlight and proceeded to peer down each and every little throat. To be consistent, each child should then have been stripped and checked for pityriasis rosea or ringworm. Such cautions may prevent contagion but they are also causing the child to be treated like a potential leper. I think children can be welcomed of a morning by a teacher genuinely delighted to see each child, a teacher who is interested in the new shoes, coat, mittens, clear, bright eyes, and happy, rosy face.

In the same manner, surely a parent can entertain reasonable doubts as to the health of the child if a normally happy child is grumpy. In our climate, a little upper respiratory congestion is almost standard; a little runny nose and a slight cough in an otherwise happy, energetic child is not enough to keep him home. Much/^{un-}sightly mucous, on the other hand, calls for a visit to the doctor. If the cause is innocuous, the doctor will perhaps at least prescribe some medication that will dry up the mucous. A child with a mucous-encrusted nose is as unsightly to view for a teacher as for another child.

Peers and teachers alike will inadvertently find reasons not to look at him.

Conversely, most children relish a little hypochondria. Did Anna not play just with Susan yesterday? When Susan can be a little bit too sick to go to school, reap attention from concerned parents, and avoid making a social adjustment. Children who have been ill (really) for some days are sometimes welcomed back in our Schools by giving them the flat to hold during opening ceremonies. They are only "sometimes" welcomed back in this manner for I learned long ago that each child would like to hold the flag every day and if staying out of School (a little bit sick) for a day or would accomplish this...? Voila!

Children are interested in everything, particularly the morbid. The subjects of conversation they have to draw on are few, but self is one that is endlessly interesting. "I have a hurt on my hand." "I have an owee on my knee." "See, if I pick the scab off like this-- it'll bleed." Self is only interesting if something has happened.. preferably bad. I only like to ^{hear} and will listen to cheerful, happy things and say so and greatly limit the post mortem conversations.

Children are suggestible. If one child has an ailment and concern is shown for his affliction, all the others consider developing it too. Allergies are popular and before we limited these as intriguing topics of conversation, each child had created a new and bizarre allergy for himself. Some were allergic to raisons with soy sauce, some to spinach (aren't all children?) etc., but it was Stevie who topped them all by announcing grandly, "I am allergice to lions!"