

THE SHY GUY

Julie hung back. Julie was always hanging back. Or sitting on the side lines. While the other children skipped and hopped and galloped and trotted, Julie sat on the side lines. Watching. Watching. With her face closed.

Could she hear? Yes, she could hear. Could she see? Yes, she could see. Was there an unhappy situation at home? No. Was she rejected by her peers? No. Badgered by her peers? No. She was ignored. She seemed content enough but nothing moved her to action or reaction.

Many children when faced with new situations withdraw into themselves until they see how things are going, see that errors beget learning, are welcomed and accepted, and then they gradually enter the stream of cooperative work and play. Occasinnally there is a child who resists every persuasive ploy.

Once we had ascertained that there was no apparent reason for Julie's taciturnity (not truculence) we could run a time-check on Julie's behavior to gather clues. This meant that at specific times in each class, the teacher would make a special check on what Julie was doing, her performance and her attitude. I coalesced the results and found a pattern of quiet, low-level cooperation and quite adequate performance on programmed materials. Where she was specifically required to follow directions and perform she did well. When she was not specifically required to act, she did nothing.

Meanwhile, she trailed in with her closed face each morning and maintained a wary vigilance throughout the day. She had isolated

herself, yet our check showed she was cooperative when expected to be. Expected. Requested. Because other children performed in certain ways, Julie did not assume she should do the same. We expected her to make that assumption. I wondered. How did she know that?

The next morning I greeted Julie and took her aside. I told her how much I liked having her in our School. We talked of happiness and smiles, of sharing happiness, of making others happy. I smiled at her and asked her for a return smile. Slowly the smile came. I was ecstatic. Like an anemone, she began to open up as I became plainly more excited and happy. A little astonishment was mixed in as she began to chatter and realized I cared what she said and how she felt and looked.

Everyone enjoyed Julie that day as we all remarked on how much brighter the day was when children were not only happy but showed their happiness. I wonder if we can assume that children know what behavior we expect and would welcome? As in Julie's case, it sometimes helps - ~~t~~ works wonders to simply tell a child how much happier the day is when she actively helps to make it so. A child, I think, needs to know her happy, active participation is not only expected but welcome and appreciated.

Julie continues to surprise us and make us speculate. Like yesterday. A new child sat withdrawn. "What do you suppose is the matter?" I asked Julie. "Oh, she 's just shy," said Julie and then added. "You know, when you're shy....everybody thinks you're good!"