

PHILOSOPHIZING ABOUT THE NATURE AND THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

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and conclusively from his limited supply of facts is better educated than the man who has gone through the schools, possesses encyclopaedic knowledge stored away in air-tight compartments, it is readily seen that the mere tot before he has ever seen a book may begin the attainment of those abilities. It is also evident that multitudes of children are passing through the consecutive grades without even beginning the acquirement of an education. What they have learned is as useless to them as the layman's carload of bricks, the ignorant bride's biscuit materials, or the minute knowledge of the would-be author who cannot see the forest for the trees.

The Primary Grades of Dominant Importance.

The first year of school is a crucial period. Then is the time to begin the real process of education.

The children come from various environments. One who has never been to school a day may be better educated than another can be within two years. To one the language of the school may be virtually a foreign language. The teacher must discover deficiencies or encumbrances arising from poor environment and supply or eradicate them. Inhibitions, marked by bashfulness, must be removed. On the other hand, judicious repression may be necessary in some cases. In many cases, the teaching of phonics and reading will be the least important of the tasks incumbent upon the teacher of first-year pupils.

To the foregoing ends, the teacher will find it to her advantage to group a large grade into small classes for much of the work. Many children cannot be taught successfully in a large group. And none should be forced to attempt to give attention for a long period of instruction. To give it is an injury to the child; to fail to give it is fatal to the child's future attainments, for, mind you, the very first goal in the educational process is that of developing the power of attention. Without such development the child's educational possibilities are already eclipsed. And the child needing such cultivation most is the one to suffer most when an attempt is made to hold the attention of a large group for a long period.

Three minutes several times a day given to a slow pupil will be worth more to him than the whole day given a group of forty of which it is a handicapped member. An hour a day, in fifteen minute periods, will prove of more value to any homogeneous group of ten of forty pupils than the whole school period spent with the group as a whole. Recitation benches should be no longer strangers to a modern school room. However, groups may be formed at the desks. Of course the first groupings will be more or less experimental. Transfers can be made at any time.

Many a time a backward child simply needs patient coaching or constant drilling till the cue is recognized. When Helen Keller's teacher attempted to reach the insulated mind of her blind and deaf and dumb pupil by a certain touch which was intended to signify water day after day passed without progress. Losing her patience one day, the teacher soused the child's head under the pump flow and then made a succession of the touches. Light broke. The mind, closed up formerly as tight as an oyster in its shell, was at once vitalized. The child led the teacher about all the afternoon swiftly learning the touch name of various objects. Helen Keller was that hour of the pump incident saved from a life of absolute mental and social isolation.

An Example from the Writer's Personal Experience.

I was teaching a group of thirty pupils or more, including one beginner and small groups of various advancement up to a small class in Latin. Such a task was the usual thing with teachers forty to fifty years ago. I started the beginner on a reading chart. There were a picture of the traditional cat, a cat and the cat—also the phrase *it is* on the first page. It took days to perfect her recognition of those three word groups. But no let-up occurred till they were mastered. Two or three times a day an advanced pupil, thus paying his tuition fee, taught her a few minutes. I taught her one or two five-minute periods. Directly she could not have been held back. And before the five-month term expired she deliberately walked up to the class in which her brother three or four years older was making slow headway on the poor foundation he had received and ended the term in his arithmetic, reading, and spelling classes. She could read glibly in Holmes' Third Reader, spell well in the

CONCURRING WITH THE EDITOR'S VIEWS ON SCHOOL WORK

By ARNOLD A. MCKAY.

I commend wholeheartedly your articles on teachers. Having spent more than fifteen years in the classroom (not the front office) I concur substantially in all you say about the profession. It is lamentably true that the profession does not any longer attract the best men; and I can show this briefly by a personal citation.

While working toward my master's degree at Chapel Hill in 1915, I was given charge of two sections of sub-freshman English. (To begin with, entrusting to an inexperienced teacher students already handicapped is always putrid pedagogy; but the professors couldn't be bothered with them.) These men had had defective preparations in English. But many of them were really ineducable, dull, and quite congenitally unfitted to do college work. It was the beginning, however, of the Age of Every Man a College Man Whether or No. We muddled through somehow. A decade later I took a job with a textbook concern traveling the state. Imagine my amazement and chagrin to find a dozen and more of my former star pupils occupying lucrative administrative positions in our school system! That is a fact; and if anybody doubts it, I have my class rolls.

The Schools No Place for the Money-Conscious.

Similarly, this hullabaloo about poor salaries for teachers leaves me unimpressed. Of course teachers should be paid more. That is, some of them should. If a teacher becomes money-conscious, however, the sooner he leaves the profession and returns to his natural element, trading the better it will be for the group of humanity he is trying to serve. My own conviction is that no natural-born teacher is going to leave the profession because he is not being paid enough, any more than a conscientious preacher will desert his spiritual pasture for the same reason. After all it takes a surprisingly small amount of the filthy stuff for intelligent folk to live on. If hard times shakes out a few of the pretentious noise-makers in education and sends them to fatten by getting and taking profits, nobody loses anything.

Furthermore, we must not forget that all of our state-supported institutions of higher learning grew out of bounds, like Florida's swamp sites, during the era of easy credit. Teachers' colleges over the state are turning out between 1,000 and 1,500 teachers every commencement after two-

Harrington Speller class, and was working arithmetic astonishingly well.

The point is: that little girl in a group of thirty or forty might have been left in the lurch and handicapped for life. As it was, those first days of patient work prepared the way for the most remarkable experience I had in a period of more than a score of years as a teacher. She had to have the cue. There are other insulators besides those of blindness and deafness. Dullards in the senior class may possibly owe their state to failures that might have been avoided in the first grade.

Don't Be Afraid of Breaking Up the Grade.

But the average teacher of this day can scarcely conceive of teaching forty or fifty pupils broken up into several groups. As usual, I know what I am talking about. At Burgaw just forty years ago I was teaching a group of sixty pupils grading all the way up from the primer to algebra and other high school subjects. My only help was that of one of the grown girls who helped me part of the day—three hours, I believe—in payment of her tuition. Yet no pupil had fewer than four recitations a day, and the progress was generally satisfactory. In such a case, the smallness of the class groups multiplies the classes considerably more than the desired grouping in a single grade will. The old-time teacher simply had to know how to make his time count. I have taught two arithmetic classes many a day at the same time, also two spelling classes. But you may bet your life that they were thoroughly drilled. Those arithmetic classes were not allowed to bring in their solved problems on paper. They had to "work" them before the eyes of the teacher, and not only those in the book but as many off-hand ones involving the principle at issue as was necessary to establish the fact that they understood the principle and its application.

Teachers Should Be Unfettered.

Grouping the pupils of the grades, from the first grade up to eleventh, should be found not only feasible but inspiring to the highest efforts on the part of both those of few and those of many talents. The former get the teaching and drill they so badly need; the latter are not bored to a frazzle with teaching they do not need. But

year nominal "training." At Chapel Hill, Raleigh, and Greensboro we have institutions quite creditable to a southern state. Deans, departments, "crip" courses, and ineducable students multiplied and thrived rather shamelessly in the good old days; and have now become a state burden since no more money can be borrowed. Now it's their turn to do a little scraping of the bottom of the barrel for patriotic purposes. All their data about salaries and such would have greater credence were it not for two facts: first, in good times salaries were higher at these colleges than at other colleges and universities of similar rank; and second, they are still maintaining, or trying to maintain, duplicating functions which in any policy of state retrenchment should be summarily discarded for reasons of economy if for nothing else.

The State Liberal to the Schools.

It is nonsense to talk about how rich we are. Only 6 of the 48 states have a lower per capita wealth than we—all southern states. Is there anyone sanguine enough to say that, compared with our sister commonwealths, we have not done munificently well by our children of school age? Incidentally and unfortunately, we have a higher per capita indebtedness, not only of any southern state, but of any state that makes up our union. A hard fact, but a true one that we must face for years to come.

We do need more money to spend wisely in education. But where is it coming from? If we must have a sales tax, let it be a graduated one—one beginning, say, at 1-2 of 1 per cent. on the necessities of life and extending fan-wise to a 5 per cent. and even 10 per cent. tax on non-necessaries and so-called luxuries like Packards, fur coats, cocktail shakers, 25-cent cigars, women radio speakers, *et cetera*; with no amount limit. As for other tax sources, it is not at all likely that any of our robust industrial cows will stand for another pail.

We are in a sorry mess financially. I don't know the answer. The teachers, like other intelligent minorities, helped to get us in this fix, spent much of the money. Now they can help get us out if they will stop whining, tell us where the money can be got; and keep scraping the barrel. That's it. Keep scraping the barrel! For it is written: "The barrel of meal shall not waste . . . until the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

No dictation of the progress any student shall make, whether slow or rapid, should be imposed by a "course of study." If teachers are fit for their jobs, they are better judges of the progress their pupils should make than the makers of a general course of study. Yet I should advise that the very brightest remain in the school the full term of years. Let them study Latin, geometry, trigonometry, extend their work in literature, history and the sciences, and thoroughly subsoil the other subjects that many of the pupils can only scratch the surface of.

On the other hand, if it takes ten years for a slow poke to master the material comprised in the first five years of the course, keep him at it that long or let him quit school. Whoever knows the contents of the texts of the first five years probably has a better fact foundation for the formation of a philosophy of life than Dean House's Socrates had. But if such a pupil passes through all the grades and comes out without an understanding of any of them as many are doing, his whole time has been wasted, and also the teachers' time. Only thoroughly mastered facts and theories can contribute to that intangible web called education or culture.

Organization and regimentation may be the key to successful mass production in the industries, but not in the schools.

Teachers should be permitted to allow every student to accomplish what he can, but to suffer him to attempt no more than he can successfully master. Thus may the task be gauged to the intellect and adapted to either the abstract-minded or the thing-minded.

I have been trying to find a quitting place for this discussion for more than a month. I foresee now only a discussion of vocational education and moral and spiritual training.

Liquor And Socialism

Editor of The State's Voice:

When a man of the type of John Sprunt Hill fathers a bill to socialize liquor in North Carolina, it is evident that the liquor people of the State are willing to enact a socialistic law, provided it will make liquor available.

If the State is to go into the liquor business,
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