

I Have Returned to Teaching

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I AM BACK in the schoolroom again. I am finding as much adventure and satisfaction as if I had donned a uniform or gone into a shop.

Naturally, this return to teaching called for many types of adjustment. For example, this past summer I had to give up many pleasures that I have heretofore enjoyed during that season, such as playing golf, traveling, and enjoying swimming and sun baths at my summer cottage.

The first thing that I, and people like me, have had to do is to rearrange my personal life. The basic readjustment has been the apportioning of time to satisfy the new claims upon it and still give proper consideration to those who already had a right to my attention. The children in school and their parents can expect a certain amount of the teacher's time; yet my own family circle must not be neglected.

You may have wondered how the schools of 1943 impress the men and women who are returning to the profession after years of absence and what adjustments they are finding necessary as they resume responsibilities as teachers. Mrs. John R. LaClear, teacher in the elementary grades in Stanton, Mich., is one of the many former teachers re-entering the profession. Of her return she writes: "Many people have said, 'If I had my job to do over again, how differently I would do it.' Few people are fortunate enough to have the second chance. This is our opportunity and we hope we can do the job as our mature reflection indicates it should be done."

Just the matter of maintaining a home is a problem. Many of us are finding it necessary to carry on almost all of our former duties in the home in addition to our regular school work. Because it is practically impossible to hire help, some of us are preparing the family meals and keeping the house clean. Although a few returning teachers are fortunate in having husbands, brothers, sisters, or parents who can help in some measure, even then household duties take up much of the time outside of school hours. Perhaps the only way of finding the extra time required is to curtail social activities, which is regrettable. Yet we will have little time or energy left after our full day's work.

All of us will be faced with the problem of adjusting ourselves to the thinking, the vocabulary, and the group habits of children. While they are no less stimulating and challenging than adults, they present an entirely different problem. We will also have to bring back into use a long-forgotten, subject-matter background which is essential in guiding children's experiences.

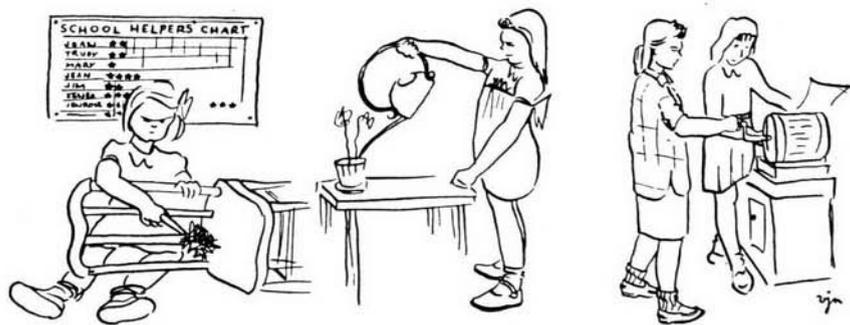
Perhaps the most important problem we face in common is that of adjusting ourselves to the newer trends in education. We know this type of teaching is more difficult because it takes more organization and planning on the part of the teacher and requires her to have a broader background of knowledge. However, there are certain things in

our favor. Our years of living, in which we have had the opportunity to observe the results of the older methods of teaching, have convinced us that the newer methods, properly carried out, should produce superior results. This conviction should make it easier for us to adopt the best of modern practices.

Another factor in our favor in making personal adjustments is that in many cases we are teaching in our own communities where we have known many of our pupils from the time they were babies. We know the strong and the weak points of the parents. We know the type of training each child has had in the home. We know the status of the child in his group of friends and in the community. We are likely to have a sympathetic understanding of these children and to know just where they need help. We know the value of making some of these children realize that they do have a place in the group and that there are some areas where they can make a contribution. We know that many of these children will lead happier lives if they learn to accept their limita-

tions and are made aware of their strong points. We understand the importance of developing leadership in children. We know how unhappy both children and adults can be when these elements in their education have been neglected. We believe that, even though we are very close to the situations in our communities, we can be objective about them.

A third factor in our adjustment to newer educational trends is the opportunity we have had to observe the needs of people in community life. After working for years on committees of various clubs and other organizations, we realize that the shortcomings of many adults may be traced to inadequate training as children. There are many ways in which children need help other than in academic areas. We realize the value of teaching children to participate democratically in group discussions. Too often opposing ideas arouse personal enmity because youngsters have not learned to accept the give-and-take of democratically conducted discussions.



Sketch by Vera Nelson
 Courtesy of Manitowoc (Wis.) Public Schools

We feel that having the children plan the work of the day with the teacher and take responsibility for carrying these plans through to a successful and satisfying culmination will make them better citizens in their community and home. We believe that the children who have had this training will grow into adults well prepared to participate in group discussions, committee work, and similar community activities. We believe they will not be satisfied to let one or two persons furnish all the ideas, do all the planning, and provide the leadership, while they sit back accumulating an inertia that is difficult to overcome.

After observing the apathy and gullibility of many people in civic affairs, we have reached the conclusion that children must be trained to do some critical thinking of their own. They must develop an ability to reason logically. It is important that we foster a questioning attitude and a desire to find the true solution to problems. Only in this way can we help them to defend themselves against propaganda, demagogues, and pressure groups.

The adjustment to newer methods by returning teachers is being facilitated by the fact that most of us long ago were convinced that the authoritarian type of discipline, which was still in good repute when we taught before, does nothing to help a child become a good citizen. It ignores the need for aiding a child to set up desirable standards of conduct based on the welfare of the group. It is likely to result in anything but good citizenship. Any initiative the child might possess tends to atrophy. The system may result in his being trained in underhanded methods, and, in some extreme cases,

developing a streak of meanness that actually produces a lasting effect on his personality.

We can recall no school in our day of teaching where children had a chance to think through a situation and plan rules of conduct by which the group should be governed. Why didn't we see then that such a method would be a most effective way to teach good citizenship, as well as relieve us of the problems of discipline? For it is amazing to see how easily children follow rules which they themselves have set up. It is interesting to see the difference this single change has made in the attitude of the children toward the teacher. In most cases the teacher has become a friend whose advice is sought, rather than a dictator whose authority is challenged on every possible occasion.

A fifth factor that stands us in good stead is the belief that the tool subjects have been better developed in good modern schools than under former methods. These subjects are being taught in situations that make them meaningful; the child feels an actual need for developing these skills and using them. As average consumers, returning teachers realize the importance of this functional use of skills perhaps better than many teachers who have not had as much practical experience.

While we approve of the general direction in which modern education is moving, we will have to exercise care in order to avoid the mistakes that have been made by some teachers. In some instances, teachers have failed to organize and plan their procedure and, in their desire to follow what they have mistakenly supposed to be modern methods, have simply turned the chil-

dren loose. We feel that the effect on the child of the resulting anarchy and chaos is often more damaging than that of older methods of teaching.

If those of us who are returning to teaching are to be more than "stop-gap" teachers and become really effective, we could use certain types of help while on the job. We could profitably talk over common problems and exchange ideas with fellow-teachers under expert leadership. We could benefit by opportunities to have assistance on special problems from experts in various fields. We would be helped by opportunities to see good teachers in action. It would aid us greatly to have suggestions from reliable sources of appropriate educational materials. It would be stimulating to have professional reading material made available.

While it is true that we haven't the vivacity and spontaneity of the younger teachers, we hope that the wisdom we have gained from our years of living, the broad, general background we have acquired from reading and travel, and the patience, tolerance, and understand-

ing we have built up after years of contact with people will in some measure compensate.

Many of us are returning to teaching because we feel that it is the field in which we can render the best service and where we are most needed at this time. Since for most of us there exists no particular economic necessity for continuing in the profession after the need is removed, we believe that the majority will be content to return to their homes when the supply of teachers again meets the demand. There, perhaps, may be some cases where women are tempted to remain in the profession because they enjoy the independence they have gained through being a wage-earner once more. These cases probably will not be numerous enough to constitute a threat to younger teachers.

Many people have said, "If I had my job to do over again, how differently I would do it." Few people are fortunate enough to have the second chance. This is our opportunity and we hope we can do the job as our mature reflection indicates it should be done.



If a little knowledge is dangerous, where is the man who has so much as to be out of danger?—Thomas Henry Huxley, *On Elemental Instruction in Physiology*.

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