

## Giving Children a Balanced Program\_\_\_\_\_

DAISY PARTON

PROBABLY NO OTHER SKILLS of our times are more greatly needed by the individual than skill in understanding his world and in living effectively with others in this world. Today those of us who teach elementary school children may well ask ourselves: Are we helping these children grow most effectively in an understanding of their world? Are we helping them recognize and meet effectively their problems of individual and group living? Are we helping them grow in ability to live and work democratically with others as they attack their problems of living?

A well-balanced elementary school program will include among its other phases socializing experiences, or a social program which will lead toward growth in these directions. Time was when the learning of organized facts in geography, history, civics, and science was considered sufficient to develop in children socio-civic understandings and abilities. Now, many elementary school teachers have moved away from this

concept of selection and organization and are attempting to build a more flexible social program in terms of the needs of a particular group of children. As this trend has developed, the criticism frequently has been made that the content of the social program has been unbalanced or "too thin" and has been inadequate in guiding children toward a growing and widening understanding of their environment—in helping them develop meanings and sensitivities, in helping them meet in an adequate way their personal and social problems of living. Controversy also has arisen out of the fact that some teachers seem to consider the learning activities and the ways of working together fundamental and the content of the program relatively unimportant.

It is highly essential that those of us who teach children look at all the aspects involved in providing a well-balanced social program. Certainly, the types of activities, the ways of working together, and the content all are fundamental and interrelated in the development of a well-rounded social program, and in each of these balance must be considered.

### *Choosing Learning Activities*

As ways of communication and transportation have improved, the school slowly has made use of the more varied means of learning and expression. Types of learning activities which make a

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*The skill of fitting into this world doesn't just "come natural." And for lack of it many persons suffer unhappiness and frustration. Daisy Parton of the College of Education, University of Alabama, suggests that a well-balanced social program in elementary school can help boys and girls to grow in the ability to live and work with other persons. In this article, Miss Parton discusses balance in the curriculum to promote social growth.*

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well-balanced program may be classified roughly in three areas.

First, there are those learning activities through which children gain information and develop and extend meanings. A balanced variety of these would include the use of excursions, films and slides, pictures, the radio, environmental materials, experiments, reading materials, maps and charts, conferences and interviews with people, and class discussion and sharing of ideas. All are important in extending and enlarging children's experiences and in developing meanings.

A second type of learning activity is that which gives children work experience in relation to their problems of group living. This work may grow out of experiences such as raising and caring for animals, cultivating flowers and vegetables, arranging and caring for materials in the classroom, making and keeping the surroundings clean and attractive, collecting needed salvage, preparing and serving food, selling wanted articles, conserving materials and property, and caring for and helping younger children. A variety of work activities such as digging, hoeing, cooking, cleaning, laundering, feeding animals, buying, selling, and collecting are fundamental in providing a well-rounded social program for children.

A third type of learning activity is that which helps children express and organize their ideas. In this classification would be included painting, modeling, building and constructing, weaving and sewing, dramatizing, singing and composing, dancing, writing stories and poems, making charts and maps, and discussing and sharing ideas. A well-balanced variety of such activities fur-

thers expression, clarification, and organization of children's ideas and plays a significant role in the formation of attitudes.

Each of these three types of learning activities is interrelated and important in providing a balanced social program for children. Each, too, calls for the development of certain skills or techniques as they are used. For example, skill in reading, speech, writing, the use of art materials, or the use of tools are needed as children engage in the various learning activities.

#### *How Shall We Work Together?*

What ways of working together on the part of children and teachers will best achieve the growth desired for children through the social program? Certainly, democratic ways of working together are basic and play a vital part in the formation of attitudes and behavior patterns.

Working together, democratically, children have opportunity to face and recognize their own problems—opportunity to engage in experiences suited to their varied interests and needs. They have opportunity to think through their problems and to work out plans for solving them. They assume responsibility for carrying out plans and engage in various activities leading to the solution of their problems. They evaluate from time to time the results of their work and share in the pleasures of accomplishment or the problems of failure.

The teacher, as a guide, helps children identify their problems and think them through in terms of which ones are suitable to work on at the time. She leads them to do their best thinking and

planning, to find their difficulties, and to see the varied possibilities in the solution of their problems. She provides opportunity for group relationships through which the children as they work together are helped (1) to develop a feeling of group belongingness, (2) to make friends, (3) to grow in individual and group responsibility, and (4) to develop a respect for the rights of others.

Democratic relationships and ways of working such as described above are fundamental in helping children learn to live and work democratically with others. However, they cannot operate effectively apart from significant content in the social program.

#### *Putting Balance Into Content*

How can an effective balance in the content of the social program be achieved? In discussing this question, it is important to recognize that a number of factors influence the development of a well-rounded content in the social program for children, and several types of balances must be taken into consideration.

*The physical versus the social environment.* A well-balanced social program will lead children into a growing understanding of both their physical and social environment. It will guide them toward intelligent and wise use of the resources of their environment. It will help them grow in social sensitivity and in ability to live and work cooperatively with individuals and groups. The content of the social program, therefore, should provide balanced experiences growing out of the fields of both social studies and science. These experiences should be developed

in such a way as to emphasize the interrelationships between the physical and social environment.

*Balance in terms of areas of living.* One of the basic purposes of the social program is to help children understand and meet more intelligently their problems of living. Children in their school and community life face problems arising from various areas of living, such as health, safety, conservation, consumption, citizenship, etc. In a balanced social program, the children will grow in understanding and ability to meet their problems in all these areas. Teachers profitably may make use of the areas of living as a check list for looking at balance.

*The "near" versus the "far"; the "now" versus the "long ago."* Children in every grade of the elementary school need to gain a deepened understanding of their immediate environment. In the same way they need at all ages to extend and enlarge their environment in both time and space. Children's concepts of "near" and "far" and "now" and "long ago" change as they grow in years and experience. The younger child's interest in the "far" and the "long ago" may be more incidental and transient than that of the older one; yet at every grade level there is a shuttle-like interest in both the "near" and "far" and also the "long ago" and "now." Each deepens and reinforces the meaning of the other. Perhaps this interest most often begins with the "here" and "now" and leads out in a comparative way to the "far" or to the "long ago."

A balanced social program, providing experiences in harmony with the maturity of the children, will develop increased sensitivity to the child's im-

mediate environment, and will lead toward a widening of this environment in both time and space. It will cause children to face and meet their immediate problems of living and at the same time foster experiences which help them become a part of ever-widening groups. At every grade level, the "near," the "far," the "now," and the "long ago" are necessary to provide a balanced social program.

*Short versus extended experiences.* Another important factor making for a well-rounded content in the social program is a balance between the short and more or less incidental problems and the larger or more extended ones. Many very effective learning situations result from the short, incidental experiences of the social program. Likewise, the small, immediate problems of living which children face and solve "on the spot" bring valuable learnings. Children, however, need to engage in experiences and solve problems which call for more extended thinking, planning, and working on their part. As they become older they should grow in ability to make plans which extend over a longer period of time, to set goals further in the future, and to work and accept responsibility over a longer period of time in achieving these goals. The meaning of an extended experience or problem varies, too, with the maturity of the children. With 6- and 7-year-olds, the evolving of the experience might call for planning and work over a period of a few days while with 10- and 11-year-olds it might require several weeks.

The various factors mentioned above

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The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.—Emerson,  
*Lectures and Biographical Sketches: Education.*

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for *Toward a New Curriculum*, the 1944 Yearbook of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, N. E. A., is announced on the last page of this month's *Educational Leadership*. The volume will deal with extending educational opportunities to persons of all ages—from the very young boys and girls in nursery school to adults who have long since wound up their conventional schooling. *Toward a New Curriculum* will be released early in 1944 and will be received by members of this Department as a part of their membership privileges. Sale price of the yearbook will be \$2.

all play a part in achieving balance in the content of the social program. It should be kept in mind, too, that the age level and maturity of the children, their background, and their environment are vital considerations in relation to a well-rounded content. Balance, too, must be looked at in terms of both the yearly program and the entire elementary school period.

A variety of learning activities, democratic ways of working together, a well-balanced content—all are inter-related and basic in providing a well-rounded social program in the elementary school, in helping children develop skill in understanding their world, and in living effectively with others in that world.

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