

The Skills We Want for Our Children

● MARY M. TIMMS

THE SCHOOL'S JOB in helping the child develop skills is similar to that of building an equilateral, four-sided pyramid. Each side must join another side, and all are equally important. To separate them would destroy the whole structure. In like manner must the skills of the child be coordinated.

One plane of the pyramid is the developing of physical strength and muscular coordination, not just in a few children so that the team may win, but the helping of every child to reach his peak of health and vigor.

A second plane is the learning of mechanical skills and the development of manual dexterity in the use of modern tools. Failure to understand the forces leading to the evolution of familiar gadgets puts the race in danger of becoming button-pushing robots.

A third plane is the training of memory to acquire the factual data of mathematics, history, literature, arts, science, and languages. The schools today have been progressive in teaching more rapid reading, thus enabling the children to cover more easily the enormous amount of ground required by an ever-expanding subject matter. Facility in the use of both written and spoken language should be stressed. If a fact cannot be put into words, it is not really understood.

The fourth plane of the pyramid is the improving of social techniques. Mutual appreciation, a growing together, and a give-and-take attitude should be fostered, not only between

pupils, but between pupil and teacher as well. Spurring the young hopefuls on with the old cut-throat, competitive system of "let's see who can be first" does three vicious things: brings out smugness in the winner; leaves the losers with heartache, resentment, or bruised ego; and sets the teacher apart as the Judge interested primarily in "firsts." Why pit one child against another? Does it make him learn any faster? No. But it does make him feel that the boy across the aisle is his enemy, whereas he should think of him as a brother with a common aim. Comprehension of and use of language play an all-important part in this ability to respect and be respected by one's fellow men. To be articulate is a rare attribute. To understand is innate good manners.

One needed habit applicable to all four planes is the completing of a task. The separation of the day into thirty minutes of this and forty minutes of that turns children into clock-watchers suffering from dispersed attention, rather than developing a "let's get it done as perfectly as possible" attitude. Even adults feel frustrated at having to abandon an activity just as enthusiasm has been aroused. Punishment to the nerves and much thwarting of good, healthy drive results from the 1-2-3 shift program.

A curriculum which develops the child physically, manually, mentally, and socially, combined with a comprehension of language, will furnish the skills needed for modern living.

These are parents' pages. Here two mothers discuss the proficiencies and philosophies they would like to have their children acquire. Mary M. Timms—a Chicagoan recently moved to Washington, D. C., to join her husband now working there—has a 14-year-old daughter, who is a gregarious youngster with a special interest in sports, particularly horse-back riding. Her 20-year-old son is in the Army Air Corps. Virginia S. Stadle and her three daughters, ages 8, 13, and 15, live at their lakeside home near Battle Creek, Mich., while the father of the family serves with the U. S. Navy at the Naval Hospital in Farragut, Idaho. The girls delight in swimming and boating in the summer and skating in the winter, they are conscientious students, and one of them has a special talent for ballet and toe dancing.

● VIRGINIA S. STADLE

WITHIN the revolutionary maelstrom now engulfing the world, we who are parents of the younger generation clutch at the fast-diminishing remnants of what we have considered normalcy.

But none of us disputes the fact that normalcy for our children, whose nurture and training is committed to us, will be very different from the comfortable life we have known and enjoyed—"comfortable" because it is so definitely a thing of the past, holding no fears or uncertainties for any of us.

Neither can the most optimistic of us deny that our children, as they become adults, will face immediately following the war a world which will challenge the intelligent, frighten the bold, tempt the strong, frustrate the mediocre, and defeat the weak.

Therefore, we ask ourselves daily, "What skills do we want for our children? What can we give them here and now which will make for stability and security in an unstable future? How can we so teach them that *their* children may look, as we did, into a 'rosy' future?"

For a number of years our main concern may have been to equip them to manage their physical comforts when they have outgrown our care (for comfort had become a "must" until two years ago and was one of the milestones of our century).

But we have begun to think more clearly these last two years in respect to values and are sincerely trying to put first things first. Now, when our children are old enough to go to Sunday school, later to school, and, sooner than seems possible to us, to participate in community activities, we discover that the really important skills for them to have learned are those emphasized universally by those who strive to serve youth.

We begin to understand that there can be no straight line separating religion learned by our children at home from that taught in Sunday school or deeds observed within their experience.

So we want for our children not wealth with which to buy "things," nor power with which to drive others, but cooperation, tolerance, judgment, honor, and reverence; also, the desire to turn their talents and abilities to help persons who might benefit therefrom. We know that with these they can ably and zealously carry over into the post-war period and to a third generation a certain spirit of democracy and the ideals of Christianity, upholding truth, honor, and justice in government and clinging tenaciously to noble spiritual goals.

And may there remain ". . . faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

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