

# Tools for Learning

## HELPING BOYS AND GIRLS UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES

LUCILE ALLARD

YOUNG PEOPLE discover their talents and defects through contacts with all sorts of educational material and equipment, and they should be given ample opportunity to select what seems to meet their particular needs.

Children can learn about themselves by working and playing with other human beings. Boys and girls understand themselves better as they become aware of what they can do for others. Children like live things! They learn their own possibilities for work through experiences with all sorts of living things, first, perhaps by planting a garden or arranging an aquarium, or starting bulbs, or caring for pets. Often children become conscious of the growth process by observing and helping younger brothers and sisters, or watching children in a nursery or kindergarten.

A child's better understanding of himself may be either hindered or promoted by his teachers and parents. He

may be confused if faced with conflicting purposes and demands put upon him by adults. In his struggle to find out what different teachers and parents expect of him, he loses perspective and fails to discover his real possibilities for accomplishment.

In the last decade, there has been a great movement toward adopting the philosophy and practice of educating the "whole child." An 8-year-old suggested with real insight why schools had failed to realize this objective. "That school was terrible," he said with feeling and sincerity. "They expected us to do a whole lot of work and didn't give us anything to do it with." A 15-year-old reminiscing his elementary school days said he heartily disliked arithmetic lessons because he hated to do a lot of work and not find out anything.

Adults can help children to understand themselves by making it possible for them to feel success in what they undertake and by encouraging each child to evaluate his own achievement and progress. Also, by providing materials suited to the children's needs. These needs can be determined through the aid of standard tests of achievement and through intelligence and aptitude tests. Careful observation of children at work and at play pays dividends in better understanding.

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*Introducing "Tools for Learning" this month is Lucile Allard, Supervisor of Elementary Education, Garden City, N. Y. Miss Allard traces means of helping boys and girls understand themselves, emphasizing that there could never be a lack of readiness in children for wanting to know, unless methods and materials for finding the answers are totally absent.*

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Children love to share the joys and sorrows of their story-book friends, to re-live adventure and biography, and to read about possible worlds to explore. Even more thrilling become reproductions of these stories in puppet and marionette shows, dramatic performances with costumes and scenery in the classroom or auditorium, and original stories reproduced on home-made slides, movies, or in the shadow theatre. Creative music, painting, and modeling, wood carving and book making have enrichment and self-realization possibilities that cannot be measured or evaluated in terms of school grades.

Much has been said and written of children's readiness for learning. It would seem short-sighted to assume that there ever could be a lack of readiness in children for wanting to know, unless methods and materials for finding the answers were totally lacking. The child wants to investigate and to experiment. His concentration on the job is continuous as long as he is successful in manipulating the necessary tools and understanding the content. When the manipulation and control of the material pass into the hands of others for a long period of time, the child's interest in the activity fades. This is exemplified in the young child's frequent pleas of "let me do it."

Mere lessons in appreciation of the arts must be replaced by lessons which discover what Bill, or Mary, or John can create and learn. Educators and laymen are coming into a new epoch of educational progress—a shift from academic training as an exclusive goal to cultural experience as preparation for life work and leisure.

Plans for a new world should be in

the hands of men and women who believe that human beings are really priceless and not expendable, and the young people must be urged to help make plans for the better world. No expenditures should be considered too high for the education and preservation of all children both in school and out. Helping boys and girls understand themselves means, first, to help more teachers and parents appreciate and understand more children.

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*Next month Agnes Snyder will introduce "Helping Boys and Girls Understand Our Times."*

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