

# The Changing World

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## WHEN JOHNNY HELPED THE VILLAGE SMITHY

IN DAYS OF OLD, when Johnny helped the village smithy, community life was carried on in such a manner and at such a tempo that children and youth took part in many if not most of the common pursuits. Before the day of wide use of non-human energy in home, shop, and field, it required the help of most every member of the community—young and old, male and female—to produce enough to eat, to wear, and to provide habitation and other essentials. In that pre-industrial age, economic factors made it almost imperative that the young share in the day's toil.

As Mary helped in the wide variety of household enterprises of soap-making, candle-dipping, carding, spinning, weaving, cooking and baking, caring for younger children, and the endless list of production activities of that time, she partook of two kinds of learning: first, she learned to do useful things and to understand and value them; but at the same time she learned "people." As Mary worked at these tasks, from her elders—her mother, aunts, grandmother, and neighbors—she heard discussions that gave her ideas and standards of human conduct. The essential lessons of Mary's day were learned from people at whose side she worked.

The same was true for Johnny. The smithy, for whom Johnny pumped the fire bellows and ran errands, was a man's man. He not only taught the boy-apprentice the skills and mysteries of his craft, but he taught Johnny the mysteries of living. For good or evil, and usually for the good, the elder shared his outlook on life with the younger. Together they felt the satisfaction of work well done at the end of a strenuous day of labor.

In most American communities today the tasks of making the things we use have been removed from the self-sufficient frontier home or from the intimate workshops once run by the village smithy and his fellow-craftsmen. These tasks have been absorbed by modern machines. No longer is it possible or desirable for children and youth to spend their tender years in child labor. Factory organization is such today that the elders could not, if they would, easily and naturally induct the youth into adulthood at the side of a continuously moving assembly line.

As a result of this mechanization, the school has been given a vastly difficult job to do in providing for our young the chance to learn from people. When we reorganized our economy and excluded children and youth from working beside their elders, we lost a

learning setup most valuable. No amount of reading out of school books or looking at pictures or listening to recordings will by itself ever be a satisfactory substitute for the lessons the elders taught Mary and Johnny. The educational consequences of so new a

responsibility will be a major issue for decades to come. Unless schools can discover ways by which children can learn from people, the culture itself stands to lose a powerful instrument for its preservation and continuous improvement.



## Notes on Working With a Group . . .

*Routine tricks aren't the whole show.* You can't sew discipline together out of rags. Often, especially when we get jittery or when misunderstanding superiors or colleagues put the thumb screws upon us for the wrong things—often, in that case, we develop an undue admiration for the organizational “gadget.” We develop the illusion that it could do the trick for us, would save us thinking, planning, loving, and understanding. Well, it won't.

If you overload your group atmosphere with the rattle of organizational machinery—try to have a “rule” for everything under the sun and another principle of revenge if that rule is broken for everything under the moon—you are just going to thwart your best efforts in the long run. Don't think you have to run around with your belt stuck full with guns and lollipops all the time either. Rely a little more on yourself, your “person” and your sense of humor. It saves you lots of headache and a load of disciplinary noise.

*The “mystery of personality” is good, when it works.* But it is a poor excuse for failure. This second statement is supposed to keep you from falling into the opposite extreme after reading the first. It is true that your personality and the way you get it across to children establishes most of what we usually call “respect” and “leadership.” However, there is no doubt that there is such a thing as the “everyday trifle” which is more easily settled through a rule or common agreement than by your magic gaze.

Children have—sometimes quite unconsciously—a need for regularity and predictability. If their whole life is dependent on the whims of your genius, that won't make them happy either and little frictions begin to increase. So—don't let your contempt for tricks lead you into mistaken contempt for all planning and organization as such.—Fritz Redl, *School of Public Affairs and Social Work of Wayne University, Detroit, Mich.*

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