

Let Youth Speak Its Mind

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GONE ARE THE DAYS when the aim of our American schools was to fill the child with hundreds of meaningless facts. Gone also is the teaching of valueless, functionless data that was "stuffed" into the minds of our young people, preserved in their memories in preparation for an examination only, and then thrown to the winds when examination day was over. Along with these departed educational practices there has also vanished the daily routine in which the history teacher sat at her desk and called out one question after another, up and down the rows of bored-faced children; and then marked in her record book a score, based on the child's pedantic, academic answer.

These procedures, we're sure, have left the schools which have re-adapted their philosophies in terms of living today. If any schools are still slaves to such practices, we pray that they are vanishing rapidly from the classroom scene.

For today it is an accepted concept that our schools are an integral part of the community, of life itself. And what goes on in the classroom should have a functional value for the child, here and now, in helping him adjust wholesomely and healthfully to his problems today, as well as those he'll face in the future.

"Current Events"—Open to Children

Of the various "areas of experience" in which the child engages at school, one which perhaps has seen a drastic change concerns

The belief that children in elementary schools can not deal with problems of economic and social significance is rapidly falling from grace with intelligent people. That the child should be given adequate opportunity to voice, as well as to examine his opinions is the premise of this article by Raymond Israel, classroom teacher, Washington, D. C., who indicates that news-problem discussions and classroom debates are some of the salient factors contributing to the mental and social stature of the growing child.

itself with "current events discussion," living with city, national and world news. We remember the days when, for a child to partake in discussion of current problems at home was taboo, when a child either had to "leave the room" while such conversation was going on, or had to be "seen, but not heard." It was in those days that the individuality of children was not considered. Children were looked upon as beings, passing through sort of a vacuumic stage in which their capacity to think was unimportant. These attitudes at home naturally affected practices at school.

As the calendar pages have turned and we have reached the 1940's, there has been a realization that children are thinking organisms whose practice in thinking prepares them more fully in adjusting to life. This realization has developed an awareness in educators that the task of the school has also changed. We now know that teachers can guide children in their efforts to attain well-balanced lives. Teachers have a responsibility in leading boys and girls so that they can find solutions to the problems which face them. This can be done only as it is possible for the teacher to guide the children into meaningful experiences which will give the children the practice of adjusting to changing situations.

Children can and should have an opportunity to engage in functional situations, so that their day-to-day experiences will continually show evidence of progressive, constructive intellectual and social development.

Why not visit with a class of ten- and eleven-year-olds to see such a situation? As you look on, seek evidence of children's experiences leading to development of:

1. democratic leadership through group discussion,
2. "democratic, cooperative fellowship" in group discussion,
3. appreciation of opinions of others,
4. right to question other persons' points of view,
5. keen understanding of current problems,

6. understanding of broader concepts, which in turn are keys to solutions of personal problems,
7. power to see continuity of current happenings,
8. experience in thinking constructively,
9. practice in forming opinions on the basis of actual facts,
10. ability to express points of view both orally and in writing,
11. concept of place relationships,
12. realization of the "oneness" of our world.

Contemporary Problems Listed

The class is seated together in one large group in front of the classroom. In the group is one child who will guide the discussion. On the blackboard are listed "current news" problems which the children have formulated. They are problems which are continuous. The problems are changed as the current news changes. As certain news events drop from the world scene, these problems are removed from the list. As other events occur, these are suggested by the children for inclusion in our list of current news problems. Problems such as these have been included:

1. How is the War Fund Drive progressing?
2. Have there been any developments in the strike situation?
3. Is the black-market problem being cleared up?
4. How are our troops advancing in Germany?

Discussing current news in terms of day-to-day problems and topics has helped give the children a clearer concept of the continuity of news happenings and the relationships of one day's news to the preceding day and the next day to come.

News-Analysts in the Bud

Seated among the group of children are a number who have enthusiastically cut news clippings from the daily newspaper at home. After reading the article, each one has written his own opinion of the news—his news analysis. Now with news discussion ready to begin, each child is deciding for himself to

which of the news problems his news analysis is related.

The current-events leader brings the first problem up for discussion. Those children whose news is related to the problem state briefly the factual data they have gathered from their news article and then they express their personal opinion of the news. It is fascinating to observe the enthusiastic discussions which follow when the leader throws open the problem to the group and the analysis expressed by some of the classmates. In many cases the group will agree with the points of view presented. In many other cases, a controversial issue brings up varying opinions. The democratic, healthy discussion following in such cases is developing the seeds of understanding, with tolerance and appreciation of other persons' ideas.

The current-news leader—with the guidance of the teacher—carries the discussion along from problem to problem, each child having an opportunity to express his opinions, either agreeing or disagreeing with his classmates, and giving reasons for his agreement or disagreement. All through the discussion the maps and globes in the classroom are getting much use, to assist in locating places mentioned in the discussion.

At the conclusion of the current-news discussion, problems are examined to select those which seem to be outstanding and worthy of continued consideration. On the basis of their importance some problems are dropped, some are added for the succeeding news time a few days hence. Those written news analyses that are submitted are placed into a booklet, so that any classmates who desire, may reread them and organize an opposing point of view.

Here, in a twenty-five minute current-news discussion, the children have had an opportunity to take part in a cooperative, democratic situation. Each child has had occasion to express his opinion about timely events in his city, his country, his world. Each child has had an opportunity for becoming appreciative of his classmates' point of view. He has had a chance to get a better understanding of the world about him and his place in that world. He has had a chance to be seen and be heard, in his participation in a living, functional discussion—having as its "factual meat" data that is today's news, tomorrow's history.

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