

Teacher Education Gets at a Real Problem

ALICE V. KELIHER

Whether you teach five- or fifteen-year-olds, future teachers or those well-seasoned in the game, there are certain standards by which you can judge whether "activities" result in learning that makes a difference. So maintains Alice V. Keliher, professor of education at New York University, and aptly illustrates her point with a story of a summer school workshop.

SOME SUMMERS AGO I was teaching a course called "The Activity Program." A student enrolled joyfully saying, "My superintendent says we have to teach activity beginning this fall. I'm so glad I can find out how to do *it* this summer."

Unfortunately this getting on a band wagon without adequate understanding of the meaning of the activity approach to education characterized too many school people in the early days of the "activity" program. Teachers looked for patterns and formulae. "How do you do *it*?" they asked in bewilderment. Superintendents issued directives to unprepared teachers to launch new programs of activity. Too often activity for its own sake without depth or direction was exalted. Many communities repudiated it as shallow and aimless and, knowing no better pattern, demanded a return to recitation-drill techniques and priorities of the three R's.

Living Is Believing

Educational leaders today know that we cannot secure changes in teachers by directives, nor by supplying patterns and formulae. Real changes in teachers and their approach to children come

when their own deepest convictions change and when they have learned to believe in and *live* the new. The leaders and the teachers of teachers must believe so much in the thing they hope to produce that they themselves *live* it. The severest test of all is the question, "Am I asking teachers to do as I say, or to do as I do?"

Far too many teachers colleges fail this test. Professors lecture to large classes and give examinations on the superiority of small classes, student activity, and the damaging effects of examinations!

The workshop is one approach to teacher education that has developed in an effort to bring theory and practice together. The basic premise back of a genuine workshop is that whatever the students are to learn they must *live*. For they will *learn it* to the degree that they *live it*. They will *carry it on in their own work* to the degree that they have *lived it, liked it, and believed in it*.

A Close-Up of a Workshop

We could cite many examples of effective use of activity methods in teacher education. The one closest to me is the summer workshop carried on

by New York University's Center for Human Relations Studies this past summer. Several sections operated concurrently. The 250 students were sometimes together as a whole group for key speakers and important movies and dramatic presentations. Much of their work, however, was done in smaller groups around basic themes. The group of fifty-five teachers with whom I worked focused on child development and problems of community organization for the welfare of children.

We spent the first two sessions getting to know each other. We found that we came from all parts of the world as well as the United States. As we introduced ourselves and presented characteristic problems of our own, we realized, as always, how much students have to give to each other in pooling their experience and thinking through their mutual problems.

In our next session we looked at the photographs of children and youth taken by Marian Palfi on a Rosenwald Fellowship. Her pictures are eloquent evidence of the unmet needs of children in all parts of the country. "But," protested one student, "that's what we see around us here. All of those pictures could have been taken within five blocks of this school."

A Laboratory at Hand

And that was true, indeed. For our laboratory was at our feet. This workshop was housed in a New York City public school building. Any approach to the school building afforded opportunity to see children—little ones and big ones—playing ball in the street, carrying on card games in vestibules, congregating in empty rubbish-littered lots, precariously perched on fire escapes. Here, right around us, were real jobs to



Courtesy Center for Human Relations Studies

The children in the neighborhood

do—tasks from which we could learn how we might survey, assess, and meet the needs of children.

The truth of this observation was attested to by many students. We agreed then and there to survey child needs in the neighborhood in which we were meeting and use that as a point of departure for our summer's study of child development. *For surely, we said, whatever we do in relation to real children here will help us in dealing with the problems of our real children at home.*

Taking Our First Look

Since the awareness of how much students can learn from each other was growing, it was not surprising that a member of the group suggested a plan by which more people could get to know each other; and the plan was accepted. The survey of the community was to be made in teams of three drawn from a hat at random so that folks could have a chance to get to know each other.

Since this was the neighborhood in which I lived, I was asked to suggest the focal points to which the teams should go. I did my homework and came the next day with typed slips of suggestions such as the following:

Go to the nearest movie theater. Interview the manager and find out what experiences he has with children and their parents.

Walk west to the docks. See whether there are children in this area and find out what they are doing.

Go to 21st Street between 8th and 9th Avenues. Note how many children are playing in this block, where they are, and what they are doing.

About eighteen such assignments were drawn by teams of three; and the

students scattered for a full morning of photographing, sketching, interviewing, recording, and observing. They found the neighborhood teeming with children of all ages, eager to talk, delighted to be photographed, ready with suggestions, friendly to the point of inviting them to take a hand in the card game.

People Give Us Leads

The discussions of the next few days were rich, animated, meaningful. The movie manager had turned out to be quite a child psychologist. He contended he had to be for children were left by parents at eleven in the morning, sandwich in a bag, with instructions to return home at five in the afternoon. Dismayed and unbelieving, students excused themselves from the discussion the next morning, stationed themselves at the theater at ten-thirty, saw two parents in rapid succession deposit a five- and then a five-and-a-half-year-old inside the door, and then disappear.

Children who were swimming off the docks in polluted water had talked freely of their preference for the river over the indoor chlorinated pools. They talked readily, too, about their choice of the rubbish-littered lot rather than a small supervised playground across the streets where adults used the handball court and elderly folk pre-empted the benches.

The candy store owner had talked of his liking for the children and their loyalty to him. The delicatessen owner was observed speaking newly-acquired Spanish to Puerto Rican newcomers.

The dangers of traffic appalled the students. One said, "The kids think of the heavy trucks and speeding cars more as a nuisance than a menace."

We emerged from these reports and discussions with a deeper appreciation of the role of the movie manager, the store keeper, the policeman, and all the other adults who influence the lives of the children. Those of us who hadn't done so read *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. All of us shared a firm resolve to do something to help better the conditions for children in this area.

We Take Action

We knew that several community groups, including the parents' association of the school on 21st Street, had petitioned to have the street closed to through traffic and made into a play area. Two deaths and a serious accident had occurred in this one block during the past year. An extra push from us could help in the effort to close the street.

But this called for hard facts. A student, himself a member of a teachers college faculty, proposed and organized a ten-minute sample check of traffic through this street during all of the daylight hours for a week. Members of the workshop volunteered and faithfully clocked traffic.

In the meantime, students were working on a three-dimensional presentation of conditions in the neighborhood. In the arts and crafts laboratory they made miniatures of the houses, docks, theaters, and a montage which cried out with the unmet needs of the children. The traffic survey committee made a beautiful graphic chart showing the hundreds of vehicles passing through this block in the daylight hours. An individual student had volunteered to extract from our discussions whatever basic principles we arrived at and those

basic human needs we highlighted. She, too, presented this in graphic form.

An Examination That Made a Difference

The last week we had our final examination—we made our presentation to the city authorities! We had our facts. They were indisputable. We had pictorialized them in graphic and compelling form. We had our own convictions of what the children in this neighborhood needed. The authorities came and listened—a city councilman, the chairman of the Police Coordinating Council for the area, the policeman in charge of youth services, the area representative of the Welfare Council, and a representative of the city-wide Health Council. They listened and were impressed. A week later 21st Street was closed to through traffic and is now a play area.

Certainly many groups worked for and are responsible for this action, but these summer students did their part in getting the job done. A card went out to them thanking them for their share in a job well done.

Much more should be told of individual conferences, of the work of an elected steering committee who actually saw to it that no one was lonely and isolated and helped plan the sequence of events, of the student organized and operated library, of the parties, the ball game, the all-day boat trip. These were all part of the workshop plan of learning by doing.

Principles Remain the Same

It doesn't matter whether we are talking about an activity program for children or a plan for teacher education; the same basic principles of learning hold.

► Learning is an active process. When a student learns something it is because he himself has done something. He has changed. He has experienced something. Therefore, the role of the teacher is to so arrange things that the student is challenged and free to learn.

► Each student has a different tempo and differing techniques of learning. Therefore, the teacher plans with the group a variety of activities in which each may function best.

► Students learn much from each other. Oftentimes they teach each other from a richness of experience the teacher does not have and they share problems fruitfully. Therefore, the teacher makes many opportunities for students to know each other well and share with each other.

► Students learn best when they are doing something real.

► And they carry into their own work optimism and determination as well as techniques when they feel they have been party to a job well done.

These are essentials of the activity approach to learning. They are not formulae and tricks. Each teacher and each class must discover anew their applications. Each fresh discovery builds courage and faith. Active-mindedness, the inquiring spirit, the zest for a real job—well done—are fundamentals of the morality of democracy. This is the activity approach to education!

Teacher Education in England

I. N. DICKINSON

Among the many delightful and stimulating experiences enjoyed by participants in the UNESCO seminar on the Education and Training of Teachers was the opportunity to see several of the English Emergency Teacher Training Colleges. Not only were we impressed with the positive way in which these colleges were meeting the problem of teacher shortage, but we were interested in their possible impact on the education of both teachers and children in England. It was my privilege to spend one day at the Wall Hall Training College in Hertfordshire. I am, therefore, particularly pleased to include in this issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP an account by Miss I. N. Dickinson, principal of the College, of the way in which an experience curriculum functions in teacher education. Miss W. M. Pearce and Miss M. E. Davies, members of the College staff, assisted in the preparation of the article.—GAH

IN MAY 1945 the first Emergency Training College in England was opened at Wall Hall, Aldenham, Hertfordshire. The house, built on an older foundation early in the nineteenth century and standing in particularly beautiful park-

land, was owned for many years by J. Pierpont Morgan, the American millionaire. Of no particular period of architecture, the pseudo-medieval façade of the house, covered with richly colored creeper, captures the imagina-

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