

a preponderance of real experiences supported by direct relationships to goals and by vicarious experiences that contribute intrinsically. A military instruction manual (1943) emphasized *doing* and *doing together*. Schools may well accept this idea and consider this procedure—"Tell him how, tell him why, show him how, have him to do it in slow motion, have him do it in as nearly normal situation as possible, evaluate strengths and weaknesses with him, and finally have him do it over."

Educational effectiveness can be reduced when vicarious experiences are not used to add meaning to real experi-

ences. Direct experience can fail almost as readily as vicarious. The learner may not know what is behind what he does in the direct experience. The crucial point is the relationship of the experience to the accomplishment of purposes.

It is not a question of direct versus vicarious experiences. The problem is one of selecting experiences for learners upon the basis of means and ends together. The selection in the present and the future must increase the proportion of real, direct experiences—for they must be related to learners' purposes to be vital.

What's the Use? *versus What's the Use!*

EDNA L. STERLING

The functional aspect of learning is extremely important, says Edna L. Sterling, director of language arts in Seattle, and emphasizes a balance of content and practical procedure in the use of content in any experience curriculum.

"IF IT ISN'T USEFUL, what's the use?" might easily be the query of a modern Alice in this land of increasing wonders. In the section on Home Decoration of a recent issue of *The New York Times*, the caption of a picture read "Decoration Today Means Planning Rooms for Use." The new president of Columbia University in his inaugural address said that the purpose of education is "to prepare the student for an effective personal and social life in a free society." And so we may say with Alice "Would it be of any use?" to

try to find out what kind of learning is useful.

What Are We After?

The word "functional" is employed today so frequently and so generally in discussion of matters educational that Alice and all her following come to wonder whether it applies to cabbages or kings and whether it really gets one out of the hole or in it.

Just for the sake of adventure, suppose we assume that learning in the modern world should serve a definite pur-

pose and, much of the time, a very practical use. In other days, certainly the ability to discourse, to write, and to read gave status, established position, and often were qualities that marked the gentleman. In the eras following the establishment of printing and other media of communication, literacy has come to be an accepted condition for all persons, and the kinds of abilities and learnings needed have, and are, passing through series of changes. With these changes of standards, students as well as teachers are continually evaluating not only the content to be learned, but the procedures by which growth results.

Differences in individual interests, needs, and abilities are accepted today as realities in any situation; and, therefore, any discussion of functional learning is necessarily in terms of wide variations. A study of the problem must also consider that function be thought of as both immediate and as long range. A child may need to distinguish carefully between the words *was* and *saw* when he begins to read; but he needs even more to have a desire to read, an interest in reading. He must also establish profitable habits of thinking and getting thought; he must learn not only to pick up complete thought units quickly, but he must form correct behavior habits of the body, especially of eyes, such as left to right progression and increased eye span through a continual extension of phrasing. Such habits, if properly directed, continue growth toward independence, self-assurance, and satisfaction.

If we believe that education should give each individual personal growth, independence, and satisfaction; if education should equip him through ex-

perience to live not only with himself but with his fellow beings, then we must measure the value of learnings not in terms of facts acquired and books read but through behavior and established habits of improved living.

Learning for Living Today and Tomorrow

The vision and planning necessary for long-term procedures is the job of the teacher or of the general curriculum committees. The child will seek what he immediately needs to know, but he is at many stages of development entirely unable to envision either what he will need or the proper order and sequence in which these learnings and abilities can be most profitably acquired. Schools are increasingly offering better guidance and counseling for the full school program. Let us consider here only the curriculum planning and the ways by which the classroom teacher may make the work that young people carry on profitable in itself as well as a satisfactory preparation for the next step in progress.

If the purpose of education is "to prepare the student for effective personal and social life in a free society," he must begin to live in an effective manner the day he enters nursery school or kindergarten, for what we expect to be tomorrow we must begin to be today. Many homes, of course, have established right habits of thinking and acting, of consideration and independence. Let us, however, confine this discussion to the classroom.

Varied Skills Result

Recently I received from a primary group an invitation to visit their class-

room. The preparation of the invitation had involved purposeful use of print script, spelling, sentence wording, and illustrations. The sending of the invitation gave training not only in writing a note, but it developed an appreciation of when notes may be used.

At the door, guests were welcomed by a host and a hostess. The morning program proceeded entirely from pupil direction and leadership. When music was needed the teacher, from an inconspicuous corner, adjusted the needle or changed a record. Otherwise the class chairman or a committee chairman directed the activities.

"We have built and furnished this house," said the chairman, pointing to a series of rooms in the corner," and we are going to tell you how we did it."

"I am chairman of the furniture committee," began Jimmie, with a hissing enunciation, because he was waiting for two front teeth, "and these are the members of my committee."

As each child was introduced separately, he told what special job he had had and described the work he had done. The children had collected wooden crates and boxes from the corner store, and we were told what a kind man and good neighbor Mr. Cox had been. They told not only how they had constructed tables, chairs, sink, and cupboard, but they displayed samples of the different materials and revealed how much observing there had been of materials used in the houses about the neighborhood.

Next the committee, which had made curtains, table coverings, and towels, was introduced. They named the articles and displayed designs. Other committees reported on trees and birds in

their region; they read stories, gave verses, songs, and dances related to their work. The morning program was an excellent summary of all the activities in progress. Through their presentation, the children had found a normal expression, a use that gave others as well as themselves pleasure.

Getting Started Is the Problem

"But," you say, "such a procedure is easy in the primary school where the activities are simple and all work is a kind of play anyway."

Perhaps teachers in the middle and upper grades can follow the lead of the lower grades. Isn't the whole problem more than anything else a way of beginning? Isn't the approach the important thing? Instead of assuming that young people must learn what was in the textbooks fifty or a hundred years ago, perhaps we and they need to discover what is serviceable in America for today and tomorrow.

Many things important in former days will never be active experiences of modern youth. Interesting as the experience might be, navigators today will hardly need to know how to man a large sailing vessel or a river stern-wheeler. The ledger system of accounting used in the country store has been replaced by an office of card files and photographic records that individualizes both work and responsibilities. The worker in a store still needs to write legibly, to record accurately, to meet persons graciously, and to keep his balance and poise in case of an emergency.

Which Procedure Makes for Growth?

Perhaps the course of study prescribes the teaching of measurements. Mrs.

Plan in Room 7 arranges a series of assignments from the textbook with dates for corrected work to be filed. She realizes that many of the children will not be able to "do" the arithmetical processes and so she "assigns" "extra" problems in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The children are very quiet as they "do their sums."

Mrs. Ready in Room 8 has always had an ear for listening. She knows the boys are dissatisfied with the playfield, but, because they are in the habit of coming to her with their problems, she does not need to contrive. The boys tell her, "The baseball diamond isn't laid out right"—(or maybe it is the football field or the tennis courts). "It is too small"—(or too narrow or too something). They want something done.

Mrs. Ready is interested but not excited. "We'll need to study the problem before we ask for help. We can get what we want only if we know exactly where the faults lie and exactly how the improvements can be made. Shall we send a committee out to get some facts for us, to take some measurements? The rest of us can discuss and plan just what other steps will have to be taken."

The class discovers they need to collect information and arrange the data in an orderly, clear form for presentation to someone else. They know the manner of this presentation, whether oral or written, must be carefully planned so that the impression may be favorable to their enterprise. They discover that if the principal has to ask for community aid, he will write a letter and so they understand that his assistance will be more likely if they have furnished him with all the facts in a form so that he can use them.

The Action Program Is Fun

Without further analysis, it is easy to see that Mrs. Plan will have a teacher-routined learning situation in which she controls conditions and actions. She can easily test to see who have "passed" and who have "failed." On the other hand Mrs. Ready will be the center of a series of expanding activities, many of them developing up to a point without her direct supervision or knowledge. She, as well as many of the young people, will become informed through reports and group or intergroup discussion.

In both situations some of the same skills will be needed. In Room 7 the skills processes will be carried on for themselves. In Room 8 the collection of data, the arithmetical work will be for a real purpose in which the children have personal interest. Moreover, the latter process involves experiences of collecting information, organizing facts, arranging situations, and planning, preparatory to oral or written reports. Summaries, group discussion, and letter writing, none of which will have a real place in the assigned lessons, will follow naturally. (That's the reason they're called lessons, the Gryphon remarked to Alice: because they lessen from day to day).

The World Becomes the Test

All areas can profitably be approached functionally, but the language arts have daily, practical uses because communication is at the center of all social, community, and world problems. There is still too much teaching about language and too little actual experience in the active use of language processes. There is too much talk about how to do and too little time given to learning by doing.

Rules for spelling, punctuation, or pronunciation are summaries which young people should learn to formulate through actual discovery of the way language grows and changes. Recital of rules is valueless if the application of the law has not become an action pattern. Drill is profitable only if it is carried on to fix an understood concept. The changing quality of language makes the world today the best possible textbook.

Get Your Balance

The unit method of planning and working together utilizes situations for learning that call for collecting information through reading, listening, or observing, for thinking through and organizing thought, and for communicating thought through either speaking or writing. A group project which requires use of facts that need to be assembled, arranged, evaluated for acceptance or rejection, and finally condensed into a summary report for the group to use is an active, live language

experience. Reports that are to be given before a new audience, letters that are for securing results are more than "exercises." Language usage, punctuation, and spelling improve when social status or "business" advance are recognized as immediate results. The organization of a high school Speakers' Bureau by the Red Cross is a practical way of giving speaking experience and of establishing good public relations in the community. That the Toastmasters' Club members advocate the same type of speech plan used in the school—introduction, proof, conclusion—that they insist on audience relationship and prohibit memorization of written text only strengthens the work being carried on in the high school classroom.

"The great art of riding," says Alice's Knight, "is to keep your balance properly." And so it is with learning; a proper balance of content and practical procedure in the use of content will keep most of us mounted and riding in the right direction.

Convention Notes

To keep the readers of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP up to the minute as the February meeting plans progress—the speakers scheduled for general sessions are, at present, Willard Goslin of Pasadena, Robert L. Weaver of New York University, and Eleanor Roosevelt, U. S. delegate to the United Nations. All persons who have pre-registered will receive a convention handbook from the ASCD office very soon. The January News Exchange will include final news notes on the convention—it will be in your mail box in the next few days. Program copies will be mailed to all ASCD members in mid-January. There is ample time for you to plan to be in New York at the Hotel Commodore February 13-16. We hope to see you there.

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