

## Creative Teaching

OUR CONCERN here is for such teaching as effects creating. It is primarily the creativeness of pupils or students that is sought; but to secure this teachers must themselves be creative. All teachers should seek actual learner creating, but the problem will differ according to conditions. Where the activity program is followed—primarily in the elementary school and in high school core work—actual creating is inherently demanded; but where a fixed-in-advance subject matter order holds, as now prevails in most secondary schools and colleges, the problem is more difficult.

Why seek creating? Both for personal and for social group purposes. For the individual to feel himself creating effectively is one of the keenest and finest joys of life. Also both for individual and for group interests the creative solution of problems is the only road to improvement. Each individual with his unending needs and problems has endless demands for creating. The man who cannot solve the problems life thus presents faces failure of living. On the other hand, the civilization we value is exactly the historic aggregate of man's successive inventions and creations; without these man had remained little more than a higher brute. Thus out of creating has civilization come. And there is no end to be set; for the higher the civilization, the more problems and the greater the need for creating.

Some would, wrongly, limit creating to additions made to the civilization, and accordingly would say that only the very gifted can create. On the contrary, as already suggested, every problem in life calls for creativeness; for

every conscious devising of a solution to a problem is of psychologic necessity an act of creation, and this no matter how lowly or exalted the problem may be. A housewife devising a more pleasing arrangement of furniture or a statesman trying to avert World War III—each is engaged in a creative act.

As educators we have a peculiar interest in this matter of problem solving; so much depends on it, both for the individual and for the group. From the first day of school pupils should begin facing problems, problems proper to their age to be sure. They must learn, in a democracy, to deal creatively with life's varied problems, first and always as individuals, later and also as groups. This is the best, in fact the only known way of cultivating the individual responsibility and group resourcefulness necessary for a democratic civilization.

One part of such preparation is the building of ideals. Each individual must build ideals along every line of his own work. In the degree that one has a clear-cut and dynamic ideal along a particular line, in like degree will he seek, as occasion permits, to pursue that ideal. In this he first builds, creatively, the ideal: then seeks, also creatively, to attain his ideal. To feel one's self attaining one's ideal is another one of the real pleasures of life. To carry this forward in keeping with the highest quality of creating is to carry life to its very highest quality.

Practically, the main thing about creative teaching is to do it, that is, do it effectively. As suggested earlier, actual doing divides according as the teaching does or does not follow the activity method.

## Activity Program Encourages Creation

Under the activity program, the pupils almost of necessity have both opportunity and incentive to do creative thinking. The teacher's part is to give every encouragement to responsible high quality pupil creating, while he himself avoids guiding the pupils too much along his own preferred ways. The creative work on the part of the learner can show itself (i) in suggesting appropriate and desirable projects for the class to undertake; (ii) in helping to choose wisely from among the suggested projects; (iii) in helping to carry forward constructive planning; (iv) in cooperatively solving the problems that arise during execution; (v) in judging helpfully the whole process after its completion to draw lessons for later use; and (vi), perhaps most important of all, in thinking up and following new lines of inquiry and activity that come by suggestion from this activity. Suggestions for new activities can come to any pupil at any hour of night or day, whatever else he may be doing. Pupils should be encouraged not only to have (create) such suggestions but to *make effective note* of them, perhaps in a classroom book kept for the purpose. These will all be canvassed at the choosing of the next class activity.

One matter which pervades practically all activity class work is group discussion. To make this as constructive (creative) as possible should be an especial aim of the teacher, but it will come forward best perhaps in items (ii), (iii), (iv) and (v) named above. Effective (creative) group discussion is an essential need for democracy. Many adults cannot argue with others without getting angry. Others talk simply to be heard, whether or not they are

helping solve the problem under discussion. Modern civilization requires more thinking and closer thinking than ever before. Constructive class discussion at practically every level, upper elementary, high school, college, adult education,—this our democracy urgently demands.

Many who teach "subjects" in high school or college see little or no chance to give their students creative work except by way of "originals" or individual "research projects" in connection with the fixed-in-advance course work. Certainly no one formula can be offered for bringing students into cooperative course planning along with the instructor, but it does appear that much more can be done than one commonly sees. A course in literature, for example, could begin with the students' choice from contemporary offerings and go on to compare the literary treatment of this book with that of some jointly chosen classic. The second round of such work would almost certainly show a bite and grasp that no mere succession of lectures could give. Similarly, second or third year chemistry could let students work on their own problems—chosen to be suited under wise guidance. This has been tried with pronounced success as Professor Emeritus John M. Nelson of Columbia University can testify. History need not be taught chronologically, the New York Regents to the contrary notwithstanding. Current social problems chosen for student interest will easily lead back into the past for intelligent treatment. Data learned in concrete settings to answer felt problems will enter into mental and moral development as is not possible with lectures or assigned lessons. Even mathematics, as the writer knows from personal experience, need

(Continued on page 167)

ionnaire entitled, "Content of experiences in science which would have been helpful to you in solving your present problems of living and working," proved beneficial in giving a student group a totally new perspective on the content of the science program.

Many other ways of re-orienting both teachers and students are possible. Space limitations preclude specific detailed examples. The problem of reorienting programs or simply developing more creative individual experiences is still basically one of responding thoughtfully to individuals, their desires, their needs and their problems. A most profound respect for the individual on the part of the teacher is implied in furthering any creative activity of groups or individuals. Perhaps developing genuine respect for the individual, however one does it, is the most basic preparation for teaching in a creative manner.

This discussion has not been in-

tended to provide simple answers as to how to bring about creativity in science teaching. The matter is not a simple one! It seems rather more important to identify some of the issues involved, perhaps begin to clarify some of their implications in science teaching and then to rely upon the creative ability of the *reader* to develop a climate and an environment in which creativity can become a part of the activities, thinking and practice of a specific group in a specific school in a specific community. What works for one may not work for another.

However, it is hoped that the preceding discussion may be of some help to teachers in their eternal quest for the best way to help their group in growing up to be well adjusted, creative and effective citizens. The world is sorely in need of these citizens who can make a creative contribution toward a better and a peaceful world in the years ahead.

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### **Creative Teaching** (Continued from page 139.)

not follow the customary order—with the resulting knowledge and interest far exceeding what is commonly got.

The chief factors now preventing creative teaching are, first, the departmental subject-matter teaching still common in our secondary schools and colleges.

The second main hindrance is the implicit teaching of the ordinary graduate school that research is the one sole and proper aim for higher education. This attitude gets instilled into college teachers and they in turn then do what they can to instil it into prospective secondary school teachers. Fortunately,

our secondary school teachers particularly in the social sciences and in English are overcoming this bias. It does, however appear that we must extend the activity program core work throughout the six years of junior and senior high school. This gives creative group work its great chance, while it relieves the departments of those who are not interested in as specialized work as the departments would like to offer. It appears, all things considered, that the secondary school core is the next great advance if creative teaching is to prevail. — *William Heard Kilpatrick*, professor emeritus, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City.

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