

The Importance of People

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The following report begins and ends innocently enough, but somewhere in the middle it raises a chilling doubt or two about the proper Doctrine for our Educational Times.

In the Washington Junior High School at Rockford, Illinois, the author apparently puts that doubt to useful work.

Harold Benjamin

And a Little Child Shall Lead Them

I AM COMPLETELY bewildered. I am frustrated, befogged and conscience-stricken. I feel outdated and my morale has fallen to the lowest point since I started teaching. I'm the pedagogical has-been who is belligerently holding onto some of the old methods with a death grip.

Jealously I am guarding some of my old techniques on child guidance. I'm using them behind closed doors for fear that the Society for Fostering the Whole Child may find out that I have callously taken a few of them apart.

I love every one of my small charges. I love their dirty faces and pointed heads. I have honestly tried to move along with the progressive school of thought, and constantly evaluate my efforts toward the development of the individual boy or girl.

Outcast of the Educational Islands

So far, so good. But I was shocked into a realization of my inadequacy in that area when I inadvertently overheard one of my superiors evaluating what I thought was a colossal attempt toward bigger and better child development. In a few well-chosen words she summed up, for future reference, my classroom status.

"She isn't doing too much. You know she's only teaching skills."

Now this was just the same as saying that I had leprosy. I became an outcast.

At each unfamiliar noise outside my door, I dropped my pointer, stealthily tucked the arithmetic drill cards behind the bookcase and stooped solicitously over the whispering urchin in the front seat.

"What do you feel like doing now, Sammy? Not reading? Not spelling? Just sitting? That's all right. Let me know when you feel like working with us, won't you?"

Running through my mind was the caution of the child-guidance experts, "Get to the seat of the trouble."

If it hadn't been for that suspicious noise in the hall, I'd have gotten there in short order.

Honestly, I tried everything. But there seemed to be only one logical solution to my problem. That was to follow along and get myself and the kids so tangled up in an activity program that neither I nor the Higher-Ups could figure out what we were doing.

No one could ever doubt the success of the plan. I plunged into a veritable cataclysm of creative endeavor designed to establish one of those ideal learning situations. I strung bright-colored balloons from the ceiling to make the planetary system sway and swing with

the rising tide of child interest. I stumbled over papier maché trains which were the outgrowth of some small fry's verbal insistence that he wanted to be an engineer. My room seethed with crawling species that some way, by the grace of God and an experimental diet, became butterflies. Pigeons roosted on the piano, and once I even midwived for a white mouse and her obnoxious husband. Things finally reached the point where I didn't have time for anything except feeding the livestock. But I gritted my teeth. "If this be it, so be it!"

Crisis in Child Guidance

Gradually things moved toward a crisis. The other teachers in the building, noting how I was knocking myself out to catch onto the tail of this new learning business, elected me delegate to the Child Guidance Conference at the state capital.

I charged a new suit, sewed an extra feather on my last year's hat, and in a burst of simulated enthusiasm took off.

There's no need to go into the details of that three-day conference. I merely want to state briefly the pay-off.

My principal, the following day, posted a meticulously written note on the bulletin board.

"All teachers will meet in the library at 3:30 to discuss the new trend toward progressive education as set forth at the state convention on Child Development."

The teachers gathered around the big oak tables in the library, looking impressed in a professional forum manner. I opened my notebook.

"Progress is being made in education as well as in other fields." That was a good beginning.

"I'm afraid, however, some of us of the old school" (here I gave a slight smirk of self condemnation), "have failed to be overly impressed by the

new experiments in the teaching of children." I caught the murderous glare in the eyes of a couple of the old guard, but I was warming up to my subject, and I wasn't going to give up the floor without a pitched battle. I launched directly into the points as I had enumerated them.

"First, we must allow children to express themselves freely in both actions and words."

I didn't look up. I knew some of the girls were beginning to pity me. I caught myself nurturing visions of Dicky and Jerome, Lester and Marty, "expressing themselves" with complete abandon and gusto, while I smiled and encouraged them in the name of their Country and the Child Development Committee.

With a slight shudder of resignation, I continued, "If a child feels like reading, let him read. If he doesn't, let him follow his own inclinations."

I endorsed that one. There was a slim chance that they all might feel like going home.

Third, "Don't be concerned whether the child gets all the facts you present. Teach the whole child."

There was a sharp silence. Two of the girls excused themselves immediately. I guess they found it impossible to witness the dying throes of formal discipline.

Classroom Conflict

The following day my third-grade class worked very quietly. I was feeling elated over not having any problems to clarify in the light of the progressive school of thought. Carefully I had explained the table of fours, and the children had glibly repeated the facts. Then I followed my usual procedure of giving them a few drill problems to work on paper. I reminded them that I would collect their work at the end of the class period. The gong sounded.

There was the usual buzz and chatter as papers were hurriedly pushed to the front. Looking down directly in front of me, I noticed Johnny with small tense hands pressed tightly upon the white sheet on his desk.

"May I have your paper, dear?" My question brought no response except a furtive glance.

Gently, at first, I pulled the paper. That simply wasn't the right approach. Before he surrendered to the enemy, both of us had used all the tactics of Washington at Valley Forge, but with some degree of finesse.

One glance at the spoils convinced me that strategical withdrawal from the skirmish would have been advisable. On that paper, and not an infinitesimal part of it, was a horse. However, this was not an ordinary horse, nor was it dull and prosaic after the manner of some of our modern art.

Undoubtedly, this horse was different. I knew, and with deadly clearness, I faced a situation that the State Convention would have found hard to classify.

Johnny's horse had two widespread ears and two eyes that crossed, glaring at each other. It was sway-backed and it had a crippled foreleg. But, particularly, it had one anatomical feature that made it different from the ordinary run. It was equipped with the longest, loveliest, bushiest tail, directed skyward at an approximate 45 degree angle! And from this phenomenal appendage were penciled curliques which couldn't possibly be interpreted as mathematical practice!

I searched eagerly for one sign that I had taught a fact. There it was up in the left hand corner, directly above the south end of the horse: $4 \times 36 = 12$.

I shut my eyes. Here came the \$64.00 question. Should I overlook the

(Continued on page 453)

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a gradual process of economic, political and social democratization for our country.

The anti-intellectualism, the resort to militant isolationism and the character assassination all have the purpose of misleading our people, throwing fear into the hearts of teachers and destroying public confidence not only in education but in our whole democratic system. These techniques have been used over and over again in European countries where totalitarianism of one form or another has taken over. Those of us who have observed the Nazis, the Fascists and the Communists at work know exactly what the techniques are; and by now the results of such techniques are matters of history. We have an obligation to lay bare the nature of these attacks—helping our people to see what lies behind them and pointing out clearly what their effects are likely to be if they continue unanswered.

Remedy: Teaching Social Responsibility

The remedy for the situation is to make every school an outstanding example of the democratic process. In it we must constantly teach the method of intelligence, both by example and by

word of mouth. We must ever engage in an earnest, sincere search for truth. Our boys and girls must be taught to meet their social responsibilities both at home and abroad, by meeting their social responsibilities now. We must make a world-wide approach to the solution of our problems and not make a narrow provincial attack upon them. Finally we must emphasize in every possible way the sacredness of individual human personality. We must help boys and girls and men and women to see that any person's good name is his most sacred possession and that anyone who wantonly and irresponsibly destroys another person's good name is committing an offense not only against the person in question but against the very foundations of our free society. In the months and years to come we in the profession will need to think clearly, act wisely and ally ourselves with our friends in the larger community. The life of freedom is at stake and we have the obligation as prime defenders of freedom to warn our citizens against hazards to freedom and to join with them not only in its defense but in its further development.—*Ernest O. Melby*, dean, School of Education, New York University.

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(Continued from page 449)

obvious lack of scholastic fundamentals and interpret this child in terms of an ill-mannered and spavined quadruped? Should I deduct that in later life he might profitably follow the horses?

It's all so horribly complex. There

must be a middle ground. Someway I have to find it. In the meantime, I'm going to keep on loving those youngsters and take a chance that maybe some of them will turn out all right! —*Nellie M. Thomas*, Washington Junior High School, Rockford, Illinois.

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