

Teacher Preparation

for Better Use of Museum Resources

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Students preparing to teach can gain rich insights into learning as they plan for more intelligent use of the resources available in their region or locality.

NO WONDER museum directors grow old young. These unscheduled groups—they are the bane of existence to most museum personnel.”

“Why, I had a teacher this year who deposited her kids at the entrance and announced ‘They’re yours, I hope you can do something with them, I can’t!’ and she went to the bus to wait until the tour was over.”

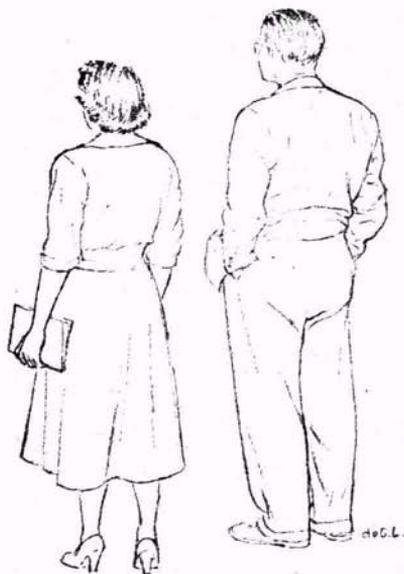
“That’s nothing. I had one who turned a whole class over to the guide and dashed off to the beauty parlor to have her hair set.”

“Or they come to us late in the afternoon after visiting two other museums so worn out that the children are impossible to manage, to say nothing about their learning anything.”

“I have had teachers say, ‘I don’t know why we are here except that the principal thought the class ought to see the museum.’”

The above comments were made by museum directors and curators at “The School and the Museum” section of the Seminars on American Culture held at

Cooperstown, New York, during the past summer. It is difficult for one who carries considerable responsibility for the preparation of future teachers for the schools of New York to listen to such criticism. Fortunately, this adverse criticism was somewhat balanced by other comments, such as these:



"What a joy it is to work with a teacher who has made arrangements far in advance and has given us an opportunity to help with the planning for the trip!"

"We can always tell when the youngsters get off the bus whether or not they have had preparation. And what a difference that preparation makes!"

"We do our best job only when teachers give us an opportunity to work with them."

The first set of comments represents a serious indictment of our profession. That some members would show so little consideration for the people who serve them through museum resources is incomprehensible. Yet it occurs frequently enough in some communities to represent a serious problem. This disregard for the simplest courtesies is even worse when lack of consideration for museum personnel interferes with their providing the best kind of service to those teachers and those children who have planned and worked closely with the museum staff to get the most out of their day at the museum.

At the Farmers Museum in Coopers-town, four full-time guides can handle twelve groups in one day quite comfortably; but only if the arrival time of the groups has been properly scheduled in advance.

Careful Preparation Needed

Frequently a prearranged schedule will be so completely disrupted by arrival of unannounced groups that guides go without their lunches; a group of 30 to 40 children, which is considered maximum for effective handling, has to be increased to over 100; or some sections have to be hurried

through or must be bypassed entirely.

Even more disturbing than the lack of courtesy to museum personnel and the interference with experiences planned by foresighted teachers is what such lack of consideration reveals about the way many teachers view the role of teaching in the modern school. One might hazard a guess that many of these teachers have been impressed with the need to be modern or progressive and have learned that the field trip is an important means of providing educational experiences. Obviously, however, many other teachers have given little thought to the educational implications of such trips or to the need for justifying, on an educational basis, the time consumed by their students on such trips.

Only when teachers become truly professional and see the importance of careful preparation for such excursions away from school are we likely to have local or state museum resources used in ways that will supplement and reinforce the regular day-to-day instructional work of the school. In many localities museum directors and other staff members are willing and eager to spend much time and effort in helping teachers learn how to use museum resources to best advantage. The teaching profession itself should make greater effort in this direction.

Many criticisms of current use of museum resources were voiced during

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the seminars held at Cooperstown. However, knowledge that at the State University Teachers College at Oneonta, New York, considerable effort is now being made to insure that prospective teachers will have had experience with field trips and knowledge of resources outside the school and how to use them effectively, tended to offset many of these criticisms. The continued interest and cooperative support of Dr. Carl Guthe and his staff at the New York State Museum in Albany and of Dr. Louis Jones and his staff at the New York State Historical Association at Cooperstown have been invaluable in assisting the college staff and prospective teachers at Oneonta in gaining insights into effective ways of using museum resources.

Students at Oneonta have many opportunities to become acquainted with the various agencies and resources outside the school that can be used to supplement the school's on-going program. Perhaps more important are the firsthand experiences they have in planning for and assisting a group of children in taking a field trip. As an example: whenever a trip to a museum is planned for and with a group of children, a conscientious attempt is made to involve as many students as possible in one or more of the steps from the first planning with the museum personnel, the preparation and planning with the children, the trip itself and the evaluation and follow-up of the trip after the group has returned to school. It is not unusual to have as many as twenty-five sophomores, juniors and seniors in some way involved in the planning and carrying out of one such trip. Usually only the

two students assigned to the class for student teaching at the time are able to experience all the steps in the procedure followed. They play an important part in filling in the gaps for the others and in giving them preparation for what they may look forward to during their student teaching period.

Perhaps the most pertinent experience relating to museums is that engaged in by a relatively small group of students, the results of which extend to a large portion of the juniors and seniors. As part of their student teaching assignment, students spend the better part of a week living in a small community and exploring ways in which that community is organized to meet its essential needs. During the past two years, two groups of eight to fifteen students each have been chosen to spend their time at the New York State Historical Association Museums in Cooperstown instead of in a community study. These students with two or more staff members together did the preliminary planning. They lived in Cooperstown for the four or five day period and evaluated and summarized their experiences and reported these to their peers.

Under the guidance of staff members, the initial planning for the experience is of a kind and quality which will benefit the future teachers as they later go out to work with children. Several weeks before the actual trip the staff and several students visit the museum to do preliminary planning with the museum personnel. The date for the study is settled at that time. The general purposes of the study are agreed upon and specific ways in which the

college and museum staff will work together with the students are determined. The students are given a quick overview of the facilities so they may help the remainder of the group become acquainted with the resources available for their use and the kind of preparation they need to get the most out of the study. Arrangements for living in Cooperstown during these days are also completed.

What Are the Purposes?

On May 16, 1953 the group held a Saturday morning conference to outline the purposes of the study.¹ The following Saturday the group selected to do the initial planning left the college at 8:00 A.M. and spent the forenoon getting an overview of the resources. This included a guided tour of the Farmer's Museum; a brief visit to the Village Cross Roads, which is a part of the Farmer's Museum; observation of children in the museum and a conference with a museum staff mem-

¹ Summaries were prepared under the direction of Miss Evelyn Hodgdon, Miss Julia Morey and Mrs. Milton Bundy of the State Teachers College Staff.

ber on the services which the museum offers to schools.

On May 27 the total group met to view slides made by the group of the previous year, defined the individual projects to be undertaken and completed arrangements for transportation.

The purposes cooperatively determined by the group were stated as follows:

1. To see interesting things in the museum.
2. To observe guides' techniques in teaching.
3. To discover kinds of material available to children and teachers.
4. To observe at what age children most enjoy the museum.
5. To discover how the college should be using the museum resources in its curriculum.
6. To discover the teacher's role during the guided tour.

Each student selected two projects for individual study.

Early on May 29 the group members left Oneonta for Cooperstown. For the next four days they worked from early morning until late at night in group discussions and group conferences, on



individual investigations, in pooling sessions, and in reporting sessions. They later described this as perhaps one of the most significant professional experiences of their four years of preparation. The morale of the group remained at a high level throughout. "Each student worked hard and became very enthusiastic about the learnings involved."

Evaluation

It is impossible to measure the real values of an experience such as this—the values which find expression in individual feelings, attitudes and behavior. Students' verbal reactions, however, serve as clues to these deeper values. These verbal reactions fall into these areas—(1) general education about the age of homespun (2) information and techniques for the use of the museum in teaching, and (3) the values from the group experience.

"One of the most significant learnings was to be found in the realization of the wealth of material the museum has to offer and the availability of this authentic material to anyone with the techniques to use it.

"The students came to see the museum as a significant instrument of learning and observed the basic techniques in conducting a group of children in the use of such a resource. Some expressed confidence in learning to use any community resource for teaching purposes. Some mentioned an increased ability to select what to see for children of certain ages and to realize what children themselves enjoy." The following notes indicate that all were conscious of the importance of knowing what the museum has to offer and the

need for careful preparation and planning by the children and teacher. "Acquaintance brings freedom of use." (How important it is for beginning teachers to recognize the need for knowing this if they are to help children value intelligently.) "We learned to recreate the past in a vital way." "Our appreciation and enthusiasm will carry over to the children." (When teachers know and are enthusiastic about what they know and what they teach, children's learning is likely to be enhanced.) "The teacher and the museum guide are jointly responsible for the children while they are in the museum."

"Great satisfaction was expressed at the quality of the group experience. The fact that each individual accepted his responsibility to make the group a success made it a stimulating time for all. The wholehearted cooperation of the museum staff from the director to each of the guides, the friendliness and easy acceptance of each member of the group, the informal setting and friendly atmosphere contributed to the group feeling." "They seemed to like having us around." "They seemed to want to help us." "We worked closely together."

The professional values gained by the students were well expressed in a sheet entitled, "Summary of Discussion on Using the Museum as a Curriculum Resource in the Elementary School."

This summary suggested:

1. Use the museum when its resources can help solve the problems on which the children are working.
2. The frequency of using the museum with the same group of children

depends somewhat on the distance from the school.

3. When the teacher has a good knowledge of the resources of the museum he can more effectively use them.

4. Resources in the museum lend themselves to use at all age levels of elementary school children. In the New York State elementary school curriculum in social studies, the content of grades four and seven is such that the museum is an especially rich instructional resource.

5. The experience of visiting the museum is good for very young children, grades one through three, only when the distance is short and very few centers are studied.

6. Class trips to the museum should be planned and conducted as study trips; they should not be thought of as class excursions or picnics.

This cooperative enterprise has been found extremely worth while in preparing future teachers for more intelligent use of field trips and museums. The author has heard Dr. Jones, in speaking to three different groups, make this statement: "Over the years in working with the children and the staff members of the Bugbee School and with the Oneonta Teachers College students who accompany them, we have learned more about how to use our museum resources for educational purposes than we have learned in any other way."

National Training Laboratory in Group Development

BASED upon eight years of pioneering research and experience in the relatively new field of training leaders in the skills and understandings necessary for developing effective groups, the National Training Laboratory in Group Development will hold its usual three-week summer laboratory session at Gould Academy, Bethel, Maine. The dates will be June 20 through July 10.

Approximately 125 applicants will be accepted for this session. Persons involved in problems of working with groups in a training, consultant, or leadership capacity in any field are invited to apply.

The purpose of the training program is to sensitize leaders in all fields to the existence and nature of the dynamic forces operating in the small group and to help them gain skill in operating

more effectively in such a group. The training program is organized so that each trainee group of 15-20 persons is enabled to use its own experience as a laboratory example of group development. Group skills of analysis and leadership are practiced through the use of role-playing and observer techniques. Concentrated clinics give training in the skills of the consultant and the trainer in human relations skills. There is also opportunity to explore the role of the group in the larger social environment in which it exists. A major portion of the last week of the Laboratory is spent in specific planning and practicing application of Laboratory learnings to back-home jobs.

For further information, write to the NTLGD at 1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.

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