

was particularly effective in increasing the children's understanding of causal relationships. This was illustrated in their learning that lowering the temperature of air containing moisture produces rain.

Learning skills for symbolization and communication were by no means neglected. Books on weather at varying reading levels had been provided by the school librarian, so that each child developed a list of new words which he could look up in the dictionary to learn pronunciation and meaning. For Sam, making a barometer gave him additional experience in solving a problem in simple mechanics. For other children the building of weather instruments resulted in fur-

ther mastering coordination of small muscles.

Finally, the study of weather caused these children to ask questions which are basic to formulating a philosophy of life. What forces control the universe? What is man's relation to these forces? Through these experiences they saw a world of oneness, predictability and stability. Larry summed up the feeling of many when he said, "The world is so big and complicated that God must have a part in it somewhere!"

Following up Mark Twain's thought on the subject, this sixth grade class not only talked about the weather; they accomplished much in gaining an understanding of it.



MARION NESBITT

The Elementary School of TOMORROW

An exciting challenge awaits all teachers, parents and others who can visualize the elementary school of tomorrow and can devote their creative talents and energies toward bringing this more humane school community into being—even for today's boys and girls!

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOL, according to Henry Steele Commager,¹ has met the demands of the past—from the beginning of the 19th until well into the 20th Century. The first task imposed upon the schools by our struggling new nation was one of providing an enlightened citizenry. The second great task imposed upon the schools

was the creation of national unity. From authors and poets, historians and painters, McGuffey readers and Webster spellers, American children built a common store of poems and stories, images and values, from which a national spirit was born. They learned a "people's common language with which to voice a people's common heritage."

The third task was Americanization.

¹"Our Schools Have Kept Us Free." *Life*, October 16, 1950, p. 46-47.

As millions of immigrants poured into America, the doors of the public schools opened wide without questioning and without fee, and they learned the language and the ways of America.

The fourth service which the schools have rendered the cause of American democracy is that of teaching the meaning of equality. "In the classroom," writes Commager, "the nation's children have lived and learned equality—all subject to the same educational processes and the same disciplines."

And now we face a new era, an era which demands a new concept of the function of the American Public School.

We are face to face with a changing pattern in American home life, changing values, the magnitude of a rapidly expanding, highly interdependent world. A world full of new and exhilarating discoveries and inventions, and a world full of anxieties and fears.

School and the Home

The place of women in today's culture has brought about a condition whereby thousands of mothers no longer spend the greater part of the day in the home. In thousands of homes both parents are working. If the mother does not work, she is usually caught up in many and varied community activities.

The home is no longer a self-con-

tained, self-sufficient unit. Where formerly children played at home or with neighbor children of like background and standards, today's children more often than not seek activities outside of the home.

Because of mass communication, mass production of goods and services, mass transportation, whether they live in cities, villages, or rural areas, children's contacts with a wider world have increased a hundredfold in the past fifteen years. The finest and best home of today cannot adequately provide for the all-round social development of its children without supplementation from the life of the community.

Children of today have better clothes, better school lunches, more confections, more soft drinks, more trips, more money to spend, a greater number and variety of experiences and—for better or for worse—they usually have television.

By moving about, by hearing and by seeing, children are bombarded on every side by the heterogeneous impact of our living culture. They are bombarded with high-powered advertisement, with facts and fiction, truths and half-truths, with crime and morality. Big cities, big governments, big business, big crime, big schools make their mass demand in a way which often overwhelms the individual and makes him feel of little worth.

This changing cultural pattern may also mean for children overstimulation, restlessness, a craving for excitement, a great need for someone to talk to, a lack of security, and a feeling of uncertainty as to what is considered "right" or "wrong."

These, our children, are growing up

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in a world where we are all tied together, where increasingly the ignorance, the poverty, the illness, the wealth and the well-being of peoples in the remotest corner of the world affect us all. They are growing up in an era when we must work together as a nation, when we must learn to attack life's problems intelligently, when we must learn to get along with other peoples if we are to survive. Our children must learn to think and to care how one's actions affect the lives of others, for this is the American way, a way that may be difficult, but a way that we cherish.

Children of elementary school age are surprisingly well informed concerning national and international tensions. They know they are living in a dangerous time.

Improved Behavior

What, then, is the role of the elementary school in this, our era?

If we are to help children gain security, build personal integrity, and make order out of chaos that they may tackle life's problems and become good citizens in the world of tomorrow, the *social behavior* of children, then, becomes the *prime* objective of the elementary school.

The school must make of itself the kind of institution which takes into account the impact upon children of the world of today. It must incorporate in its program goals and practices by means of which children grow in ability to solve their problems.

If good relationships are built inside of children, they will be better able to practice such relationships as they grow older. Better relationships will be built

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into children only as they live these relationships.

The elementary school is uniquely a child's world. The elementary school more nearly than any other institution gathers together all the children of all the people. Here are the followers and here are the leaders. Here are children and adults who would never come together were it not for the school. At school there is always someone to play with, always someone to work with, and there is always someone to relate this work and play to a larger whole, to a world of people and things.

Children are of many kinds. There are the alert and the stolid. There are children who fight, children who lie and children who steal. There are children whose integrity and fineness shine like a bright and guiding star. All will be different, but all will have a common desire and hope. All will come seeking to enhance the phenomenal self and all will come, whatever the outward behavior, wanting to meet the expectancies of society.

Out of this coming together in a school dedicated to the well-being of children, there will emerge an ordered whole—a children's world. In this school there will be adults who share the impact of the stresses and strains of the culture, who help children make a whole out of diversity. This wholeness will be forged out of planned and

shared experiences. It will not be found in recitations from textbooks, nor will it be found by studying about the fragments of other people's experiences. The wholeness and the common ground will be found in the experiences of people as they struggle for better and more mature behavior in meeting the problems of life as they arise in this society. This children's society will seek for itself acceptable standards of behavior. The mores of this society will be so clear to all concerned that individuals who deviate will stand out sharply. This "norm" for social behavior, in sharp contrast to an academic norm, is one within the ability of every individual to meet or to surpass.

An Atmosphere for Living

Life in this children's world will take on certain characteristics. One of these characteristics is the atmosphere. By atmosphere it is meant a certain all-encompassing, all-enveloping element which emerges out of the quality of the life being lived. This atmosphere will pervade and permeate every aspect of school living. It will reflect relaxation, graciousness of manner, cordiality and zestfulness. It cannot exist where there is regimentation, tension, dullness, drabness, suspicion and habitual criticism.

To obtain such an atmosphere there must be mutual trust and understanding. There must be acceptance of each individual and a belief in the process of growth. There will be a permissiveness wherein mistakes are not crucial, and children have support in their unhappiness. This permissiveness will not be without inherent direction but will al-

ways be helping children grow into better socialized beings.

Practices must be tested in the light of their influence upon this all-encompassing atmosphere of the school.

There will be few bells, and teachers and children will plan their own use of time, a schedule best suited to the needs of each class group. Children will be grouped in life-like groups. There can be no grade placement of subject-matter, nor any specific time allotment for learning to take place. Nor will anyone be penalized for lack of ability in academic skills. There will be no special time set aside for anyone to be weighed in the balance, for integration of self cannot take place when generalizations and refinements are required before the individual is ready to make them. Many children have been thrown down by the hurdles of such requirements. If the integration of the self does not take place in the elementary school, it is doubtful if it ever will take place. A child cannot live well with others unless he accepts himself, unless he feels adequate.

The paramount responsibility, then, is the child—the child integrating himself to an on-going whole; the child feeling self-confident, feeling that he has a place in the world, respecting himself and respecting others for what they have to give to the world of which they are a part.

In such an atmosphere of acceptance, it is possible for learning to be at its best and for frustration and failure to be at their least. This atmosphere, though invisible and intangible, is quickly sensed both by those living in it and by those observing it.

The Elementary School of Tomor-

row will also be characterized by the quality of the life that exists in it. The life here will not be characterized by children reciting, by children being drilled, but rather children will be caught up in life that is adventurous, zestful, exploratory, experimental, stimulating. Intelligence, inventiveness and creativity will be challenged.

There will be quiet days and high days. There will be joys and pleasures. There, too, will be hardships and difficulties as the problems of life are met and worked through, for this is life and life cannot always be softened, nor can all risk be taken away from a child if he is to develop normally.

Each child will feel himself a part of the total school environment, because the total environment will become the over-all planned, continually modified, scheme of life and living into which each child must make his place. As maturation takes place each will have increasing responsibility for the life of the whole group. It is through participation in an expanding whole that group responsibility and group morale are built as individuals sense this over-all relationship.

Wherever they go, whatever they do, children are learning with their entire selves. They are totally involved in whatever is happening to them. In this society nothing will be too small to attend to, nothing too huge to attack. The simplest "good morning," the simplest "thank you," the most complicated school plans, begin and end with the major emphasis on the human relations involved.

There will always be plans for the physical environment, an environment aesthetically pleasing, which satisfies

and calls one to explore. There will be plans to create it, to renew it, and to maintain it by the most acceptable standards of good housekeeping.

Plants must be watered and cut flowers arranged. There will be aquariums and terrariums to be set up and kept in balance, things to be painted and repainted, pictures, bulletin boards and exhibits to be put in place. Supplies must be kept in order and tools cared for. A school library that is a vital factor in living needs the cooperative effort of all who use it. Understanding the techniques of running a library, using a library, caring for books, helping to select books, helping the librarian, all can become significant learning experiences.

The corridors, the washrooms, the playyards, the lunchroom, the assembly hall belong to all the children, and each must share in the responsibility for their use. If a school lunchroom is not just a place where children eat but a place for dining and gracious living with one's friends, then continuous effort is necessary to make it so. If a playyard is a part of a qualitative environment, not just an area where children are turned loose and one hopes for the best, many hours of cooperative effort must go into its planning and maintenance. It well may be in the School of Tomorrow that playyards will become larger and simpler, having less commercial equipment and more of the ordinary structures of the work-a-day world. A five-year-old once said to his teacher as he gazed wistfully across the alley from his school, "I wish I had a shed to run on; I wish I had a tree to climb." It may be that playyards of the future will have a shed to run

on, trees to climb, boughs to swing on, logs to sit on, a mossy bank for a tiny playhouse, and a wheelbarrow to trundle.

Such routine matters as handwashing, going to and from washrooms, going to and from places of assembly, will not be a part of the day that is rushed through or shunted aside to make way for so-called subject-matter content, but rather such opportunities will be seen as important aspects of the whole learning process. In the degree that children understand and accept such responsibilities, to this degree are they increasing their ability to understand the common concerns of community living.

Relating to the Adult Community

As children go about the everyday business of living, there will be critical thinking, planning, evaluating, cutting and shaping and measuring, reading and writing, and accounting. This will be no hodgepodge of experience but a carefully guided way of living that develops insight and understanding, that helps children to use skills effectively.

When such planning is cooperative and appropriately guided, children and adults will be caught up in plans for Parent-Teacher meetings, school festivals and community enterprises. This process will inevitably include many people in the community who know things that boys and girls want to know. The more the school's plans for children widen and deepen and expand, the easier it is to relate its plans to those of the adult community.

Parents will be inherently a part of the School of Tomorrow. Never before in the history of the United States have

so many parents been so well informed in child growth and development. From lectures, discussions, books and magazines and newspapers, they have studied and learned. And probably never before have so many parents been so willing and eager to become a part of the school. Certainly never before have so many been so able in organizational and community work.

There will not be just a few services which parents can render the School of Tomorrow. There will be many. The more creative the school environment, the more opportunities there will be for parent participation. Parents will share in creating the school environment of this children's society. There will be not reporting to parents, for parents will be a part of the process of this school. Teachers and parents will learn from each other.

School will be another place, another institution where parents can participate in a democratic process. It will be one of the few places where they can see their children living in an on-going society of their peers. There they will get insight into the problems of this child's society and so learn better how to offer guidance to their children.

Leadership in the School of Tomorrow will be dynamic, creative, inspirational, cooperative. Leadership will not reside in one person but will shift and change, emerging out of the needs of the group. Mutual respect and faith in one another will be necessary for this kind of leadership to evolve.

In this society the concerns of the larger school community will go back and forth into the classrooms, providing much of the content of the curriculum and demanding the use of

many and varied skills. But there will also be numerous activities that uniquely belong to each classroom. There could be no effective communal living within the total school environment without the smaller, well-knitted, intimate planning and living within the classroom.

What of the Children and Teachers?

What of the children and teachers who will live in these classrooms?

Those who guide the young must have a social philosophy and their values must be close to child life—simple, basic things. Teachers must love children and understand the way they grow; they must be alert to what is revealed as they participate in school life; they must be keen to life and to those forces that impinge on it; they must keep abreast of professional research and make changes accordingly. There must be a humility, an open-mindedness, that sees the other person's point of view however different it may be.

And the children who come into the classroom each school day, wearing the same kind of cowboy jackets, the same saddle oxfords, having looked at and listened to the same television or radio programs, and laughed at the same jokes, there they come, playing they are robots and super-men. What can we do for them?

They have seen the magic of a fairy world and death-daring adventures on air and land and sea. They have watched murders and mysteries, and have taken vicarious trips into outer space. The lives of the great and the not so great have unrolled before them.

Jungles, deserts and polar regions are a commonplace. Facts and fragments of facts have been gathered from every corner of the universe. Dien Bien Phu, Geneva, Pakistan, Ethiopia, communists, security risks, super-sonic planes and space ships are as common to most children of today as the oatmeal and milk they have for breakfast.

And all this is theirs just by turning a knob and twisting a dial. It's almost incredible, but it's true. We do not know what all this means for our children. Much professional research is needed here. But there are some things that we do know.

We know that never before in the cultural life of America have so many children been exposed to so much science, geography, history, music, art, drama, dance forms, current events, amusement and entertainment. There is no dearth in today's world of the subject-matter the school once thought existed largely in books.

And never before have the teachers of America had available to them, with so little research on their part, such a large body of teaching materials and so many children who know so much about these materials.

We know that out of these conglomerate pieces of knowledge and ideas the school must somehow sort out the chaff, fill in the gaps, extend, broaden and deepen to bring interpretation and wholeness.

We also know that in the mechanistic world in which we live it is important that teachers help children perceive the wonders of the natural world and help them find satisfaction in simple pleasures of life. When thought has been arrested by such

things as the intricacies of a leaf, the softness of early spring rain, and the quietness in the movement of smoke on a still day, one's horizon of thinking has been enlarged. When one takes joy in such things as the popping of corn, the good smell of food being prepared, and the fellowship of friends, life somehow slows down its pace and one has time for reflection. When there is so much about super-men, it is well to call attention to the unselfish acts, the kind words, the generous impulse, the quiet courage of people as they live day by day. After all, Superman at school is just a small boy with a piece of newspaper or a sweater tied around his neck jumping from a height of two or three feet.

We know that while children come to us bringing so much of the mechanistic world and so many problems, old and new, they also come to us as always, bringing the freshness and charm of young growing life. They bring with them wonder and imagination and love. They, as always, approach the world about them with eagerness and expectation and a belief that life is good to touch, to taste, to feel. They want to find the answers, to see cause and effect, to see things happen. They wish to use many media through which to express themselves. And they, as always, want to test their adequacies and practice those skills that have meaning to them.

There is no staleness, no triteness in living with them, for they bring with them their joys, their sorrows, their hopes and their plans. And we know that it is these children as human beings that should always be the teacher's first concern.

Content in Life Experiences

Teachers with creativity and imagination can make with children in the School of Tomorrow a curriculum of vast richness. Such richness we never dreamed of a few years ago when the world was small and the backbone of the curriculum was a textbook or a cultural unit of work about which one studied. The approach in the Elementary School of Tomorrow will not be studying *about* but it will be extending and deepening insights in today's world so that tomorrow's world will be better.

The School of Tomorrow will not wish children to give back the facts they have learned or want them to repeat generalizations. The school will want the children to feel that they have never reached their maximum in thinking, for they and their teachers will continue to seek for information and for truth in observation, experimentation, discussion, wide reading, and from many different people who can help them in their quest.

What of the Three R's in the School of Tomorrow?

A group of third grade children once asked their teacher what was meant by the Three R's. There was to be a Parent-Teacher meeting that evening, and this was to be the topic for discussion. After the teacher's explanation, one child said, "But only one word begins with 'R.'" Another remarked, "They couldn't spell very well in those days, could they?"

In the School of Tomorrow, children will be better able to read and write and do arithmetic. These skills will be tied up in all that goes on. Life will demand their use and give meaning to

their acquisition. There could be no intelligent solution to problems involving quantity and space without accuracy in accounting and without carefully weighed judgment. Writing and spelling cannot be separated in life experiences. They are both a part of the communicative arts that are necessary to carry on the business of living.

Children by their very nature wish to become adept; they wish to reach the expectancies of society. They will practice skills eagerly when the opportunity is present and the necessary maturity is at hand for a successful experience. A fine quality of workmanship and an earnestness of purpose will be one of the goals of the school society in which they live.

Reading

And what of reading?

Reading will be a way of life in this society for it gives information and ideas and it provides splendid entertainment. There will be a demand for a large number of books both in the central library and in the classroom libraries. There are many beautiful and interesting books available to children in today's world, but unfortunately they are not always available in elementary schools.

There are books for every occasion and books for every mood; books for laughter and books for adventure; books to help children explore their world; books that help them see those values that persist down through the ages; and books with great ideals to which they may attach themselves.

Since learning to read is a personal matter, the approach to the teaching of reading will be largely individualis-

tic, for any attempt at uniform procedures usually hinders rather than helps. Through reading, one may share his experience with others; but reading also lends itself especially to individual pursuit. Through a love for reading one can escape much of the entertainment provided by mass communication for mass consumption. In tomorrow's world this may be an important factor. With a magazine, a newspaper, or a book one may explore the wide, wide world to his heart's content, unhampered by time schedules, days of the week, or other people's preferences. A school can do much in opening up new avenues of communication to tomorrow's children, for great treasure awaits those who go voluntarily to books.

In many reading textbooks of today there is a paucity of ideas and a lack of imagination. A love for reading cannot often be acquired by overexposure to pallid, insipid materials. Learning to read is not particularly interesting when one reads of boys and girls who are devoid of naturalness and charm; or when one reads of the day by day routines with which one is already familiar.

The mother of a six-year-old boy, named Benny, was "hearing him read." This is what she heard:

Dick likes to run.

Jane likes to run.

Baby likes to run.

And Benny hates to read.

Textbook publishers should be given the support of educators in efforts to create interesting, vivid, meaningful reading material.

Educators of today hear a great deal of the clinical approach to reading.

Since the reading clinic was originally designed for those children who had serious reading difficulties, it is unfortunate that in many quarters this approach has been incorporated into the teaching of regular classrooms. While possibly helpful to a few children, clinical procedures break reading into so many small parts that many children are never able to get these parts together again in a wholeness of experience. When small parts are to be measured, exacting measures must be devised. These measures in no way measure the total reading process.

If the standardization of norms, as a controlling factor in the teaching of reading, were eliminated, then the clinical approach could assume its proper place in helping children with serious difficulties without making this approach a practice for children generally.

We lose our perspective when attention is focused on standardized norms and the clinical approach. We will never see the values of an organismic approach if we spend our energies on a mechanistic approach. It takes courage to let go that which has been measured so exactly for something which is largely discerned in human behavior and in the strivings of the human heart.

The United States Office of Education has estimated the teacher shortage for the past school year at 72,000. Many reasons have been given for this shortage. It is possible that one of the major reasons is the lack of challenge in the teaching profession today. Teachers have sometimes been characterized as baby-sitters, taskmasters and policemen. The teachers for the

Elementary School of Tomorrow must be equipped to teach at the point of human need. For one who would teach at the point of human need, moral and spiritual values must be strong and deep; scholarship, imagination and creativity are necessary, for such teaching is full of strivings and of plans, and it will be wonderfully exciting. We do not know all the answers; so this kind of teaching is full of suspense which gives zest to life. There will always be something to be solved, something to be mended, someone to be helped. Life will never be commonplace, but always worth while. When the task grips, one is willing to struggle and to endure hardships, for the joy and the growth are in the struggle.

Here in America we have the potential for meeting the demands of the Elementary School of Tomorrow. We have a psychology of learning which would teach us to begin with the human factors in the environment, rather than the non-human, in order that the phenomenal self may be enhanced. We have a tremendous body of research in human growth and development, and a philosophy which would guide us toward the life good to live. And we have thousands of men and women who wish to be of real worth to society. "Man's right to knowledge and the free use thereof" is no more applicable to the college professor than to the classroom teacher.

This, then, I believe, is the direction in which we must go, that we may develop citizens for tomorrow who carry with them, as a part of themselves, a strong unfaltering belief in the humanitarian approach to life, a belief on which our nation was founded.

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