Making Teaching

A Satisfying Experience

This article seeks to give teachers confidence in working out newer, more creative approaches to classroom instruction.

Evidence has long been available that making teaching an imaginative, progressive (going-forward), modern process has seemed to provoke hesitation, doubts, frustrations and even teaching failures on the part of many teachers. Frequently teacher comments concerning modern educational practices have simply echoed the criticisms made by the worst enemies of the public schools. Teachers must be happy and secure with the teaching job they are doing, or there can be no real teaching satisfaction. Members of the profession should look at their shortcomings; we are the ones best qualified to do the job of making constructive teaching a satisfying experience.

A Constructive Process

There are three things that can be done, basically, to get the above process started:

First, educators should consciously stop joining the malcontents in America who pillory modern education with little basis for their criticisms. Honest, constructive criticism is greatly to be desired. However, why not keep this criticism where it will do the most good—within a professional framework where self-analysis and sharing with other members of the teaching profession can lead to educational improvement?

Second, let's get the facts! The "facts" are those about modern educational practices. A knowledge of the successes in modern teaching will go far in convincing one that it can be a very satisfying experience or has been for many people. These facts are readily accessible. A recent book entitled Public Education Under Criticism has them for both sides of the current arguments on public education. A brief examination of some criticisms involved in modern teaching concepts seems in order.

What of the idea that time is wasted on inconsequential matters—the unit approach and its attendant "frills" in education. It does seem odd, at the outset, that Americans who want to be up-to-date and as enlightened as possible (or at least they want that for their children) actually regard the acquiring of essential social information as inconsequential. In contrast, Koopman found, in a Midwest community, that parents ranked educational out-

comes in the following order: (1) ability to make a living, (2) learning to meet life problems, (3) social adjustment, (4) fundamental subjects, (5) character education, (6) citizenship education, (7) general education and cultural, and (8) athletics. This evidence seems to refute the thinking of those who feel that school patrons want only the 3 R's for their children. Social education has never been a frill.

Further, there has been no decline in the attention given the fundamentals. It is presently true that a smaller proportion of time in a school day is being allotted to the traditional subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic than was the case a number of years ago, but the length of a school year has increased from 132 to 175½ days since 1870. Thus, Gray has indicated that actually more minutes are devoted per week to reading than was formerly the case.

A brief look at the teaching efficiency criticism, concerning the supposed superior preparation of children in the fundamentals during times past as compared to modern efforts, can allow teachers to state that there has been, not regression, but general instructional improvement over the past eighty years when résumés of “then and now” studies are reviewed.

The argument that modern teaching promotes discipline problems is based largely, on very mistaken teacher ideas about classroom freedom under the progressive approach. No educator worth his salt today even remotely believes in children being allowed unlicensed freedom under the guise of “newer” teaching procedures. Modern teachers exist to help youngsters take turns, express courtesy, understand fair play, obey rules, respect others, and conform to recognized authority. These behavior goals of self-discipline can be achieved better under up-to-date teaching concepts than through “cut-and-dried” programs which have little meaning for children.

The contention that the old, tried and true methods are the only ways to promote learning is just as faulty as the others mentioned. Reported research which has attempted comparisons between matched schools using traditional, formal methods and schools using modern, developmental methods.


Ibid. p. 369.


See the following sources:


has been uniformly in favor of the latter.

The foregoing bits of information are not recent developments. Many teachers have undoubtedly been aware of these facts. They do, however, support a teaching viewpoint which has modern, developmental overtones. It does seem that efforts on the part of professional workers to promote positive programs can result in educational success. This should strengthen the notion that modern education can be a satisfying experience. Lastly, there should also be some feelings of gratification that more enlightened approaches in teaching children do pay off.

The third item in relating educational practices to greater job satisfaction is the most difficult. It requires a modification of the individual’s present methods in order to promote better experiences for children and more personal pleasure from teaching. The following process is suggested:

1. For one week, take the teaching area in which you have the greatest concern and make a written record of your teaching actions and the general responses of the pupils.

2. Begin some actual reference reading in the area of your concern to see what you can learn. Unfortunately, few teachers “know” the research on which good teaching methods are based or care to find out about it. One’s teaching perspective can be broadened tremendously with just a moderate knowledge of recent educational research or information—a little can help greatly.

3. Analyze the original teaching record you made in light of the information gained through your investigative procedures. Attempt to isolate the particular teaching practices which need modification, and look further, if needed, for ideas to try in place of ones previously used.

4. Formulate a new teaching plan or proposal for your teaching concern invoking the changes which you think will make for better teaching practice.

5. Try out the new plan, evaluate the results, and then if necessary repeat the entire five step process. One new idea will usually lead to others. Teachers will be surprised at how “creative” they can be and how much satisfaction there is in trying things out with some successful experiences.

A New Approach

A first grade teacher with whom the author is acquainted recently tried the above process as she thought over and reviewed her work with two reading groups in pre-primer materials. She realized that apparently two problems existed with her children—word confusion and seeming boredom with the continual vocabulary repetition. The children were rather indifferent to their books, attention was easily diverted, and they frequently lost their place. Instead of claiming that this state of affairs was due to the weather, just one of those days, or the inadequacy of the children, this teacher formulated her teaching concern as one of maintaining interest in the needed repetition of the pre-primer vocabulary or, to put it more broadly, developing interest in the early stages of beginning reading.

As this teacher began some reference reading, she realized there were some answers to her concerns. The first idea secured was a suggestion that teacher prepared materials have been devised to meet specific deficiencies in a class. The utilization of this thought took the form of teacher-made, dittoed booklets based on the children’s focal interest in the autumn season. Much of the vocabulary used in the pre-primers was incorporated in this material. The children
not only "read" simple one page stories in these booklets but had the opportunity of illustrating the pages read. This idea was not novel, but the new material did generate greater pupil interest.

Further research turned up this statement, "Many teachers find it effective to have children prepare little books of their own which they write and illustrate. . . . The children enjoy reading their own materials to other children."

Searching further in source material strengthened the idea that reading must be a part of the entire primary program and thus gain vitality from it. Three large charts were made for the bulletin board on the unit being developed which incorporated the vocabulary used in the pre-primer materials.

This teacher also had an interest in children's poetry. She had a large, illustrated chart collection of children's poems which could be introduced for enjoyment and appreciation when certain events occurred in the school life of children.

These poetry experiences for first grade children furnish reading as well as listening opportunities. Stimulation was offered, too, which enabled the group to write its own poetry. One such poem grew out of vivid rainbow descriptions related during sharing time. The children's efforts on a rainy day resulted in this poem:


The late afternoon of that school day found proud children carrying home a poem which they could read to mother! An expressive, child-drawn picture above the lines of poetry was also available which could be read, too! Twelve of the eighteen words in this poem were from the children's pre-primer vocabulary. This first grade teacher reported that she had had better results with four lines of poetry, in developing interest, word recognition and comprehension, than she had achieved with two weeks of previous work.

This illustration tends to reveal some of the many possibilities available for good, satisfying teaching when a teacher begins to do some creative self-analysis about her own classroom concerns. Every educational worker can have these happy, modern teaching experiences! Americans welcome, laud and publicize the up-to-date or experimental in almost everything except education. Sleek motorcar designs expressing such concepts as "Motoramic" or "The Forward Look" are hailed, because they are new, as the manufacturers proudly claim, from the ground up. Is it not time for a personal crusade for more positive, modernized thinking and doing on the educational scene? Let's stop ridiculing, questioning, or dismissing the new before it has a fair examination! Let's get and know the facts about the successes of improved ways of teaching! Let's begin the modification of our own teaching practices!