

The School Library and the Changing Curriculum

For the children and young people in a changing world, the teacher and the school librarian need to work together in providing meaningful and realistic learning opportunities.

IF THERE is one thing that we can be sure of today beyond our abiding faith in the future, it is that we live in a confusing age; one described as the anxious age, the age of propaganda, of technology and automation, the age of conformity, of slackness, of fuzzy thinking, the atomic age, the space age, and the age of rapid social change. We are told that about all we can educate for is *change*, a generalization not very helpful to the hundreds of dedicated teachers and librarians who are attempting to provide the most useful, meaningful and realistic learning experiences for the nearly 40,000,000 youth who are today enrolled in our schools and colleges.

That education has changed, that the curriculum is changing and will continue to change rapidly in the next decade is as certain, as that teachers and librarians will seek to provide children with the learning experiences that may make the difference between the annihilation of the civilization we know and believe in, or its preservation and enhancement.

Let us examine, therefore, a number of curriculum trends of the past decade that have brought significant change in

the function and role of the school library, those which give greatest promise for the improvement of education in the years ahead, in a future brought into sharp focus by the launching of Sputnik, an event that ranks in importance with the invention of fire, the wheel and printing.

Trends in Curriculum Development

The first significant change in the curriculum is the sharper focus on the child, his physical and emotional needs, and his developmental tasks that are being spelled out in the attempts to adjust the curriculum to the child as well as to adjust the child to the curriculum. We are attempting, first, to *provide* the child a broad, balanced education fitted to his needs and abilities; and the content of the curriculum is directed toward a mastery of the knowledges, understandings, beliefs and skills that will enable him to reach his highest potential and to contribute effectively in all life's associations and relationships.

Methods of teaching adhere far more strictly than in the past to what has been learned through research about how chil-

dren grow and learn. While it may be true that some psychologists have gone overboard in suggesting that everything should be made easy for youth, that to frustrate a child is heresy, it is equally true that curriculum change has been built on a foundation of painstaking research.

Briefly the research can be summarized as follows: (a) Children learn in different ways, in different situations, at different rates, from different materials. Although they all go through stages of growth from infancy to maturity that can be identified, individual differences in growth and learning are marked. (b) Learning takes place when the new learning is related to something already known, when the child can see some use for or meaning in what he is asked to do by the school. (c) Interest promotes learning, and learning, in turn, promotes interest. It is a two-way street. (d) Learning is a change in behavior; in ways of thinking, believing, and doing. It is these findings that have provided the bench marks, the major assumptions on which core, general education, life adjustment education, and problem solving methods have been initiated.

Changing Methods of Instruction

The heart of these curriculum changes lies not so much in a change in the content of curriculum as in methods of instruction. Adhering firmly to the evidence from research on how people learn, teachers are making it possible for pupils to identify problems that have meaning and reality for them; to locate, gather, organize, evaluate information and to utilize it in reaching conclusions and generalizations—thus translating information into knowledge, understanding and belief. True it is that this method of instruction requires far greater skill and

imagination on the part of the teacher than does textbook instruction. The results when evaluated in terms of the pupils' ability to think appear to make the effort worthwhile.

The Role of the Library

The effects of this general curriculum change on the role of the library in the school is too well understood to need long description. It has had two distinct effects—(a) Libraries are becoming true materials centers where appropriate books, pamphlets, magazines, and audio-visual materials are selected, organized, and made easily available to pupils and teachers alike. (b) Librarians are involved in helping pupils develop skills in the methods of inquiry, as they bring information to bear on their problems whether these be, "How people lived in the 1850's," or "How can local government be improved?" Teachers and librarians are working hand in hand to teach pupils these skills.

The school librarian must continue to take major responsibility for the selection and organization of the learning materials, but he should organize his student staff so that a major proportion of library routines are carried on by them. His major responsibility is to work with teachers in helping pupils acquire skills in the methods of inquiry.

In schools using the newer methods of instruction, there are now fewer pupils coming to the library to read on an assigned topic which they copy word for word out of an encyclopedia. There is less searching by the librarian than formerly. One librarian recently, however,

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did try to locate a strange animal called an "anzee" which a boy insisted was his "topic" for a zoology class. Considerably later she found out that he was assigned to report on the chimpanzee.

The newer methods of instruction motivate pupils to read widely, to explore, to "find the facts, filter the facts, face the facts and follow the facts,"—and the librarian is involved in teaching pupils to read with understanding, to examine the authoritativeness of their information, to tell fact from opinion, to collect evidence and reach conclusions, to turn the white light of reason on problems, to say "what does this information mean to me?" to think critically, not just to gulp and to regurgitate information.

A Second Curriculum Trend

A second trend in the curriculum is related to the renewed accent on the attitudes, beliefs and behavior of the products of the schools. Schools today are recognizing that they must be judged not only by what children know, but by what they believe and how they behave. That this is a tremendous responsibility to be shared by all in whose hands rests the upbringing of youth—the home, the church, the community, is evident. But how can we help youth believe that service to others is a worthy objective, that human personality is of worth, that a baby crying in Tunisia is our baby, is a problem being tackled more and more directly by the schools.

Studies reveal that these values are not always achieved in classes in civics where pupils memorize the duties and responsibilities of citizenship; that they are not acquired by report card marks in citizenship; that they are not achieved by exhorting pupils to be responsible and cooperative. Beliefs and values are built as children have opportunities to under-

stand them and test them in many school situations as they participate in planning both in the classroom, in cocurricular activities, in the student council where they share in policy making, where they identify school problems and seek solutions, where they carry out plans and evaluate results.

There is nothing new about schools having service organizations, although in the past their main objective has often been to get work done around the school. Now such arrangements are becoming real service opportunities, organized and directed as laboratories for democratic living.

Library clubs so organized lend themselves perfectly to this type of learning. When the club is carefully organized, when weekly meetings are held in which members are able to identify library service problems; to make plans, answering such questions as what needs to be done and who will do what; where pupils assign themselves individual responsibility for specific tasks, the learning that accrues comes through the students' evaluation of what they are able to do for other pupils and teachers. Students learn the skills required in planning, in carrying out plans and evaluating results. They learn what it means to be contributing, responsible citizens because they have a chance to understand and test these values in action.

But even more important in the development of values and beliefs is the new emphasis on the actual teaching of the values intrinsic to the democratic ethic, the social cement that motivates and holds this nation together. As teachers have moved to give children an understanding of the American heritage, to make them sensitive to the welfare of others, to see, to hear, to understand, to care, they have found reading of tran-

scendent importance in meeting these goals.

True it is that one acquires many of his values by contagion. Research, however, brings clear-cut evidence that values can be taught. Not by exhorting children to be good, to be responsible, but by providing many situations where they can actually assume responsibility, where they can examine human motivations and human behavior, where they can see cause and effect relationships.

Responsibilities of School Librarians and Teachers

In books and reading these values can be explored and evaluated. Findings from the studies undertaken by the Center for Instructional Materials at the University of Chicago, the Detroit Citizenship Study, and the American Council on Education provide clear-cut evidence that children identify with book characters and that the identification operates at a very deep level. They not only want to be like the book characters, they actually become them. Think of what we can do in giving the kind of guidance to children so that they can generalize about the characters and situations that they meet in books. Think of the opportunities we have to help them examine human behavior, and evaluate human relationships—not in broad terms—but in such specific areas as differences between generations, economic differences, wholesome family living and the motivations of others. It is not done in reading guidance situations in which children are only asked to tell what the book is about. It is done in book discussions when teachers and librarians ask why characters behave as they do—and what they (the pupils) might have done in similar situations.

When we help pupils choose the books

in which characters are meeting the same problems that they do, give them a chance through skillful discussion, through role-playing stories, through helping them reflect and generalize, we will find a great increase in interest and skill in reading among our present “non-readers.” But teachers and librarians need to start with children, their needs, interests and developmental tasks—help them find appropriate books and guide them in generalizing about them.

If librarians do not meet this challenge of using books to help children build a scale of values and beliefs, they are missing their greatest opportunity. We should stop using such broad goals as “free reading,” reading for pleasure, and “the book is all” and use *all books* as *bona fide* curriculum content. Children will still read for the story, but the teacher and the librarian will formulate goals in terms of the learnings they wish to provide for their pupils and use books as “means” as well as “ends” in education.

A Third Trend

A third trend in curriculum development that can be explored is the use of educational TV. Make no mistake it is on its way and it is succeeding. That it can provide the best possible learning situation as it combines both sight and sound; that it brings the whole world to the threshold of the child; that it enables thousands of children to enjoy the carefully planned lessons of master teachers; that it may save money; that it can well have tremendous influence on the future of the school libraries are generalizations that should not be shrugged aside.

John K. Weiss, vice president of the Fund for the Advancement of Education, reviews the progress made, the careful evaluation of these projects of equated groups of young people—the

experimental group studying the subject via TV—the control group by the usual classroom methods, with results statistically significant and favorable to the TV groups. He summarizes these experimental projects in these words: “The logistics of manpower and money as well as consideration of quality make it (TV teaching) a foregone conclusion.”¹

What is this likely to do to books and school libraries? Philip Lewis speaking at the American Association of School Administrators recently said this: “Libraries of the future will use TV techniques to eliminate books. Films, tape recordings, and microfilms will take the place of heavy volumes. If a student misses a class, he can check out a film of the session.”

Implications for the Librarian

The future of libraries can go down one road or the other depending largely on the dedication and skill of teachers and librarians who believe that in books are man's best ideas, the story of his achievement, the record of his imagination, of his creative intelligence. Will reading of books become a lost art? It well may, for let us not be complacent about the reading behavior of the American public today! In a recent survey in which one question was asked a careful sampling of the American public—Are you reading a book now?—79 percent said, “No.”²

We must not assume that putting a book into a child's hands is sufficient. Highet says, “It is useless simply to tell kids to Read A Book. It is like telling

them to go away and live for a year.”³

Unless in our reading guidance programs we start first with the child, help him to keep the wonderful curiosity, the desire to understand, and to know, we are going down the road to the obsolescence of books. People will continue to spend more and more time in front of TV where many of the programs lull people into insensibility, a state of semi-anesthesia.

But skillful librarians will accept the opportunity to use the experiences children have in educational and commercial TV as motivations for continued learning. They know that once interest in a subject has been promoted by a science lesson on educational TV, they can broaden and deepen the learning through the medium of books, where the images are not fleeting and evanescent. But make no mistake some of us may need to change many of our reading guidance procedures.

Some say that the librarian has too many pupils to take care of individuals. This is not an acceptable answer. Every day as school librarians meet groups of children, time should be spent with these groups in ascertaining their interests, in providing them with potential ones, in introducing them to a wealth of materials. Motivating children to read is a matter of good teaching—providing learning situations in which the librarian starts with the interests and needs of pupils, their developmental tasks and their need to achieve them. Through reading aloud, through book introductions, latching onto their interests but going a step further in introducing them to new potential interests, to a world of adventure, of fantasy, of reality—extend-

¹ John K. Weiss. “New Worlds in Education.” *Saturday Review* 41:13, February 15, 1958.

² Lester Asheim. “What Do Adults Read?” *Adult Reading*, Fifty-fifth Yearbook, Part 2. National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956. p. 8.

³ Gilbert Highet. *Talents and Geniuses*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957. p. 275.

ing their horizons, stretching their minds and hearts, the school librarian provides for real learning in the library.

A Look Ahead

And finally what is likely to be emphasized in education in the future and what will be the role of the library?

We were disturbed about the attacks on education following the orbiting of Sputnik and were thankful when Explorer took the heat off the schools to the extent that more reasoned judgment could be brought to bear on the problems facing education in this new age. It will be a mistake, a tragic one, however, if we return to complacency. We should continue to re-examine our objectives, to test our methods in the light of those objectives and to re-evaluate our achievements. Can we do better than we are doing?

What should the schools be about? Two or three trends are emerging clearly from current discussions about education as follows:

1. Scientists will not be developed in a curriculum heavily skewed to science and mathematics. They will be educated when, from kindergarten through college, pupils have many experiences with the scientific method; in learning to think critically and creatively, in schools where inquiry is promoted, not discouraged by question and answer methods of instruction. Through the scientific method pupils can be helped to clarify the relationship of science to the larger purposes of life. They will learn the scientific method as teachers treat their ordinary experiences in a way that they can ask, *how* and *why*, instead of having the teacher ask, *what*?

2. Balance in educational experience needs to be continued and encouraged.

It is in the humanities and the arts that the individual acquires the skills and insights that promote emotional stability, that enable him to become a more complete personality. While automation and technology pave the way for man to have more leisure, his use of it at present can be evaluated by such terms as the "rape of leisure." We need a curriculum that educates the emotions, that gives the individual the insights and skills for using leisure constructively.

3. The American family and the community must provide greater motivation to children for education. Pupils need to work hard at school, to experience the satisfaction that comes from disciplined achievement. Teachers alone cannot provide this motivation in an American culture that presently calls the intelligent and skillful people, eggheads—in a culture that is permeated by fuzzy thinking or none at all—where conformity rather than creativity appears to be in the ascendency.

If these trends are significant, it means that determined and skillful school librarians will devote themselves increasingly to the task of teaching pupils to think critically and creatively as they master the skills required for locating, organizing, evaluating and utilizing information.

It means that they will provide real learning situations in school libraries, taking into account how children learn; that they will not assume that making books available is their major task; that they will teach children as directly as does the teacher in the classroom.

Then they may hope that youth will learn to like to read because they have really learned how; that they will use books and other communication media in the pursuit of truth, and for lifelong learning and fulfillment.



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Liberal arts inclined teachers' colleges and universities into which modern theories of "life adjustment" type education had not yet invaded—I owe not only my thirst for knowledge but also my desire to be a teacher. . . . It has been my high school instructors who have shown me that I can be of most benefit to my students, my profession, and my country, not as a psychiatric adviser, but as an instructor whose enthusiasm for learning is contagious. And it is in these dedicated people that my own hopes for the future of American education lie, for I shudder to think of the inevitable degeneration of the minds of millions of American school children who are doomed to be subjected to the teaching methods which my generation has been instructed are the proper ones.

Upon this hopeful note we come to the end of our comments on our education. Ours, we think, is a good school providing adequate education for all who wish to benefit from it. We go even further in providing enrichment for the future leaders in every profession.

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