

# Kindergarten and First Grade Programs for Today

**Moral values, spiritual values, courage, stability and insight must be our goals for modern children if our democratic society is to endure.**

PLANNING for modern education of children should involve many people—both school people and other citizens. Since the teacher is especially sensitive to the influences of our society on today's children, he should certainly play a major role in educational planning at national, state and local levels.

A consideration of how a few skilled teachers regard some of these influences should help to point the way for those who seek to improve the quality of education for children today. At this crucial moment in education it might well be the teacher who turns the tide of public opinion in such a way that the influences of our modern society become forces for the good of young children in kindergartens and first grades.

## Mobile Population

"Mama, it looks like Miss McArthur is going to teach me to read in spite of myself!" Paul glowed with satisfaction as he closed the book which he had been sharing with his mother. Paul's father worked for a firm which often transferred him to a new location. During Paul's first year in school his family had lived in three different towns. He carried with

him no books for reading and only brief statements concerning his progress. One such statement read, "Paul is not ready to read. He needs to find himself." No mention was made of what had been done to help Paul to get ready to read or to "find himself."

Paul's mother simply didn't understand this statement. When she enrolled him in Miss McArthur's first grade, she explained that she thought he was just an average six-year-old. Miss McArthur encouraged Paul to talk about himself, his family, his friends and the places he had been. He told many interesting stories about apartment houses, snow shovels, orange trees and airplanes. She wrote these on large charts which he shared with the group. Paul brought pictures and objects from home either to illustrate his stories or to share with the children. The teacher gave him a chance to become a part of the group. She made him feel that she was a warm, good person who understood him. She encouraged him to experiment and to explore his school environment. She saw to it that the schoolroom was a clean, attractive, interesting place.

One day the teacher said, "Paul, I

want to read with you today." She motioned for Paul to sit beside her as she took a low chair by the library table. On the table was a selection of books that would appeal to a beginning reader. Paul quickly said, "Miss McArthur, I can't read." She knew that he was now ready to read. That is why she said, "If you will choose a book, I'll help you to read."

As the year progressed Paul had many experiences with charts and books, gradually built a sight vocabulary of several hundred words, learned to use context clues and structural and phonetic analysis, to recognize new words, grew to enjoy books and finally became an independent reader. Paul had "found himself!"

In his hand he carried a note to his next teacher telling of his progress and making suggestions that would make future adjustments less difficult.

### Pressures of Time, Space and People

"Hey, teacher, ain't you got a coffee pot?" Allan pulled at Miss Sallie's skirt. She was moving about the room rather quickly because 37 first graders can get out of hand quickly during the first days of school. She was thankful that she had asked for time for special interviews with each child and his parents. She was glad she had spent several days arranging many centers of interest and preparing for this large group. She was pleased that two parents had agreed to be on hand to help in case of emergency. She felt she was fortunate that the teacher who would arrive later to use the same room for another half-day session did not seem to expect things to be in perfect order.

Allan and two other children were in the housekeeping corner apparently having a make-believe meal around a

small table. As Miss Sallie passed the table again he yelled, "Hey, teacher! Ain't you got a coffee pot?"

Generally 37 children were working and playing together fairly well. Miss Sallie was keen to observe their reactions to each other. Like Allan, many children had never been in such a large group before. There were no records or machines to measure the inner emotions or the growing tensions that such a situation produced. Here and there a few tears, a flushed face, a thumb sucker, a loud voice, a silent thinker evidenced the reactions of an individual child.

Allan's voice grew louder. As Miss Sallie approached, he placed his hands on his hips and yelled, "Teacher, how do you expect me to get through this morning with all of these kids without a cup of coffee?"

In addition to the tensions generated in this crowded classroom, Allan had come from a world of other numerous tensions. He would need many outlets for these growing tensions—fingerpaint to squeeze and smooth, large blocks to pull and push, big paper, brushes and paints to splash with, large areas in which to romp and play, clay to pound, and nails to drive. He would need periods of quiet and relaxation, such as listening to good music, enjoying good books, arranging puzzles, resting on a rug or in a rocking chair. He would need to become adjusted to routines, to follow simple rules and directions, to share with others, to think, to use self-control and to assume responsibility for himself as well as for the group. He would need much individual guidance and encouragement to read, write and

---

*PATSY MONTAGUE is supervisor of elementary education, Department of Public Instruction, Raleigh, North Carolina.*

---

work with members successfully. Success is very important at this stage! Miss Sallie often said at the end of the half-day session, "If only I had more time to help Allan! He has so many needs. He'd have a better chance in a group of twenty-four children during a six-hour day!"

### Accent on Acceleration

Jacque's mother wasn't a bit worried when his first grade teacher said, "Even though Jacque has read only a few books, he will do excellent work in Grade 2." In many ways he seemed more mature than many of the children of his age. From the very first he was a leader in the group. He had expanded his interest in science, art, music, literature and dramatic play.

Miss Walker had seen to it that he had many opportunities to experiment, to select, to do simple research, to engage in dramatic play, to listen to good music, to write original stories and poems, to paint pictures, scenery and murals. His inquiring mind and unfolding talents were given no boundaries. His search for knowledge was never quenched. He was easily overstimulated and very sensitive but he grew in his ability to cooperate and to work with other members of the group. As the year progressed he showed only a slight interest in learning to read. At the same time he was deeply interested in library books, reference books, charts and maps. At the end of the first grade he ranked 1st grade 6th month on a standardized reading test. Another test indicated that his I.Q. was approximately 150.

Jacque's second grade teacher continued to provide rich experiences which added dimension and unity to his learning. During the first month of school Miss Williams gave him much guidance

and many opportunities to grow in his ability to read, write, spell and work with numbers. During the next eight months his progress was phenomenal. On a standardized achievement test he ranked above fourth grade in reading. Jacque was definitely a gifted child!

Miss Williams said, "All children need to be challenged. What we need is a non-graded primary school in which children can advance to the next step as soon as they are ready!"

### Modern Technology

Susan brought some oak leaves and acorns to kindergarten. Mrs. Kennedy asked, "Do you know what comes from these little acorns?" Susan, "Oh, yes! Baby squirrels!" Some of the five-year-olds in the group disagreed. As they talked she made a list of things they knew. Then she asked, "How can we find out more about acorns?" They asked the librarian for books. They went for a walk to look for acorns and, perhaps, a squirrel's nest. Before they took the walk, they made a few simple rules and talked about what they would do. After they returned, they discussed what they had found out about acorns.

This was the beginning of problem solving which is necessary for scientific discovery: What is the problem? What do we know? Where can we find out? Let's experiment!

"How many acorns?"

"Where does it say that?"

"How old is that tree?"

"Baby squirrels eat acorns."

"Ho! Ho! Mrs. Squirrel!"

Susan grew to understand that there is a relationship between baby squirrels and acorns. Mrs. Kennedy knew that these five-year-olds who were growing up in the neighborhood of an atomic re-

actor would need to grow each year in their understanding of the interdependence of all people and of other living things.

### Mass Media

Mrs. Johnson didn't understand why her daughter-in-law insisted on sending Lydia to kindergarten. There was a TV program especially for five-year-olds. There were many good recordings of stories, songs and games. It seemed to her that these were enough to keep Lydia occupied every hour of the day. She asked, "Is Lydia *really learning* anything at kindergarten?" Lydia's mother laughed. "We are all learning something! Recently we were hurrying through breakfast. Bill's newspaper suddenly knocked over the baby's milk. I began to scold Bill. Lydia calmly got a cloth and began to clean the baby's tray. She said, 'I don't think Daddy would have done this if he could have helped it, so I'll just help him clean it up.' We realize that kindergarten has brought about many good changes. During our regular conference with her teacher we asked how this was accomplished.

"Lydia's teacher explained to us: 'One of the children was painting and acci-

dently knocked over a pot of red paint. Lydia yelled, 'You big, clumsy ox. Look what you've done!' Then I said, 'I don't think she would have done this if she could have helped it.' Lydia seemed surprised but soon began to help clean up. This is just one of the ways that Lydia is learning through experiences with her group to: get along in a peer group; use a pleasant voice; grow in self-discipline; enjoy art, literature and music; select interesting materials; express important ideas; assume responsibility; contribute to the welfare of the group.

"You see, Mrs. Johnson, through the integration of many meaningful experiences the children are learning how to work, play and live together."

The demands, the pressures, the changes; the national, the state, the local programs; the families these affect; the mass media and all their implications have to be woven into a varied tapestry. All will be failure unless the individual pupil and his own sanctity as a human being are clearly delineated. Moral values, spiritual values, courage, stability and insight must be our goals for modern children if our democratic society is to endure.

## The Association for Childhood Education International

*invites you to attend the*

### 1959 ACEI Study Conference

March 29—April 3, St. Louis, Missouri

*Theme: "Fundamentals for Today's Children"*

For information write to ACEI headquarters:  
1200 Fifteenth Street, N. W., Washington 5, D. C.

Copyright © 1959 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.