

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

JUNE, 1906

THE UNIVERSITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THE YEAR IN REVIEW AND THE OUTLOOK

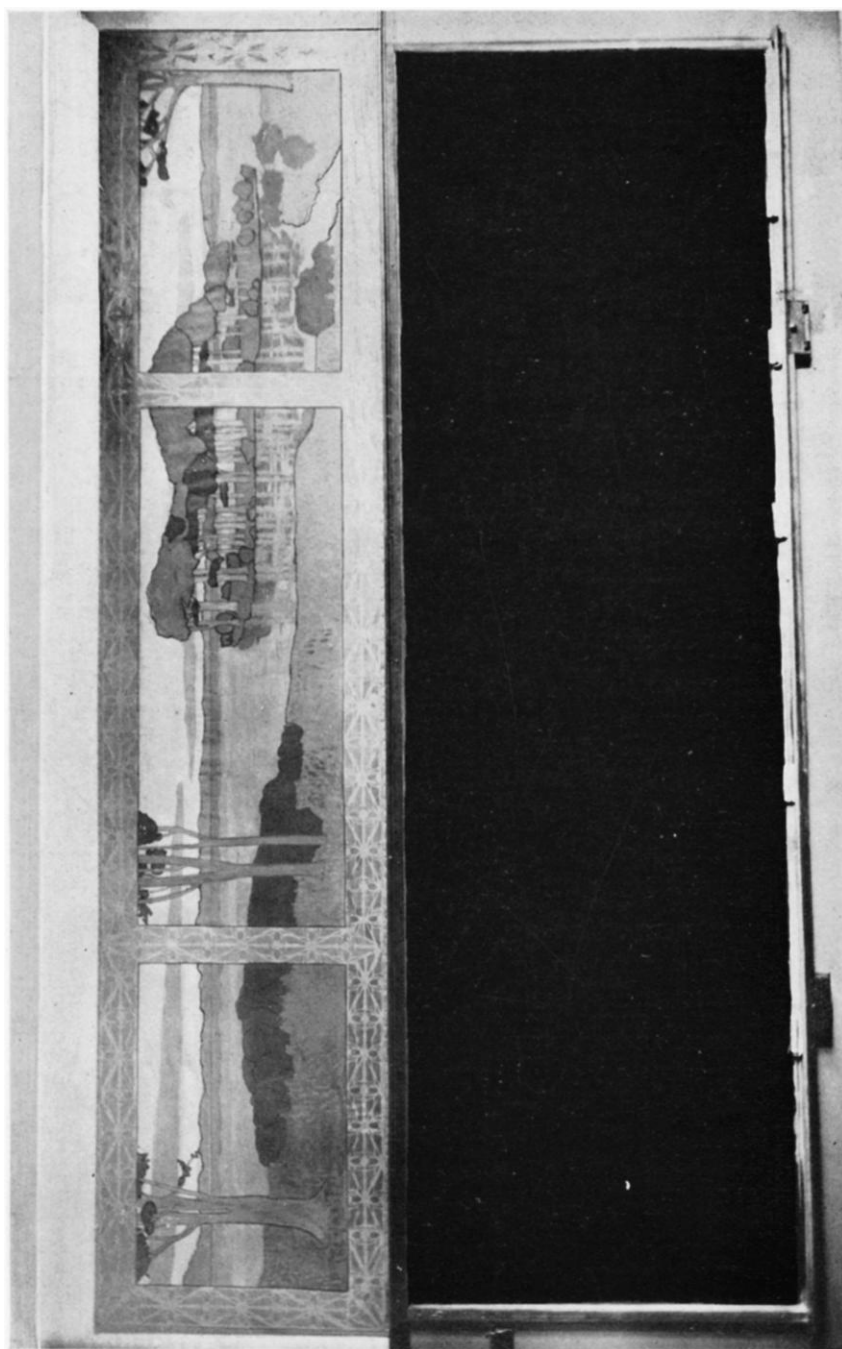
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THE PROPER MEASURE OF A SCHOOL

The test of a school, like that of any other enterprise, is found in its output. Gathered together in the schoolrooms, in the persons of teachers and pupils, is a tremendous amount of vital energy which, as a rule, is still almost wholly unproductive. From this source the community expects but little help directly, and it gets even less. The real educational problem, therefore, would seem to be that of transforming the non-productive into the productive in some form that has an actual value to the community. It is the larger aspect of the old problem of making two blades of grass grow where but one grew before; and it is to this end that THE UNIVERSITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL has largely directed its efforts during the past year. This conception of the function of a school need not obscure the fact that in the last analysis the educational output is a spiritual product; but we have learned by bitter experience to question severely the character of a spiritual product which does not manifest itself at once in some objective and tangible form having a definite and beneficent function. It is this idea that is at the bottom of the art, the industrial, and the civic work in the school.

COMMUNITY-INTERESTS AS SUBJECTS OF STUDY

In organizing the activities of the school community, it should be the aim to have represented, as far as possible, the interests that



FRESCO MADE BY PUPILS OF THE TENTH SCHOOL YEAR, FROM LANDSCAPE STUDIES ON WOODED ISLAND, JACKSON PARK
(Placed above the blackboard of their room)

bind together the various elements of society at large. The chief difficulty encountered in doing this lies in the fact that the instant an industry or an art is introduced into the school-room the tendency is to erect it at once into a "subject of study." This means to the average person that it must have its special teacher, its arbitrary place on the program, and in other ways take a definite setting in the curriculum. Now, there is a vast and an essential difference between this kind of so-called organization attempted by the school, and the actual organization which takes place in true community life. If, for example, under normal conditions, in the latter, a wagon is to be made, the various activities that contribute to that particular end are so correlated as to combine efficiency and economy. Everybody's efforts are directed to that result. There is just so much wood needed and no more. A premium is placed upon the endeavor to use as little as may be consistent with the character of the wagon desired. The same is true of the iron work—no more bolts or bands are made than are actually needed. So, also, it is with the paint; what the wood needs for its preservation and adornment is used, and nothing beyond. But bring these industries into school as "hand-work," and we find only so many more "subjects of study" that in some way must be juggled into an already overcrowded program; only so many more teachers that are to increase the wear and tear in already overwrought children. It is no longer a question of doing *just as little as is needed, but as much as possible!* It is as though the wagon-maker were to go ahead blindly and make a dozen wheels where only four can possibly be used; as though the blacksmith should forge a hundred pieces of iron where but twenty are needed; and as if the painter should demand forty hours for his work when five would be altogether adequate. We are in an incipient stage of development, where there is insufficient attention given to the relation between demand and supply. The work generally in any particular subject represents the strength and the personal push of the teachers, or the reverse. If by superior wit, or by greater cunning, or by sharpness of tooth or strength of claw the ambitious teacher is able to get a lion's share of the program, his particular subject

may be correspondingly magnified, even to the detriment of all others.

The faculty of THE UNIVERSITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, recognizing to some extent the great need for a truer form of organization, has given a good deal of attention to the question, and the subject will probably be in the foreground of discussion for some time to come. Meanwhile, the public has no right to become testy or impatient because, so far, it has not yet made an astonishing success in organizing itself on the community plan; and the problems which face us in the schoolroom are not less difficult—they are, in fact, of precisely the same type.

THE BASIS OF ORGANIZATION

The cardinal principle to be observed in the newer organization of the school is that everything which the pupils do should be a genuine response to a real need. It must not only be a need that the child himself can appreciate; it must be one which, on its own merits, appeals to the teacher also. Whenever this is true, the work assumes its highest possible educational value. To illustrate: A member of the Civics Club of the ELEMENTARY SCHOOL came to the office a few days ago and said: "We have been looking over the building, and we think there should be a waste-basket put upon each landing on the stairways. We believe that, if this were done, the pupils coming down from the lunchroom would not scatter wrappers and other scraps of paper on the stairs, as they now do." This was a suggestion well worthy of the oldest and the wisest head in the school. Such work makes the pupils participants in the vital interests of the whole; through these opportunities they actually partake in a perfectly natural and genuine way in the real life of the place, and the chief virtues desired in human character receive a direct and lasting stimulus. As we multiply such opportunities for co-operation between the teacher and the pupils, the school becomes less a matter of aimless play, on the one hand, and less a matter of dull drudgery, on the other; it becomes a scene of normal activity and a field for reasonable accomplishment. The relationship of *mutual* helpfulness between pupil and teacher is vitally important. The feeling on

the part of the pupil that he can actually do something which the teacher cannot do for himself at once transforms him from a time-serving lesson-learner into a real social factor. The year just passed has still further demonstrated what tremendous possibilities there are in children for accomplishing things that have intrinsic and lasting merit in the fields of civics, industry, and art. It has also emphasized how trifling still are the demands which the school makes upon the pupils for creative work that has a permanent value.

TYPE OF TEACHER THAT IS NEEDED

The plan of reorganization here proposed requires teachers of fine training and insight, who can discern and properly estimate values. There is no greater obstacle to progress than the "special teacher," so called, of narrow attainments. The high-school graduate who begins at once to "specialize" in some training-school for teachers is the particular pest that is just now most to be dreaded, discountenanced, and avoided. It is this type of specialist that insists on the pupils' making five wheels for a wagon. The specialist we must have, it is true; not the one, however, who pretends to know a single subject, though never so well, but rather one who has sufficient breadth of vision to see the whole educational situation from his particular and special point of view. The kind of teacher needed, now as never before, is found in the ideal citizen; one who is in vital touch with the demands of life, and who knows how to work with people—including the children—in finding the supply. We educate only as we train the children to consider the fields of nature, of history, of literature, and of art as original sources of materials that are demanded by the public welfare. The so-called specialist of today *deliberately and purposely limits his pupil to one field*, and too often to but a small part of that. Under such instruction people cannot grow up otherwise than circumscribed in view and prejudiced in judgment. On the contrary, every teacher must know how to tap the primal sources of strength that lie on all sides, and how to train his pupils to turn toward them and appropriate them for his personal needs of growth and for the general weal.

A careful review of the year justifies the observation that we have advanced only as we have learned to discriminate more closely between artificial and genuine needs, and as we have displayed insight in appraising the relative values of subject-matter as a means of supplying them. Every study on our program can be scaled as to its importance in the school and as to its hold upon the pupils according to these two criteria.

The tremendous development of all the industrial work in the direction of both utility and art is due to the fact that both teachers and pupils have found a place in human life—in their lives—hitherto unoccupied, that needs filling, and they have proceeded to fill it.

SCHOOL WORK HAS A VALUE PROPORTIONED TO THE PERMANENCY OF ITS OUTPUT

It is most instructive to note how much the fact of permanency has enhanced the value of certain lines of study. While the work with clay, for example, was confined to models that were allowed to dry up and crumble away, the subject had almost no significance in the school. The use of the kiln, however, and the adoption of processes for reproducing the modeled forms in plaster, have aroused an interest in the subject, and given it an energy and directive intelligence, that in earlier days were unknown. Similarly, the work in wood has advanced enormously, not only in the quantity, but also in the quality, of the product, as the pupils have vitalized their efforts with the idea of making things that are *permanent* as well as *useful* and beautiful. The same may be said of textiles. Cooking to a pre-eminent degree enlists the best efforts of the pupils, as the results have an immediate and recognized value in both the school and the home, and by teachers as well as by parents and pupils. It is interesting, also, to observe how easily the pupils solve the much-vexed problem as to the relation of utility to art. They instinctively avoid the ugly in the work, as though it were a kind of maladaptation to the end desired. Every movement is toward the artistic, and under intelligent instruction in design they, seemingly without much conscious effort, blend the useful and the artistic into a harmonious unity.

THE ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL CLUBS

At the opening of the spring quarter the teachers adopted a plan that was designed to break down somewhat the barriers formed by the grading system, and to offer additional opportunity for the display of initiative on the part of the pupils. This is in line with the discussion of the subject in last year's handbook. The school, as a whole, regardless of age, was given the privilege of organizing itself into some eighteen groups or clubs. The central idea of each club was developed in part by the teachers, and the matter was laid before the pupils with the statement that each one could choose the line of work which he wished to pursue. The following is the list of clubs, with the number of members in each: Civics, 18; Wood-Working, 17; Gymnastics, 44; Metal-Working, 16; Cooking, 33; Bookbinding, 9; Camera, 12; Field Club, 16; Dancing, 18; Sketching, 13; Dramatics, 13; School Paper, 8; Electricity, 18; Garden, 9; Tool-House Construction, 12; Textiles, 10; Clay-Modeling, 30; Microscope, 2.

Inasmuch as it was anticipated that some of the clubs would be too large if all were assigned according to their first choice, it was deemed wise to ask the pupils to name their second and their third choices also. In the main, however, the clubs represent the first choice of the children. As the plan was so new to all of them, there were, of course, a number who made mistakes in selecting their work; when it seemed advisable, such children were permitted to change before the clubs were really organized; but when once under way, transfers on all grounds were prohibited.

It has happened in this case, as it always does, that where the real responsibility was placed upon the children themselves, their steadiness and all-around efficiency have been worthy of note and a matter of astonishment to the teachers. The spirit, generally, was that manifested by a little boy in the early stages of organization of one of the clubs, who, becoming somewhat impatient with the proceedings, rose and said: "Well, I move that we *do* something."

As it was to be expected, the significance of the movement was not apprehended equally well by all the teachers nor by all

the pupils. On the side of the faculty it revealed, as nothing else could have done, how firmly fixed upon us is the traditional attitude of the teacher toward the class. This was shown by the disposition to "step in" and assume responsibility, when really the teacher should have "stepped out." The essence of the whole plan is that the club shall assume the entire responsibility, and the teacher shall have no more authority or influence, necessarily, than any other member. The teachers have given the plan their heartiest support, but the greatest obstacle to success on their side is the inherited and acquired disposition to "boss." On the side of the children, with many, the individualistic and selfish motive was strong. They wanted to make use of the club to further personal ends; whereas the cardinal idea is that of being able to make some contribution to the welfare of the whole.

The work in many of the clubs, however, has been exceptionally good. The school has been distinctly helped by the Civics Club that has devoted much attention to the care of the building and grounds, and they are creating a healthy public spirit in the school at large. The Tool-House Club is building a much-needed storeroom for the garden implements. It is a frame structure, about twelve by sixteen feet. The Garden Club has been industrious in trimming up the trees and bushes, and in doctoring those that were badly trimmed in previous years. The Dramatic Club is preparing to make a contribution in kind to the approaching spring festival in the garden. The Dancing Club is preparing the May Pole and other dances for the occasion. The Press Club is publishing regularly *The Elementary School Reporter*—a small paper edited by themselves and published under their direction. They make it pay expenses through advertising and subscriptions.

One interesting result of the club organization has been to bring together in something of a common interest children of widely different ages. In the Textile Club the membership includes pupils from the fifth, seventh, and tenth years. The Sketching Club contains those from the fourth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth years; the Clay-Modeling Club, from the second to eighth, and so on. Once in a while, as might be expected, there is an atavistic outcrop toward grade conditions, but generally the

association of the older and younger has shown some distinct advantages. There is no doubt that we suffer an enormous social loss in our schools from the fact that the grading system effectually prevents the development of any bonds of sympathy between the older and younger pupils. The clubs have been useful in revealing the school as a state of society. This was brought out in the work of the clubs themselves, and through discussion in the town-meetings held by the pupils and in the conferences of the faculty. They have shown a social condition of which the ordinary classroom work gives almost no indication. The clubs have disclosed the selfishness on the one hand, and the clannishness on the other, as well as a certain amount of public-spiritedness, which one finds in the community at large. These inner aspects of the pupils' character are almost untouched by the prescribed classroom work. It is only when the children begin to act for themselves, and when they endeavor to enhance those actions through organization of their own, that character growth really takes place. It is only as the school furnishes the opportunity for such work and such organization that it becomes a help and not a hindrance to mental and moral development.

The proper unfolding of the club idea requires an insight and training that is of a distinctly higher type than that now possessed by the average parents and teachers. The former, more or less unwittingly no doubt, instil into the minds of their children the same feelings of indifference toward the needs of the school as a social organization that they themselves exhibit toward the interests of the general public. The teachers, on their side, know too little about actual citizenship. They are too easily disconcerted by the inevitable turmoil which is created when the children really enter upon the work of self-organization. They are too apt to long for the peace of the "well-ordered" classroom which is made possible when each pupil works for himself and all are under the complete domination of the teacher.

The sole purpose of the club is to develop a public spirit that shall correspond to, and even outrun, the public need. The children must have, therefore, the inspiration and help that can come only from a teacher who is alert and sensitive to the demands of

the school community and the community at large. He must understand democracy and be a thorough believer in it.

Crude and imperfect as the work with the clubs has been this year, it is a consensus of opinion on the part of both pupils and teachers that it must be continued in some form. The plan will be modified so as to give the pupils more completely their freedom. As a need appears, in either the school or the community, the pupils that so desire will be given opportunity to organize themselves for the purpose of supplying it. When the end is accomplished, the club may then dissolve, and a new issue may be taken up by another organization. The usefulness of the clubs has been demonstrated; it only remains to develop during the coming year a more effective plan of administration.

THE OLDER SUBJECTS IN THE CURRICULUM

In the radical reorganization of the curriculum which, through the slow processes of evolution, is now taking place, a question perennially green is: "What is to be the future of such studies as history, geography, arithmetic, English, spelling, grammar, and others that have formed, traditionally, the core of the course of study? It must be remembered that evolution involves not only the modification, but also the extinction, of many existing forms. Both of these operations are actually taking place in the schools. Some parts of arithmetic, formerly considered important, have become extinct; as for instance, alligation, true discount, and partial payments. It is safe to say that corresponding eliminations are taking place in all the other subjects named. In spite of vigorous protest, the inclination is decidedly toward less, rather than more, formal grammar, and the sequel will show that the tendency is correct. And after a while our English will be all the better for it. That will be when we learn how to make it less of a misfit in the pupil's life. There is not another subject in the whole school course, from the kindergarten to the junior year in college, that is taught with the same uniform lack of regard for the actual experiences of the learners. In the whole of this long, long period there is scarcely an exercise in English that is not written, chiefly, that the teacher may have a chance to

criticise the form—let him deny it who will! It is the lowest possible motive under which the human mind can act, and the results in the pupil's character correspond.

During the past year I happened to be present at a meeting of the junior class of a high school. The president announced that one of the members wished to make a statement to the class concerning the need for funds for some school enterprise, and this is the way the young man delivered himself: "Now see here, I just want to say that you fellows have got to hustle up and get some money. You can't expect two or three fellows to rustle round and do all the work, for they can't do it. The sophomore class last week got a move on and got a lot of advertising, and we've got to do the same. So I want you fellows to wake up and get busy."

This young gentleman represented about three years of high-school English, in addition to the training he had received in some elementary school, all of which, of course, stands for the best that all the numerous college-entrance requirements committees have been able to bring forth in two decades. The real irony of the matter is in the fact that he will probably go up to some college next year and answer all the stock questions which they choose to ask him on *The Faerie Queen*, *The Nun's Tale*, the *Roger de Coverley Papers*, and the sanity of Hamlet; and he may pull through even if he is called upon to sketch in "his own words" some character in *Silas Marner* or George Eliot. To be sure, there will be a wail later when some accident like the class-meeting episode unmasks the young man; but the college should not complain—he gave them what they asked for! The pity is, however, that out of it all the boy gets so little for himself.

It is not the intention here to underestimate the value of good literature in education; it is only intended to show that the present common use of it as a means of teaching English in the earlier stages of development is but little better than a farce. To a perpetuation of this serio-comic procedure in education we must refuse to be a party.

When the thinking of the pupil makes the same direct demand

for expression in English that it now makes for forms in metal, wood, clay, and textile fabrics, then, and not till then, will language become equally clear, graphic, and artistic. The malady affecting the young man here described is not to be reached by an additional dose of technical rules, nor by further attention to the classics; but rather by cultivating a thoroughgoing respect for his own thinking. Like every other form of art, English is a matter of taste, and taste is not a concern of rules, but of thinking. As before noted in connection with clay-modeling, the quality of permanency has a tremendous effect upon a pupil's effort. Children are frequently asked to write something about nothing; this is done upon any kind of a scrap of paper with any kind of pen or pencil; this is later inspected, "blue-penciled," and sent eventually to the waste-basket. There is not a step in the procedure that is not intellectually and morally downward. Instead of compelling the pupils to write for the sake of their English, it would be far better for their English if they were not permitted to write except when they had something to say which must be written, and which when written must be preserved. To this end it is proposed during the coming year to devise some means for binding all written work in a permanent and artistic form, and greatly to extend the use of the printing-press as a further means of giving to this form of expression a higher and more genuine value.

THOROUGHNESS IN SCHOOL WORK

The application of the principles herein discussed is in no wise inimical to all the thoroughness that a given subject may demand at any particular age. It may not preclude the possibility, or even the necessity, of drill. If in his cooking lesson the pupil finds out that there are two pints of milk in a quart, there is no reason why the fact should not be fixed in the mind. The sane teacher will not become panic-stricken, however, if such facts are not at once readily remembered. If he finds, after the frequent recurrence of similar operations, that the facts still escape, he will as a last resort give it the special attention secured by drill.

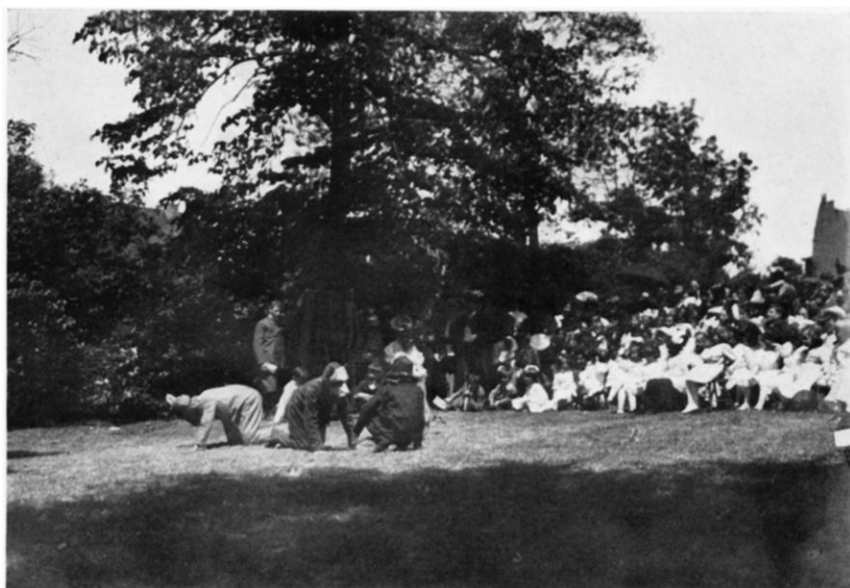
The most discouraging struggle in the schoolroom is with the

spelling. While it is believed that our children are learning to spell more words than their elders did in the days when the spelling book reigned, the hopelessness of the task lies in the unphonetic character of the language. We are dutifully teaching the pupils to spell correctly, but it is no part of our intentions or duty to teach them to respect the traditions that place upon their shoulders such a heavy and useless burden. It is our ambition, rather, to send every pupil out of the school charged with the mission to do what he can to strengthen and hasten the great work undertaken by the Committee on Spelling Reform.

The year now closing has been full of encouragement. The school is particularly fortunate in securing a deep interest on the part of the patrons, who through the Parents' Association have most effectively supported the labors of the teachers. Without the generous spirit of tolerance and co-operation which marks the attitude of all the patrons, the solution of the difficult problems which rise in the school would be practically impossible.

Our school, owing to its newness, has been handicapped in some measure by the absence of all traditions among the pupils. During the years past, however, customs and habits have become established upon the lines that lead toward steadiness of effort, and much has been done to create in the children those feelings of pride and self-respect that are the most precious possessions of any school.

The paramount interest in our institution at this time lies in readjustment. The school is slowly changing its organization from a competitive to a co-operative form, and it is endeavoring to do this without impairing the vitality of individual initiative. The movement necessitates constant resurveys of scholastic values, and the new estimates given frequently do violence to academic traditions, and cause apprehension. The needed and sufficient safeguards are found in the directive function of the trained teacher who can intelligently comprehend the organizing forces at work in society at large, and who will conscientiously heed the children's responses to these forces as they make themselves felt in the schoolroom.



THE DRAMATIC CLUB IN THE SPRING FESTIVAL
The Musicians of Bremen, Scene 1
 (An original adaptation as played in the Garden Theater)



THE DRAMATIC CLUB IN THE SPRING FESTIVAL
The Musicians of Bremen, Scene 2